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Listening: Projects for the Self and Social Action

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LISTENING: PROJECTS FOR THE SELF AND SOCIAL ACTION

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LIST OF ABBERVIATIONS

CLC –   Course Linked Capstone

RPP –   Reflective Practice Phase

SIT –   School for International Training

TDEL –   Training Design for Experiential Learning

TSA –   Training for Social Action

ABSTRACT

Listening is becoming more of a rarity in this increasingly busy world, especially between those who see a particular issue differently. The question, "By conducting listening projects as trainers, what can we learn about ourselves and social action work?" is explored in this capstone paper to see how listening can benefit us both personally and professionally as trainers. Numerous articles, commentaries, and literature around listening, listening projects, and their meaning are examined in this paper.

Five different types of listening projects are explored through listening sessions: Oral histories, Oral artistries, 'Button-pushing' challenges, Single-issue testimonies, and Life stories. With the exception of 'button-pushing' challenges, which comes from the Training for Social Action (TSA) class, the types of listening projects come from Hugo Slim's *Listening for Change* and were all studied during the TSA class. Building upon and deepening learnings from best practices and studies in TSA; themes for the listening sessions were determined by the author's own experiences which prompted this personal journey in listening to ten people, their lives, and their perspectives. For each type of project, two participants were selected. A total of ten participants were listened to: five who the inquirer previously knew and five who were strangers.

Best practices are determined for listening projects as a whole; best practices for individual types of projects, similarities, and differences are also suggested. Key learnings are shared about the act of listening, listening projects, the self, and how all of these concepts can enhance training. Further connections are made in how listening lands within the realm of social action. Both training practitioners and their work can benefit from slowing down and listening. As is found by both the author and the literature: – "Listening is social action."

INTRODUCTION

"Have you ever wondered why you have one mouth but two ears? Because it is much easier to talk than to listen." ~Asian Proverb

When I started at the School for International Training (S.I.T.) Graduate Institute as a Master's student in autumn 2014, I came in wanting to know more about training. A significant part of why I chose the self-designed Intercultural Service, Leadership, & Management degree was that it allowed me the flexibility to take multiple training courses. I had gathered my own understanding of training at that point, mostly through my time serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ukraine for forty-two months over the course of 2010-2014. Through my multi-faceted responsibilities, I trained trainers, taught in both formal and informal settings, and served as a representative on various panels.

As a result of those experiences, I began to see the importance of speaking minimally as a facilitator, creating the right tone within a space, and having participants contribute to the learning environment. The two training courses I took at S.I.T, Training Design for Experiential Learning (TDEL) and Training for Social Action (TSA), expanded my understanding of training. The classes provided a deeper understanding of the experiential learning cycle, emergent learning, and the power of listening. It was then that I received terminology for concepts I had practiced, such as setting norms and the components of a learning environment. Through these courses, I began to see that ending on an action-oriented note was part of the application stage.

Listening was something I did not expect to learn about coming into my time at S.I.T. During the first quarter-century of my life, I never said a whole lot. It is difficult to say whether that was because I was shy – or because I felt a multitude of words was overrated – or because I preferred to take in the world around me – or because I did not know what to say – maybe even a combination of those – or something else. By the time I was beginning my studies at S.I.T., I felt

I was already a fantastic listener and did not have much left to learn, if anything. Sure, I interrupted, threw in my own comments, gave advice, and asked questions to show how much I was interested; but I was fantastic. Simply put, I was wrong.

My first listening project at S.I.T. was an assignment I did as part of Training for Social Action. This particular project allowed me to build upon my skill of listening and integrate that with the newly discovered concepts of not interrupting and listening to that which is challenging. It also strengthened my ability to ask open-ended strategic questions, allowed me to practice patience, increased my self-awareness as to where I stand on issues, and brought me closer to my participant. The project served multiple purposes personally and professionally; and it spanned several of the types I explore in this paper. It ended up being my favorite activity from S.I.T. Combined with other tools such as Strategic Questioning (Peavey 1994) and the Way of Council (Zimmerman & Coyle 1991), listening to understand ended up being one of my most significant learnings.

Strategic Questioning is another tool from Training for Social Action, closely intertwined with listening: It creates new information and uncovers deep desires of the heart rather than communicating information already known (Peavey 1994). It shifts the energy in questioning from the listener to the speaker: from thinking about questions in a "What else do I want to know about this story?" mindset to a "What areas might the speaker benefit from exploring?" mindset.

I chose this Course Linked Capstone (CLC) in Training in order to focus on the theory and practice of listening projects through asking, "By conducting listening projects as trainers, what can we learn about ourselves and social action work?" With this capstone project, I intend to dive deeper into listening and listening projects: oral histories, single-issue testimonies, life stories, oral artistry projects, and 'button-pushing' challenges. I also look at how these projects

can inform not only our own selves, but our social action work as practicing trainers. Topics I ended up listening to range from politics, religion, social issues, and culture to the histories of people and places. The focus of this paper is not the topics but rather the listening project process. For each of the five types of listening projects examined in this paper, I conducted two interviews making a total of ten. None of the interviews were conducted with members of what I consider to be a vulnerable population.

Furthermore, this paper explores existing literature on listening projects. I wanted to compare and contrast what the literature says to what I saw during my practice. Additionally, I describe the logistical and chronological process of my project. I conclude with my learnings, a comparative analysis of best practices, and recommendations for the field. I ask the question, "Where do these listening techniques land in the context of social action work and training?" This paper will touch on my own journey around competency building, listening as a technique for social action, my own learning about listening as a practitioner of social action work, and ultimately, how that learning might benefit trainers.

My philosophical approach to training relies on listening. My feeling is that people will learn best from each other and the ideas which their peers and fellow participants put forth. This approach has had both strengths and weaknesses within my Reflective Practice Phrase (RPP). My RPP practicum position has been as a Prevention Associate at the Western Youth Network in Boone, North Carolina. Essentially, my work consists of working with various community sectors on initiatives, policies, and strategies which aim to reduce and prevent substance misuse. At community meetings and key informant interviews, listening has allowed for the content and ideas to be participant-driven. Conversely, this quieter approach can give the impression of disinterest on my part and prevent me from sharing my own ideas.

In order to learn more about what role listening plays within myself, my work, and my training approach, I referred back to an assessment from TDEL. Upon my arrival at S.I.T. and at the beginning of my TDEL class, I completed an assessment titled "My Skill as a Listener" from *The Winning Trainer* (see Appendix A). There are likely better assessments available but I chose this tool because I had previously applied it during the fall of 2014 (score of "56") and desired to compare and contrast it to the present.

However, as with any kind of assessment, it should not be taken as the ultimate truth. Assessments can provide a sense of a particular subject and act as a guide; but results can change day-to-day based on one's emotions, feelings, and moods. I filled out a second one in January 2017 (score of "50") before any of my capstone listening projects began. Despite my growth over these couple years, I had "dropped" six points. I attribute this to an increased awareness regarding that which I did not know in fall 2014. Again, I tended to think I had everything figured out regarding listening at that point. I filled out the assessment a third time in late-March 2017 after all of my capstone listening projects had been completed (which I discuss more in my Learnings section).

While the assessment is one way to track my own journey as a listener and trainer, I also wanted this capstone project to build some of my other competencies. So while originally designing this project and putting together the objectives of my proposal, I wanted to increase my knowledge of available literature on listening (objective G), increase my knowledge of conflict management and problem solving (objective D), strengthen my attitude of self-confidence through self-growth (objective A), and increase my skill in listening to others (objective D). In trying to synthesize the multi-purposed intention and motivation of this paper outlined above, I created the following objectives shown below. One aspect of this growth that I

hoped to see was a better understanding of myself. Although I seem to becoming more

consistent as a confident, focused, steady trainer, I still struggle. As an example of that struggle,

sometimes within a period of facilitating, I will carry a more timid, unconfident, scared tone –

then I will return to being calm and poised for the rest of a workshop thirty seconds later. Thus,

it was my hope to learn about this lack of consistency and understand my own areas of need.

Personal
 A. Assume the responsibility for my self-growth through this project, which will in turn lead to greater self-confidence.

 B. Increase my self-awareness of where I stand on issues through listening to different perspectives; as well as the attributes I bring as a facilitator in helping or hindering me staying grounded.

 C. Increase my patience and empathy by listening to differing perspectives and the people behind them.

Professional

 D. Increase my skills in strategic questioning, listening to others, and conflict management/problem solving.

 E. Contribute to the training field by demonstrating the benefits of how listening can benefit social action work.

 F. Cultivate my respect & sensitivity for individual cultural differences & other humans by creating environments that model trust, inclusion, and safety.

 G. Increase my knowledge of available literature, resources, and material in the field of listening.

Before I jumped into the listening projects, I first wanted to read everything I could readily find

on listening and listening projects. These next sections are summaries of what I found. I believe

the literature was instrumental in giving me a foundation for my listening projects along with

considerations I needed to think about along the way. Having done a broad project in TSA, the

literature also allowed me to focus in on the differences between the listening project types.

 "We need to listen as if someone's life depends on it - because it does." ~Fran Peavey, 1994

LISTENING

"Listen"
When I ask you to listen to me
And you start giving advice
You have not done what I asked.
When I ask you to listen to me
And you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way
You are trampling on my feelings.
When I ask you to listen to me
And you feel you have to do something to solve my problems
You have failed me, strange as that may seem.
Listen! All I ask is that you listen
Not talk or do – just hear me.
Advice is cheap: 50p will get you both Claire Rayner and Russell Grant in the same newspaper.
And I can DO for myself. I'm not helpless.
Maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless.
But when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel,
No matter how irrational, then I stop trying to convince you,
And can get about the business of understanding what's behind this irrational feeling.
And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.
So please listen and just hear me, and if you want to talk,
Wait a minute for your turn, and I'll listen to you.
<div align="right">~Anonymous (Sharland 2011)</div>

What Is Listening?

Active listening is being present in hearing another's words (Ungerleider 2008).

However, listening is different than hearing (Burley-Allen 1995). Karen Hagberg states,

"Thinking is not listening. Listening is listening," (Peavey 1994, p. 104). It is a simple act and

one that needs practice – but one that simply requires us to be present, sit, and listen (Wheatley

2001). This resonates with me because while I find listening simple, I also find it challenging.

People have a deep need to be listened to (Burley-Allen 1995). Margaret Wheatley (2001) puts

forth: "If no one listens, we tell it to ourselves, and then we go mad. Not listening creates

fragmentation, and fragmentation is the root of all suffering. Listening moves us closer, it helps

us become more whole, more healthy."

Often, children are told to "listen up," "be a good listener," be obedient, and follow the rules. If they do all of that, they are "good listeners" (Schultz 2003). But listening is more in that it is a multifaceted active, interactive, relational, and interpretive process focused on making meaning (Shultz 2003). Jamie Utt adds that listening is opening oneself up not only to another's words but to the sum of their experience behind those words (2013). Listening is the act of witnessing another's testimonies, stories, emotions, and experiences (Utt 2013). Listening used to be a way for me put myself in the midst of others' stories. Now to me, listening is giving someone the space to explore, share, and tell through an active, emotional, mental, physical, and mostly silent process where the speaker's words are taken directly to the heart and mind. Learning and understanding are the primary goals during listening while engagement, disagreement, and dialogue are secondary (Utt 2013).

Various styles of listening can include the faker, the dependent listener (who aims to please through listening), the interrupter, and the self-conscious listener (Burley-Allen 1995). Listening is more than waiting to respond, more than hoping for a dialogue, and more than basing all of one's conclusions upon one voice (Utt 2013). Listening happens in order to revise one's own thinking (Enos 1999). Knowledge and understanding are searched for with a focus on acceptance and respect for the people who are talking. While this can be demonstrated in different ways, the Pueblo people demonstrate this type of listening through silence (Enos 1999).

There are at least eight TED Talks on listening (Simmons 2016). Generally, we use listening more than speaking, reading, and writing (Peterson 2012). I find that true for myself. Yet we dedicate much more of our instruction time and focus on speaking, reading, and writing (Peterson 2012).

What Holds Us Back from Listening?

In addition to a lack of instruction time and focus on listening, we tend to listen impatiently while forming our response and waiting to present it before others have finished speaking. People tend to give advice, coach, try to sound "wise," fix the other's issues, and figure it all out – all of which can prevent one from listening (Zibart 2004 & Zimmerman 1991). Advice can be distracting and disempowering (Sharland 2011). I remember how even just a few years ago, I thought advice was a sign of good listening. While advice does have its place, I do find it to be disempowering most of the time. I have been guilty of it myself and usually find the advice response forming while the other is still speaking.

Other blocks that can prevent us from listening include interruptions, subject changes, interrogations, teaching (Salem 2003), our own opinions (Zibart 2004), reactions, external and internal distractions, fantasies, judgments (Peavey 1994), and emotions. According to Wheatley, we do not need to do any of that – we just have to listen (2001). As mentioned earlier, interrupting is one of my greatest challenges. A few years ago, I believed that by interjecting similar to advice, I proved I was listening. This however more often than not disrupts the concentration, energy, and flow of the speaker. I was operating in the unconscious/incompetent realm by not even being aware of the disruptive habit I was practicing. By learning to appreciate the harm of interrupting, I am now more able to prevent it from happening, moving me into the conscious competence realm: being aware of a beneficial habit that encourages the speaker to share.

Furthermore, the continual and diverse stimuli we experience more and more in daily life challenges our ability to listen efficiently (Peterson 2012). To me, life sometimes feels as it is simply a series of e-mails, notifications, and to-do lists. This is a tiring process and being tired

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makes listening more challenging. Even our desire to be helpful can sometimes make us forget to listen to the story (Garfat 2009). Doing something else, planning what one has to do after a conversation, and thinking of solutions also prevent listening (Rosenbaum 2014). If we could remain nonjudgmental and empathetic, it would acknowledge the talker in a way that invites communication to continue (Burley-Allen 1995).

How Can One Approach Listening?

There are things one can do to encourage listening such as allowing silence after a question (Garfat 2009). One must train oneself in order not to judge, not correct, and not criticize a speaker (Hanh 2004). The practice of not interrupting, using open-ended questions, and having sensitivity to the emotions expressed are important. Non-verbal behavior such as body language are also important as a listener (Salem 2003). One must stretch one's capacity to be present to another's pain (Zibart 2004).

The listener should acknowledge the speaker in ways which invite continued communication (Salem 2003). Deep listening naturally arises when personal thinking and habit of thoughts are dropped (Pransky & Catherine 2017). One must put all responses aside, regardless of who is speaking: this requires an open mind and the willingness to be vulnerable (Chin 2016). Once we move beyond reacting, real transformation is possible (Chin 2016).

What Are the Benefits from Sharing and Listening?

Attentive silence gives the speaker the space to see and hear oneself (Wheatley 2001), explore their own options, and discover oneself (Peavey 1994). I know I am more equipped to be articulate and clear in my sharing when not interrupted. Silent space also allows for a full and complete expression of oneself where the words can be validated, honored, and accepted (Leseho

2005). When we give our time and energy to others, their value and worth as a human is affirmed (Kim & Ryu 2014). Close listening allows for people to look at the world on their own terms (Schultz 2003).

Acknowledgement, a basic human need, leads to trust, teamwork, belonging, self-confidence, and the release of feelings (Burley-Allen 1995). Being listened to can heal experiences with violence (Lesoho 2005), relieve suffering, and allow for more clearly expressing oneself (Hanh 2016). When working through some personal trauma during the spring of 2014, I know that by having family, friends, and professionals listen to me; I was slowly but surely able to let go of pain I was holding.

Thompson argues that we must listen because, "Otherwise, we risk treating those unlike ourselves as, at best, mirror images of ourselves, and at worst, as inferior, exotic, or instruments for our own purposes," (Schultz 2003, p. 542). Listening is more than avoiding risks; it is embracing benefits such as a deeper understanding of individuals (Schultz 2003). By coming to see others as humans representing another culture or species, a person intrinsically adds value to one's own presence (Zimmerman 1991). By silently listening, one learns new things that never would have been learned had interruptions or advising occurred (Wheatley 2001).

Listening builds trust and respect, enables the disputants to release their emotions, reduces tensions, encourages the surfacing of information, and creates a safe environment where collaborative problem solving can occur (Salem 2003). It contributes to one's ability to see beyond and recognize the other while developing deeper compassion, human resiliency, and commitment to work with others (Freed 2010). Whether it be learning about the reasons behind a belief or aiding the approach in how to work with another, I have experienced so many of these benefits throughout my journey of listening.

During my Peace Corps service, I failed at times, but I tried to go about my service with a humility that deferred to Ukrainians. Listening as a conscious act was something I was beginning to grasp. While it was underdeveloped as a skill, I listened frequently to try to pick up the often challenging, but beautiful, Ukrainian language. In the midst of informal conversations, I often listened to my host grandmother Sophia who had fascinating ideas, perspectives, and stories she wanted to share. And I listened to other volunteers: more experienced ones who had wisdom to share and newer ones who wanted to dive into new struggles. Looking back at myself, I suppose that I appreciated what I gained when others shared and listening was a way to encourage that sharing.

Another benefit which listening can provide is one as a needs assessment. Multiple sources, including the Co-Intelligence Institute, put forth that listening can aid in discovering community concerns (2003). It is significant to include multiple voices in a needs analysis (Elisha-Primo 2015). Listening can identify key community problems, issues, and priorities. It can also create long-term capacity for collaborative community action that incorporates the concerns and needs of the community (Walters 2016).

If misuse, misappropriation, or exploitation of people's words and knowledge are avoided, oral histories can add value to monitoring and evaluation within development work as pieces can get lost in quantitative reports (Bainbridge 2000). Listening creates space which allows for the needs of the participants to come to the surface (Mansfield 2014). Listening to all voices enables us to discover and implement changes by resolving discrepancies among needs (Elisha-Primo 2015).

What Is the Relationship Between Listening and Mutual Understanding?

When one truly listens to another, discovery and recognition can happen in place of arguments and voting (Zimmerman 1991). We can empathize with and understand those whom we are usually opposed to (Atlee 2003). Understandings and possibilities are discovered on all sides (Atlee 2003). When listening happens across difference, these differences can be reframed as strengths and resources as opposed to weaknesses and deficits (Schultz 2003). Listening allows us to make sense of others' worlds, thus giving us more insight into what the whole world looks like (Schultz 2003). It also can reduce tension, facilitate cooperation, promote communication, create an active mind, and enhance the self-concept (Burley-Allen 1995).

Margaret Wheatley (2001) adds, "I know that neither I nor the world changes from my well-reasoned, passionately presented arguments. Things change when I've created just the slightest movement toward wholeness, moving closer to another through my patient, willing listening." Listening establishes rapport and is a primary factor in relationships (Enos 1999). Opinions (Co-Intelligence Institute 2003), knowledge, needs, and concerns are shared when the listener's sincerity is confirmed (Atlee 2003).

LISTENING PROJECTS

Listening projects move away from data and toward the issues which arise in the hearts and minds of those speaking while being listened to (Co-Intelligence Institute 2003). It is a method and way to include often unheard and/or unheeded voices (Walters 2016). Listening Projects done by Fran Peavey began when she sat on benches in countries outside of the USA with a sign reading, "American Willing to Listen" in the 1980s. The idea of simply listening quickly spread to community and neighborhood organizing, vigils, and demonstrations (Co-Intelligence Institute 2003). A listening project session with any given person usually lasts about an hour and as described in the needs assessment section above, results in the new knowledge of needs and concerns (Co-Intelligence Institute 2003).

Engaging people in activities which have opportunities for the practice of listening skills is challenging (Simmons 2016). A listening project is a way to both practice listening and create the atmosphere where the type of silent, present, respectful listening described above can take place. It is a way to create a lot of energy in the interchange but keep the temperature low (Zimmerman 1991). For both the listeners and the speakers involved in listening projects, new understandings and possibilities are created which were not previously seen (Co-Intelligence Institute 2003).

What Is Oral Testimony?

Oral Testimony is the umbrella that covers oral history, oral tradition/oral artistry, and life stories (Slim & Thompson 1993). These three types of listening projects in addition to 'button-pushing' challenges and single-issue testimonies, will be explored in greater depth in the Best Practices section. Oral testimony can allow people to assert their own reality, show the partial views of outsiders, describe how human rights have been ignored and abused, give

communities more power to set their own agenda for development, reclaim indigenous technical knowledge, and describe how rights should be fulfilled. The power of applied oral testimony is vast in that it can critique development policies; improve responses to famine, disaster relief, and refugees; and strengthen curriculum and agriculture techniques, among many other applications (Slim & Thompson 1993).

Oral testimony provides accountability to development processes. It moves us past the general collective and loudest voices which we usually hear from the wealthy, political elite, and social/religious leaders (Slim & Thompson 1993). Because reality is constructed and sustained by those who talk, those who control talk control reality. In order to get full pictures of people's lives, a listener must explore health, agriculture, economics, nutrition, law, psychology, social relationships, social obligations, work, friendship, love, sexuality, childbirth, parenting, leisure, and religion (Slim & Thompson 1993).

It is important to consider not just these social, economic, environmental, and working worlds but also the cultural context. For example, some societies consider individual interviews to be dangerously intimate encounters (Slim & Thompson 1993). By getting a more comprehensive picture, interventions can be appropriately designed (Slim & Thompson 1993). It is important to treat the information which is gathered as guidance and not the ultimate source of information (Platt 2017). Summaries should be avoided so the speaker can be direct, and presentations should include the original words. This is more challenging but more equitable and effective (Slim & Thompson 1993).

What Is Listening's Connection to Conflict, Social Action, and the Creation of Solutions?

We tend to talk at and past each other but rarely with (Salem 2003). Conflict is not a rational argument versus a rational argument but instead one's rational argument hitting the blind

spot of another (Kahane 2004). We must see the human behind every category (Zibart 2004). In the process of listening, one can look for obstacles to caring, impediments to action, what is pushing people, how change happens in their life, and how to remove resistance (Peavey 1994). Listening can aid in the pursuit of social justice by capturing lived experience and thus promoting inclusive practice (Mansfield 2014).

Without deep listening, it is difficult to move toward peace (Hanh 2016). There can be no global peace if we talk only to people who we agree with. Because if one cannot hear, one continues fighting (Zibart 2004). If one has sympathy for only one side of the conflict, one becomes part of the conflict (Zibart 2004). And if one knows others will not accept one's words, one tends to turn toward close-mindedness, distrust, anger, frustration, discouragement, and hurt (Salem 2003). So, we must listen to our enemies with the same sympathies we do our friends (Kahane 2004). We can hope to find the path to peace only by understanding one another (McAmis 1979). Reconciliation only happens when you understand both sides (Zibart 2004).

Listening gives us practice on how to respond in the moment as well as strengthens the frameworks from which we work (Schultz 2003) as trainers. By taking in the stories of others, our decisions are informed on both how and what to train (Schultz 2003). Participant voices shape what our training practices must include in order to create an environment for powerful, transformative learning (Mansfield 2014).

Listening leads to action by supporting change and transformation. Listening is a call to respond (Schultz 2003). Because social justice is not linear or static but a process which requires new knowledge and interaction between people and systems, listening is a necessity (Mansfield 2014). Not only does attention create action (Peavey 1994) but as Johanna Leseho put, "Listening is social action," (2005, p.10).

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What Are Some Concrete Applications, Examples, and Results of Listening Projects?

Large industrialized nations have seen many proposals for listening projects aimed at massive social change (Ohliger 1968). Listening projects were instrumental in Katarina Kruhonja's peace-team work and her seeing reconciliation occur between former enemies in war torn communities divided by ethnic fears and hatred. In Harlan, Kentucky, Joan Robinette saw how listening projects empowered afraid people to speak out on the accountability of companies responsible for toxic waste damage (Walters 2016). Students with social capital, knowledge, and the willingness to participate in school are seen as "successful" while students with less knowledge of school practices and little desire for school norms are seen as "failures." By listening to stories, teachers can work toward more justice and equity in students' education (Schultz 2003).

In the spring of 2014, Blackburn Chapel in Todd, North Carolina, began utilizing a survey to guide listening projects. The chapel staff uses the survey to learn about the community's concerns, skills, and levels of involvement (Wrencher 2017). The results of this listening informed a variety of topics from knitting activities all the way up to large festivals. More broadly, these listening projects connect the community together through collaboration (Wrencher 2017).

Listening projects have been done around topics ranging from Lincoln's assassination, the Pittsburgh Survey regarding civic reform around social conditions, and the Great Depression (GMU 2016). Encounter is using the ideas behind listening projects as part of its work on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Perry 2010). In a class titled "The Listening Project" at a Montessori School, one boy discovered the importance of listening to his grandpa for the first time. The experience provided him with the resolve to go out and listen more (Donahoe 2009).

INQUIRY PROCESS

Selecting My Participants

In choosing my subjects, I looked for certain criteria; namely gender and whether I knew them or not. With ten projects planned, I wanted to interview five people I knew and five people I did not. I also aimed to interview the primary sexes that our society identifies - one male and one female within each of the five listening projects. This approach would allow me to both explore issues of trust between interviewer and interviewee, as well as listen to perspectives outside of the usual male-dominated one.

For the five people I knew before the projects began, I reached out to them in person or via e-mail to gauge interest and frame the project. Oral artistries can take place formally in person or informally where the performance is listened to through a recording (Slim & Thompson 1993). For the oral artistries, I had one Ukrainian friend give a formal performance to me over Skype. And for the second oral history, I had a second Ukrainian friend guide me to an informal recording.

To set up the remaining four of my interviews and become connected with people I did not know, I enlisted the assistance of two friends who are also colleagues. One connected me with a male stranger to do a single-issue testimony and with a female stranger for a 'button-pushing' challenge. The second connected me with a female stranger for a life story interview. Between this female stranger and second colleague, the two of them connected me with a male stranger to conduct an oral history. Although I ended up with two males for the oral histories and two females for the 'button-pushing' challenges, I was content in that the overall numbers of the sexes were five and five for the ten total projects.

Selection Bias

In selecting participants I know, that selection came from the professional and social circles from which I operate in – mostly in Boone, North Carolina. My job, level of education, middle-class upbringing, and context all directly impact what I am currently doing. All of that affects the type of people I know and thus invited to participate as subjects in these listening projects – two from Ukraine and eight from the United States. Within the United States, only two participants are from states other than North Carolina. In North Carolina, only one participant lives outside of Boone. In the grand scheme of the world and even within North Carolina, this is a small sample size. When I selected participants who were strangers to me, I still only utilized people within my circles to get me connected. This also likely contributes to a limited engagement of different populations. There might exist the assumption that because I talked to people I did not know, male and female, and US and Ukrainian; that I had a diverse sample size. After exploring more from the vantage point in which I selected participants, this assumption must be questioned.

Setting Up the Interviews

Once I confirmed that participants were interested in serving as an "interviewed" subject in my listening project, I was in touch via e-mail and telephone to coordinate a time and place of mutual convenience. Again, the informal oral artistry project I did involved the viewing of a recording. For the other nine projects, five took place in person, three on Skype, and one on the telephone. For two of the Skype calls, because of technical connectivity issues, the interviewee was able to see me as the listener but I was not able to see them as the speaker.

Conducting the Interviews

The process of completing the ten interview projects took longer than I had envisioned or hoped, spanning almost seven weeks from late-January 2017 until mid-March. Each listening project entailed one meeting. For the majority of the projects, I offered the interviewee the chance to meet a second time if something arose which the interviewee wanted to further explore. The length of the sessions ranged from just a few minutes for the informal oral artistry project up to two hours for the longest life story project. But the average length of a session was somewhere in the range of forty-five minutes to one hour. I decided to do ten listening projects for a few reasons, primarily because sociologist David Karp puts forth that ten interviews is a good point to take a close look at emerging themes (Biber & Leavy 2006).

Ethical Considerations

I decided to *not* record any of my interviews. I took notes as the subjects were speaking about some of the aspects which struck me during the exchange. To ensure the subjects that information would be used in an ethically principled manner, I provided an informed consent form (appendix B), verbally confirmed that and checking for understanding, and reaffirmed my intentionality of confidentiality. Furthermore, I protected the field participants by keeping all hard-copy notes and electronic documents locked and password protected. At the completion of this project and presentation, all of these documents and notes will be destroyed. In order to thank my subjects and demonstrate my appreciation to them for having spent their time and energy in sharing their thinking, their hopes and fears, and in many cases a part of their life with me; I will send each of the ten participants a hand-written thank-you note upon completion of my degree.

My Subjectivity

I am a tall, white, heterosexual, cisgender, 31-year old male who was born in the United States of America to Christian, middle-class parents. Those characteristics have given me a significant amount of privilege and a particular frame from which I look at the world. In conjunction with the labeled privileges above, I construct labels to give myself such as facilitator, counselor, and leader at times. Some of that construction comes from within. In labeling myself, I might be further imposing certain frames and lenses on myself affecting my assumptions, approaches, decisions, actions, and way in which I look at and operate within the world. This is all important to note regarding my own bias in doing this project and the bias in which I selected my participants.

Trust

Along with this point of coming into all of my listening projects through people in my circles comes the issue of my trust. To me, trust creates a space where one is willing to share a deep part of oneself with another. Because both the interviewee and I have this mutual connection, is the interviewee already predisposed to trust me more? If so, what does that mean? I have no reason to think any of my participants were anything but open and honest with me. What did that come from? Our mutual connection? My warm-up questions and creating a comfortable space? My capacity to listen? Some combination of those?

Vulnerable Populations and Unheard Voices

As already noted, I did not engage in listening projects with vulnerable populations. Not included in my project were unheard and unheeded voices from perspectives of those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, not on gender/sex binary, black, brown, etc. Eight of ten

participants' native language was English. And even for the two Ukrainians I engaged with, they have a high level of English. What might be missing from other populations who have a primary language other than English?

Inquiry Process Limitations

There are further limitations of my inquiry process. Although this project focused on me as the listener and trainer, at the end of all my interviews, I asked the subjects, "In what ways has this process benefited you?" Subjects reported quite different experiences through a vast array of responses but there were some themes. Some subjects appreciated being the center of attention and having a "captive audience" to share themselves. Feelings brought up for the speakers ranged from intimacy to pride to fun. Others enjoyed the experience of being listened to and not needing to debate. They found the opportunity to share oneself as important but rare. This process helped some participants by allowing them to relive some good times and/or forcing them to think about what may be missing from their lives. One remarked, "It's been good to revisit the past because I am so busy moving forward that I don't take the time to look at the memories that mold my future." For some of the interviewees, because of the unique set-up of the listening project, thoughts about the general act of listening began to arise.

That is just a glimpse into some of the participants' benefits. It would be a fascinating study to look more into how listening projects benefit the speaker including immediately after the project like I asked; or to be in touch with participants one day later to see what might be stirring within them; or even a week later or months later to see what might be stirring within them at that point – and/or to see how their views on listening might have changed.

Although emerging themes can be examined from ten interviews, it is still a relatively small number of interviews. The scope of this project could greatly be expanded by doubling the

interviews to twenty, tripling to thirty, or even more. Within each of the five types of listening

projects I looked into, the dichotomy factor itself is limiting. I have two oral histories to reflect

on. I have two life stories to reflect on. And so on. Similar to the overall scope of the project, if

I were to look at more than two examples of the same listening project type, more depth and

understanding could be grasped. In turn, it would be easier to think outside the limiting trap of

"black and white." By not recording my interviews and instead relying on notes, I perhaps was

not able to relive interviews as accurately during the reflection phase. With that, I could not

closely examine my strategic questioning or the way certain ideas the speaker was putting forth

made me feel.

  Finally, while in the process of putting together my proposal, a fellow student asked me if

I had a plan for emotional and mental self-care in place. I did not and still do not. Although this

student asked me this when I was planning on doing a project entirely around 'button-pushing'

challenges, I still believe this could have been valuable with the project I ended up doing.

Listening projects can be unpredictable. While it required energy to take in so much from others,

I ended up being fine – although maybe I got lucky. No matter the type of listening project, I

believe a plan for emotional and mental self-care could be of value for practitioners.

BEST PRACTICES AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Whether doing a listening project for the self or for social action, there are some best

practices which should guide all:

- Do the project in person. Skype takes some of the human element out of it while a lack of video takes even more. A telephone call is another step further in the wrong direction.
- After having done a listening project as part of Training for Social Action, I thought it would be best to have a personal relationship with the interviewee. I do not think that is the case now. As long as the right environment is set and the right questions are asked, the listener's and speaker's prior relationship is usually not important.
- Ask the questions you do not want to ask. Some of the strategic questions I asked were questions I did not want to ask because I feared discomfort from hearing the answers. But these answers were the points that provided the most learning and understanding for me. They shined light on both my own and the speaker's views. They created a sense of intimacy and trust when the speaker was able to share without being judged. The questions bring up issues, which are usually left in the dark, for exchange. And, it is a way to begin addressing a conflict by bringing viewpoints into the open for exploration.
- Let the interviewee set the project's course and move it where the speaker sees fit.
- Show appreciation and thanks to the interviewee.

While those best practices work for any type of listening project, I now want to focus in on

each of the five types of listening projects.

Oral History: Past

In the 1940s, Allan Nevins at Columbus University started recording histories. Then in

the 1960s/1970s, recordings moved away from the political, business, and social elite (GMU

2016). From the 20th century to today, capturing the history of those not often heard has become

more challenging. People are less likely to create records by keeping diaries, drafting

correspondence, and sending memoranda instead using telephone, fax, and e-mail (Paris 2011).

Oral history is a living memory of the past which can be used to interpret social change.

It can be about any aspect of life and usually contains personal, social, and cultural areas of

experience (Slim & Thompson 1993). Oral history is an in-depth account of personal

experiences and reflections (OHA 2009).

Oral history is a self-conscious, disciplined, conversation between two people about some

aspect of the past considered by them to be of historical significance. Alessandro Portelli says

oral history is what the source and historian do together at the moment of encounter in an

interview (GMU 2016). Oral history is the systematic collection of living people's testimony

about their own experiences (Moyer 1999). It is not folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor. An

interviewee recalls an event for the interviewer who then creates a historical record (Moyer

1999). Oral history is unlike written history in that it captures people's feelings, expressions, and

nuances of language (Ritchie 2003). Challenges with oral history include subjectivity, memory,

retrospectivity, and narrativity (Freund 2009).

Traditional historians get nervous with oral history, partly because of the issues of power,

bias, and memory. These are indeed issues but accuracy is not a concern unique to oral history

(Moyer 1999). Challenges for the interviewee might include fear, low self-confidence, memory

challenges, focus, discomfort, the organization of thoughts, and pressure. Challenges for the

interviewer include nervousness, disorganization, not listening, expectations on what to hear,

criticism of the interviewee, and cultural differences (Moyer 1999).

Oral history can appear in a variety of formats including formal, rehearsed accounts of

the past presented by culturally sanctioned tradition-bearers; informal conversations about the

"old days" among family members, neighbors, and coworkers; printed compilations about past

times; or recorded interviews with individuals who have stories to tell (GMU 2016).

The speaker can gain confidence in this process by seeing that one's perceptions and

experiences are worthwhile (Slim & Thompson 1993). The narrator can steer the conversation in

particular directions, emphasizing certain issues while obscuring others (Sarkar 2012). It is important to note that the speaker is influenced by the subject and audience. As there is no such thing as a transparent interview, the positionality of both parties is fundamental. The positionality determines which partial truth is received (Sarkar 2012). Through oral history, one can learn about the perspectives of individuals who might not otherwise appear in the historical record (Walbert 2016).

Oral histories can encourage community action/cohesion, close generational gaps, provide the basis for literacy programs, and revitalize disadvantaged sectors of society. With oral and alternative versions of history, it might not be possible to prove what is correct but it is important in telling us what people believe (Slim & Thompson 1993). It is a way to understand the subjective experience of social change, the way in which people make sense of their lives, and how they situate themselves within and against dominant histories (Sarkar 2012). Valuable insights into the meanings which people attach to particular events of processes can be discovered. Even if a piece of information is "wrong," it still can be "psychologically true" and this "truth" is an important element (Sarkar 2012).

Oral history gives history back to the people in their own words. And in giving a past, it also helps them toward a future of their own making (Thompson 1988). By documenting lives and feelings of all kinds of people, we gain a truer, picture of the past; the connection of public and private experience; more courage for older generations; meaning to communities; and contact between generations (Thompson 1988). The best oral histories remember details, clarify the muddled, make connections, challenge contradictions, assess what it meant then and what it means now, and ask the hard questions (GMU 2016).

Recording and preserving these experiences and reflections, through audio and/or video, provides research opportunities for the future. While the interviewer should ask historically significant questions, carefully prepare for the interview, and understand the issues to be addressed: the speaker has the right to respond to questions in the speaker's own style and language (OHA 2009).

The word I most associate with the oral history project is "past." Simply, an oral history is a look into the past and, as the literature points out, any aspect of the past. For my two oral history projects, I wanted to hone in on a similar issue which happened in two small, rural towns. After looking for this similar issue through conversations with local residents, I found two towns that both had significant high school expansion work done in the recent past. One town built a new high school while the other underwent notable renovations.

I should note that I did not conduct research on the school issue beforehand. Since the focus of my project was on listening and not preserving the history, I did not record the sessions. I do not see how these two aspects might have diminished my listening project. If anything, the lack of recording might have given more comfort to the speakers.

From the perspectives of the two speakers I listened to, differences did exist within the two towns' approaches. One town voted on a bond. The other did not do a referendum because of the concern that it would split the town. For the town that renovated, students had attend classes in trailers for a period of time. And for the town that built the new high school, no such temporary solution was needed. Students were able to continue attending the old building until the new one was ready.

What the participants remember about the two similar initiatives was astounding. Community cohesiveness and a nonpartisan approach allowed for the project to happen in which

equal access and plan reviews were priorities. Both projects required the demonstration of need to the public and outreach in building public support. For one project, although taxes were an issue for some citizens at first, it was soon out of sight and out of mind. That demonstrates how the meaning changed over time. Regarding the people working closely on the other project, the committee set up a "speak your mind" norm so that communication would be open and honest.

Whether building a new school or addressing incarceration policies, there are numerous benefits an oral history could provide to a person or group engaged in a social action project. By looking at the similarities, differences, successes, challenges, and best practices that other communities have dealt with, an oral history can provide context for one's own social action project. With this example of the school expansions, one can gain an appreciation and understanding of the benefits and challenges of putting students in temporary trailers. An oral history is a way to glance at how others interpret social change and how social action affects them. The glance provides insight into how a school might be perceived over time and the impact which taxes have on individual lives. Other best practices include the easy questions coming first, one question coming at a time, the room for silence, good listening, verbal encouragement, open-ended questions, follow-up questions, and flexibility (Moyer 1999).

Single-Issue Testimony: Depth

A single-issue interview consists of a testimony about a particular aspect or period of a person's life (Slim & Thompson 1993). They tend to be shorter, yet more detailed. The interviewer should have technical knowledge of the topic (Slim & Thompson 1993). Listening to individual testimonies can provide a counterpoint to generalization, review the collective version, and create an appreciation of both differences and alliances within a society (Bainbridge 2000).

Depth is the word that first comes to mind with the single-issue testimony. The faith community has a strong voice in the Appalachian Mountains, particularly the Christian one. So with that, I chose the issue of religion and spirituality to dive into. As I grew up in a Christian Presbyterian church and have practiced spirituality in various forms over the years, it is tough for me to say how much technical knowledge I had coming into these listening projects. However, I did not acquire any additional technical knowledge specifically for these sessions.

For the two single-issue testimony listening sessions, I listened to one person who adheres to the Christian faith and one to a more free-flowing, spiritual, unique path. As I heard during several other types of listening projects where religion came up, there was a tendency for more "spiritually" oriented people outside of the Christian narrative to think religion is specific while spirituality is a unique path – but that religion and spirituality go hand in hand. Although I did not ask about this aspect specifically to the Christian perspective, it is an idea worth diving more into.

The question, "What led you to believe that?" was a powerful one throughout the types of listening projects, but especially within the single-issue testimony. In these two sessions, it allowed for a fuller picture of one's life. History, experiences, family background, social settings, economics, and more all have a role in leading someone to a particular belief.

By looking at a relevant issue in a community, as Bainbridge states, single-issue testimonies can allow a glimpse into both differences and alliances within that community and society as a whole. With faith, religion, and spirituality playing prominent roles in many people's lives; this glimpse can give a practitioner a sense of the commonalities among different perspectives, what might be holding those perspectives back from working with each other, and ideas on how to bring them together. With that knowledge, social action work can be

approached in a more mindful manner by being more familiar with issues on people's hearts and minds within a community.

Life Story: Connection

Richard Kearney remarked, "Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so, in fact, for while food makes us live, stories are what make our lives worth living." A story is a series of events on a particular subject relayed by a person to an audience (Turlington 2010). Our individual lives are all woven together through stories (Dyson & Genishi 1994). Storytelling is the conveying of events in words, sound, and/or images (Boundless 2016). An individual life story encompasses a person's whole life including personal, spiritual, social, and economic aspects (Slim & Thompson 1993). As stories serve many critical functions at once, as humans, we need them (Turlington 2010).

Stories offer a beginning, middle, and end that bring order to the chaos of life (Turlington 2010). Naturally, our brains tell stories as a way to give structure, meaning, and purpose to our lives (Gregoire 2013). Stories organize our experiences, give us a sense of self, and can even dictate our behavior (Gregoire 2013). No matter the significance, life stories' ability to summarize can simplify the immense complexity of individual lives (Sandberg 2016).

As we have a need to know and express, stories become an essential part of ourselves (Freed 2010). Telling stories are attempts to release, evolve, and grow beyond them (Freed 2010). They are ways for us to think about how we came to be and where we think we are going (Gregoire 2013). Life stories highlight who we are and what is most important to us. They allow us to explore the deeper parts of our life experiences and what they mean to us (USM 1995).

Stories can act as powerful tools which can change society because they connect us to each other (Turlington 2010). The shared humanity of stories strengthens and builds connections between people (StoryCorps 2016). When we can see the world through someone else's eyes, we can empathize and better live together (Turlington 2010). Stories can serve a variety of purposes such as escaping routine, teaching in a fun way (research showed we retain facts more readily if in narrative form), reinforcing societal norms and history, posing questions, finding solutions, and speculating (Turlington 2010).

We tell our stories to transform ourselves, learn about our history, tell our experiences to transcend them, make a difference in the world, broaden our perspective to see further than normal, act beyond a story that may have imprisoned or enslaved us previously, and to live into more of our potential (Freed 2010). Telling our story can fulfill important functions psychologically (ourselves), sociologically (others), spiritually (the mystery of life), and philosophically (the universe around us). Our stories can make us whole, gather up parts of life for greater meaning, and illuminate connectedness (USM 1995). Stories bridge cultural, linguistic, and age-related divides (Boundless 2016). Stories can act as entertainment, education, cultural preservation, and a means of instilling moral values (Boundless 2016). Two or three sessions should be planned for a total of 1-8 hours (Slim & Thompson 1993). Another important note is that a story is constantly evolving and that the present emotions of a speaker influences the entire narrative (Gregoire 2013).

Life stories bring about multiple connections. They allow for the speaker to connect with the speaker's own story, for the listener to connect in ways to the speaker's story, and for the speaker and listener to connect with each other. Listening to two people's life stories gave me a sense of both the magnitude of experiences that shape an individual, as well as the broad variety

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of issues that contribute to one's being and way of thinking. Life story subjects told me that it was a rare and wonderful opportunity to share, marvelous to tell a story, and of great benefit to them.

Although the literature suggests to have more than one session, I did only one for each of my life story subjects. The session with the second participant lasted two hours; perhaps, both the speaker and I could have benefited from a break and to come back together another time or two. As an observer (someone other than the interviewer and interviewee) being present can distort what the speaker shares (Slim & Thompson 1993), I did not have any observers present for any of my listening projects. Literature proposed that the speaker and listener should be of the same sex (Slim & Thompson 1993), but I did not take that into consideration with my projects and do not readily see any detriment because of it. However, that is a point to be mindful of, especially when conducting listening projects across cultures.

When we listen to the sharing of experiences and knowledge, we learn (Boundless 2016). Social action trainers can use life story listening projects as a way to learn about a community and connect to the people they are working with. The connection increases trust, better enabling all involved to work together collaboratively and respectfully. Thinking about my TSA listening project, I gained insight from the depths which my subject was sharing and am hopeful the trust between us expanded as well. Regarding training design, the power of stories is worth looking at to see where and how storytelling might fit into a particular training. Stories can add to the level of connection in a training room and thus enhance the potential for learning. During a training on bullying I facilitated as part of TSA, I instantly noticed the cohesion and openness increase once participants were given the space to share personal stories. Ultimately, stories can add value to community projects, trainings, and relationships.

'Button-Pushing' Challenge: Patience

There is much pressure within the world for safe, non-combative atmospheres. These atmospheres silence discussion, eradicate the possibility of exchange, and interfere with creating community through constructive dialogue around intense disagreement (Hooks 2010). When we hear combative issues or "hot buttons," past experiences, beliefs, and one's biases can all arise (Burley-Allen 1995). In defense, one then tends to tune out, plan rebuttals, and formulate questions. If someone starts to think of possibly changing one's own positions, it can feel threatening (Burley-Allen 1995). Usually, there is the little voice within us that claims, "I am always right and there is no need to listen to the voices who are different," (Utt 2013). We ask, "What could those voices possibly teach me?" (Utt 2013).

It can be a dangerous journey to listen to the challenging and uncomfortable, but taking this route increases our chances to reach our destination safely (Hooks 2010). When we hear something positive or negative, biased listening can happen. This carries the possibility of one's self then distorting the original message (Burley-Allen 1995). It is worth working on our biased listening. Katherine Schultz wrote in 2003, "Listening for what is absent helps us understand what is present." Listening is more than looking for tidbits from another person that confirm our worldview (Utt 2013).

Buttons are "emotionally volatile, reactive places within us that cause us to have negative feelings of frustration or anger," (Davenport 2016). People push our buttons intentionally or otherwise. The sting is painful and the urge to retaliate can be overwhelming. These reactions are usually full-blown counter attacks that can include name calling, below-the-belt barbs, stand offs, pouting, shouting, hurt feelings, mistrust, longstanding misunderstandings, and passive aggressiveness (Davenport 2016). But it is best to wait. It takes restraint and self-awareness to

deal with button-pushing in a healthy, positive way but the benefits of allowing a button to be pushed without anger or retribution far outweigh the momentary pleasure of emotionally reacting (Davenport 2016).

Thich Nhat Hanh writes, "If you don't have compassion, you cannot listen, because what the other person is saying may water the seeds of irritation and anger in you, and you may lose the compassion you have and no longer be able to listen," (Hanh 2004). But when one has compassion, one can always offer another an opportunity to empty the heart because the compassion protects the listener and keeps the listener safe even if the speaker puts forth wrong perceptions, condemnation, and bitterness. If the listener loses peace, others notice and are unable to continue (Hanh 2016). One needs to know how to calm oneself because the listener cannot listen when fear, prejudice, or anger is in place (Hanh 2016).

There are numerous techniques, including breathing and practicing peace, which one can use to prepare for listening to a 'button-pushing' challenge. One must look within and ask oneself about one's own sensitivities because the buttons are about oneself: insecurity, fear, low self-esteem, and unmet needs. It is important to establish boundaries and view the challenges as an opportunity for self-awareness, healing, honesty, and growth (Davenport 2016).

When you have people with different or conflicting views, listening can build empathy, understanding, and common ground (Walters 2016). Even if you do not like the story or the person, Margaret Wheatley argues, "You can't hate someone whose story you know," (2001). By listening to the uncomfortable, listening can create relationship and move people closer to each other (Wheatley 2001). Confrontations are calmed (Co-Intelligence Institute 2003) and emotional tension is lowered (Atlee 2003) when listening takes place. Listening to challenging perspectives can lead to the recognition of other beliefs, new questions, and new ideas about the

resolution of those questions (Haroutunian-Gordon 2010). It can help us discover that creative consensus without compromise is a real possibility no matter how strong the differences (Atlee 2003). People who we hold as greatest enemies can be our greatest healers (Zibart 2004).

The most important word associated with 'button-pushing' challenges is patience. One must have patience and calmness before one is able to listen to try to understand a different frame of reference. A lack of patience does not allow you to focus and it does not allow the speaker to gain energy from you to continue exploring. The calmness allows for distractions to be blocked, for objectivity to increase, and for changing what is disliked and uncomfortable into a strength. As noted in my Objective C discussion, I did lose compassion on a couple occasions and looked down at my notes to regain my composure. This moment provided me with the opportunity to breathe, re-center, and bring myself back to the purpose of the situation. As time moved forward, the need to look at my notes diminished.

John Elter had the idea that if we listen for what is right and what is wrong, then we will not be able to hear what is possible (Kahane 2004). I found it easier to listen when I did not focus my attention and energy on whether the content was right or wrong; but instead on the sharing and the possibilities. It is easier said than done but leaning into that discomfort and looking for strengths in the challenging words increase our capacity for empathetic listening. When one can truly listen to another with radical openness, you might not feel in control or feel good but learning can happen by facing reality (Hooks 2010). There were many times I did not feel good during the 'button-pushing' listening projects. In facing this reality, I learned how participants' experiences have led them to the present, how difference is not as scary as it seems, and just how much humanity we share. With an open heart comes radical openness.

In my second 'button-pushing' challenge project, one point I noticed was that I was able to smile and even laugh while listening to challenging words from the speaker coming in the form of jokes. On one hand, that shows growth for me in being able to sit with that which is uncomfortable and encourage the speaker to continue. On the other hand, I wonder how ethical my disingenuous body language is to encourage more speaking. Maybe it is fine. Or maybe is it misleading and unethical to the speaker in some way? Perhaps, it is acceptable as long as the body language is an expression of my excitement at the speaker sharing and maybe not necessarily the opinions themselves.

In the summer of 2015, I worked for the Governor's Institute of Vermont, which provides prestigious, fun, accelerated learning residencies on college campuses for highly-motivated Vermont teenagers. During the model US Congress activity, I acted as a lobbyist advocating to not raise the minimum wage. As my personal belief is that the minimum wage should be raised, I researched some of the arguments to the contrary. The research allowed me to gain understanding of a position I disagree with. I then actually successfully convinced the group I was lobbying to not raise the minimum wage after they began the session leaning the other way.

From my lobbyist experience at the Governor's Institute through the listening projects, I learned that trainers need an understanding for all sides of a particular issue. One way to investigate those sides is by hearing perspectives that might push your buttons. Listening projects are one way to get there in a format which is less threatening than the shouting and yelling seen on television. Informal conversations and research can contribute to understanding as well. Whatever the route, taking the information with a calm demeanor allows for the greatest understanding and greatest ability to effectively navigate the tough conversations which can come out in a training room. It can further increase our capacity to listen in the training room,

respond in the heat of the moment, and keep challenging conversations alive which can end up producing the most learning. Frank Howard Clark wrote, "We find comfort among those who agree with us--growth among those who don't."

Oral Artistry: Appreciation

Oral artistry is handed down from generation to generation in the form of songs, stories, legends, poem, drama, proverbs, theater, folk singing, and rhyming chants. It is the oral transmission of ideas, customs, and emotions which belong to a society (Slim & Thompson 1993). Some serve a record-keeping or technical function. Stories, songs, and histories are a process of socialization while tales and proverbs carry advice. But all of them contain a society's values (Slim & Thompson 1993).

Oral artistry does not occur in a book but instead through performance. While oral artistry is indeed not objective, it does tell about social change, archetypal events, and community responses to those events (Slim & Thompson 1993). Oral artistry preserves particular norms but can be a challenge to others. It represents a space where it is safer to say things and insights are given into the community (Slim & Thompson 1993).

Appreciation is the word for me associated with oral artistry projects. Truth be told, it has proven to be the most challenging of the projects to pull meaning out of. But hearing a friend recite a Ukrainian song provided me a certain feeling of awe, particularly when she expressed a fear about this part of Ukrainian history dying. Although the song was recited in her native language, this friend shared about what it means to her in English. As it is important for the speaker to speak in one's native language as this shifts the burden from the speaker to the listener (Slim & Thompson 1993), I should have set up a situation where this was the case.

Art is powerful. Hand-in-hand with the feelings are the words that express themes of love and hard work paying off. Oral artistries provides the listener with both a feeling of the culture as well a glimpse into some of its values. Others maintain and preserve norms, conventions, and the organization of society through performance (Slim & Thompson 1993). A practitioner and trainer can gain appreciation and learn about values through these performances. While doing any kind of training or social action in a particular area or with a particular group of people, oral artistry projects can give trainers a glimpse into a culture's soul, better preparing trainers to be effective partners. A trainer can then be more appreciative of the values such as hard work paying off and integrate those values into a training design.

Listening Projects: Empathy

All listening projects offer a glimpse into another's world that can help the listener build empathy. My history with the two oral history projects regarding schools reminded me of what I saw on a field study trip to Jordan in January 2015. There, listening was being done with local communities, learning about their wants and needs. Practitioners listened and then used that information to gather support and facilitate change regarding issues such as environmental preservation policies and refugee support. Listening projects can allow for the collection of this information which in turn can allow for more effective advocacy efforts. Listeners can gain a better sense of the needs of the speaker and become partners. Speakers can explore their own needs and wants, potentially acting as a rehearsal of sorts thus allowing them to then articulate their needs and wants on a larger scale.

Listening projects bring up so much more. There were times when I felt as if I heard contradictory ideas from the same speaker within minutes of each other. That raises the question of, "Can different realities simultaneously be true?" Fran Peavey adds that this phenomenon

should be paid attention to because it demonstrates a potential wedge into solution exploration. In wanting to keep control of the sessions in the hands of the speaker, I always ended my sessions with, "What else would you like to say?" to be sure that any last points or thoughts could be finished up. The question, "What inspires you to act?" was significant across the types of listening projects. That directly informs the trainer what motivates people and in turn can shape our training design in considering participant motivation.

At some points in listening projects I have been a part of, the speaker will soften their stance. This is a phenomenon I have witnessed a few times. While I more readily notice it during the 'button-pushing' challenges, it has happened across the listening project spectrum. It happens when the speakers soften stances with bits of compassion that they had originally been harder on. The world teaches us to be hard. Especially when we share something controversial, we tend to share it with a hardness because we are building up for the expected pushback of what we typically receive from others. When that pushback does not happen and we are forced to sit with that hardness, it does not feel as good. It can cause one to re-evaluate one's position and/or the rigidness of it.

Whatever the situation regarding trust ended up being and the impact that had on the learning space, the location was chosen by the speaker. I believe that automatically puts them into a comfortable and familiar place mentally and physically where they are best able to share. If the speaker is comfortable, I am comfortable as a listener. Regarding my own comfort as a listener, I found that two hours was about my limit for staying engaged. I had only one project last that long and it was around that two-hour mark where I started experiencing frequent lapses in my attention. Whether the two-hour mark is my limit or it was that one-time experience, I do not know. When listening, it is important to recognize when breaks are needed.

Another aspect I observed about the process of listening projects is that the process eliminated the need to be right or be in control. Since all the listener can do is ask questions, I did not need to worry about creating defenses, building arguments, formulating responses, or proving the speaker wrong through debate. As the listener, I am more easily and readily able to listen for understanding because that is the only option available.

I learned a great deal about my ability to "listen from the heart" over the course of these ten listening projects. By attempting to go into these projects with an open heart -- although not flawlessly -- I was able to distance myself from judgment because name calling and labeling are not conducive to listening. With my ten participants having more than four hundred years of life experience among them, I found some of my biggest learnings to include the absorption of wisdom from them. Ideas such as friends being reflections of ourselves. That made me wonder if that idea only applies to friends. Or a feeling that the USA has lost the idea of appreciation – because we just have it. Or the importance of needing to work in this world. Or that life lessons are all similar; yet, uniquely ours.

These were lessons that came from different types of listening projects. Wisdom can be heard whether you are conducting a life story or a single-issue testimony. I believe these lessons and wisdom can be absorbed only if one enters listening with an open heart. Listening is a skill. As is the case with other skills, listening can be improved upon through practice. Having listened over the course of ten intentional projects, it became easier to keep the heart open in listening for possibilities as opposed to divisions. An open heart is a significant aid in allowing trainer practitioners, including myself, to understand that everyone owns a piece of the truth. These listening projects solidified this idea for me which I had only begun to grasp during TSA and the first listening project I engaged in a couple years ago.

DISCUSSION

"When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new." ~Dalai Lama

After experiencing the ten listening projects, I wanted to look at how I progressed in reaching my objectives.

Personal
A. *Assume the responsibility for my self-growth through this project, which will in turn lead to greater self-confidence.* Taking on a large project like this has at times been overwhelming. But I have successfully navigated the demands of this while staying on top of my Western Youth Network responsibilities, short-term work for World Learning, community organizing, and other areas of life. I am optimistic that the self-growth is shown through this paper because of the time I intentionally took to reflect on the listening projects as opposed to immediately writing. This growth has indeed led to greater confidence but there is always room for expansion.

B. *Increase my self-awareness of where I stand on issues through listening to different perspectives; as well as the attributes I bring as a facilitator in helping or hindering me staying grounded.* My attitude of being clear in my own values has increased because of this project. Having spent a lot of time listening to perspectives which are different than mine, I am able to see more of where those differences come from. Margaret Wheatley (2001) wrote, "It is impossible to create a healthy culture if we refuse to meet, and if we refuse to listen. But if we meet, and when we listen, we reweave the world into wholeness." By meeting what the world tells me is "the other," my understanding of my own positionality has strengthened. My ability to listen and my relaxed demeanor benefit my ability to facilitate while my aversion to conflict and struggle to think quickly in the heat of the moment can still act as a hindrance.

C. *Increase my patience and empathy by listening to differing perspectives and the people behind them.* I can directly see an improvement in my patience while listening to 'button-pushing' challenges from the spring of 2015 to the projects which have happened over the past couple months. Hearing 'button-pushing' challenges during the spring of 2015 caused me to look down to take notes to avoid having my facial expressions seen. While it is possible I did this throughout the course of these rounds of projects, I believe it was only a time or two. Just by getting glimpses into so many people's lives, my empathy for people and the massive varieties of their experiences increased.

Professional
D. *Increase my skills in strategic questioning, listening to others, and conflict management/problem solving.* My strategic questioning skills have increased over the past couple years as I was already practicing before this project. Strategic questioning is something I have tried to do as a youth facilitator, as a family member, and as a Prevention Associate at the Western Youth Network. My listening projects have increased my awareness of what is one of my main challenges regarding questioning. It additionally showed that I can sometimes be quite skilled in asking questions in response

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to content and others times weak. The time I spent listening throughout the course of this project has allowed my listening skill to increase. I can more quickly catch myself when my mind drifts and refocus myself on the speaker. My poise has increased in being able to peacefully sit with that which is uncomfortable to me, but I still have much room for improvement in terms of conflict management and problem solving.

E. *Contribute to the training field by demonstrating the benefits of how listening can benefit social action work.* I learned a great deal from this project. It is my hope that I am able to articulate these learnings from so many incredible thinkers in this paper along with tips for other trainers.

F. *Cultivate my respect & sensitivity for individual cultural differences & other humans by creating environments that model trust, inclusion, and safety.* Similar to objective B, with the increased understanding of my own values came a respect, sensitivity, and appreciation for other people and the cultures that contribute to who they are. When trust exists, speakers go deeper and explore new ground when they are being listened to (Zimmerman 1991). Listening projects allowed me to create environments of trust, inclusion, and safety. While I still would be curious as to what factors created the trust, again, I have no reason to think any of my participants were not open with me.

G. *Increase my knowledge of available literature, resources, and material in the field of listening.* I made substantial progress with this objective. In this paper, I have cited and referenced approximately 60 sources. Throughout my reading and research on listening and listening programs, I looked through more than 100 references. I was pleasantly surprised to see such an abundance of materials.

Areas of Other, Unanticipated Growth

The objectives I planned at the beginning of my project were not the only ones I moved within. There were two other skill competency areas in which I experienced growth: the skill of presenting information and/or directions clearly and thoroughly, and interpersonal and intercultural skills. I was challenged in the fact that I did not always properly set the stage for my listening projects. Although I remembered the majority of the time, there were a few occasions in which I forgot to say something along the lines of, "This is your project: take as much or as little time as you want in your exploration." This is a simple but significant line which affirms that the speakers are the ones in control. I wonder what impact not saying this line

had on those who did not get the chance to hear it. Having forgotten this several times, it has been a reminder in the importance of framing a situation.

Having listened to different people from different cultures, my capacity for a variety of interpersonal and intercultural skills increased. Exposure leads to expansion. With this expansion, qualities such as respect, a search for understanding, and listening seem to operate within most cultures.

Challenges of the Process

In addition to the challenge mentioned above (forgetting to properly frame my listening project sessions), I experienced several others. Although it was not to the extent of needing a plan for self-care, it was at times challenging to listen to some of my subjects' pain. Whether it was being disheartened by social media or feeling a lack of hope, I felt some of the pain that they shared.

In thinking of a solution prematurely, the connection with the speaker disappears and information is missed (Rosenbaum 2014).   Reacting to others' words and distractions can certainly cause me to miss information. This can take away from the ability to listen. As described above, I did experience distractions to listening whether it was planning my next question or thinking about what I needed to do after the session. Even when I arrived at my tenth and final listening project, I hoped that I could remained focused for its duration. But music, which is my biggest weakness in terms of distractions, was playing at times.

Nonetheless, over the course of the ten projects, I was able to more quickly catch when my mind began to drift. My method of notetaking seemed to both keep me focused and act as a catalyst for the speaker. While trying to write down every word of the speaker would have been distracting in itself and likely impossible, writing down ideas here and there, at times with a head

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nod, showed to the speaker that the ideas being put forth were valued. When a life story is being shared, it should be given in a private, comfortable, secluded, location that is familiar to the speaker (Slim & Thompson 1993). This was challenging for some of the interviewees as they wanted to defer to me. While I appreciated their flexibility, I ended up having to insist that they choose. From my experience, the comfortable and familiar location being chosen by the speaker is important not just to the life story but applies to all types of listening projects.

Further challenges included the sessions which happened on the telephone or Skype. Again, there were two Skype sessions which happened where I could not see the interviewee. So instead of being able to look at the speaker, I was forced to stare into my laptop's tiny video camera lens trying to convey my deep listening. It was awkward indeed but at the same time, it might have taken away some of the pressure from the speaker in knowing they could not be seen. For the one session that I did on the telephone, there seemed to be the least amount of connectivity between me and the speaker. Perhaps it was not the smoothest session for other reasons, but I would guess it was because we were on the telephone.

The largest challenge was simply scheduling all ten listening projects. I had hoped to have all of them completed by the end of January but was not able to finish them until March 20th. People are and were busy; and the simple task of getting my schedule align with another's was difficult. During this time, I did experience frustration at the need to rely on others for something I wanted to do immediately. But after all, in order to progress as a group of people sharing the same space on this planet, we must rely on each other. Despite these challenges, I enjoyed the listening project sessions. It was a true privilege to hear about so many aspects of peoples' lives.

LARGER LESSONS FOR TRAINERS

"Listening does not mean waiting until it is your turn to talk. Listening means giving up agency.
Action Listening means seeing through another's point of view even if you don't agree with it."
~Christopher Robbins

Strategic Questioning

This project, as already touched on in my objectives, allowed me to practice strategic

questioning. I did not see surveys, questionnaires, or focus groups as appropriate to what I was

trying to do with my project. Some of the questions I asked my subjects were informed and

created during the interview and by the content of the speaker. At times, I asked more

spontaneous questions than others. It is difficult to say whether I was better on some days than

others or if on the days I asked fewer questions, I simply felt like what had already been explored

was adequate. Several questions that I used to design most of my listening sessions around

included the following:

- What does the term "social justice" mean to you?
- What inspires you to act?
- What is your vision for this world?
- What would be your ideal world regarding _____?
- Within this world, what drives you?

For the different types of listening projects, questions varied. For example, during an

oral history project in response to a certain action or event shared by the speaker, I asked, "What

led you to do that?" For a single-issue testimony project, I might have asked, "What is your

stance on this issue?" "What led you to believe that?" and "What role does this issue play as part

of your larger vision for the world?"

I have four takeaways from the experience of strategic questioning over the course of my

listening projects. Strategic questions should:

- <u>Be open-ended, non-leading, and allow room for growth</u>. This gives maximum space for
  the speaker to explore and allows them to take the space where they feel it needs to go.

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- Begin with "what." This significantly makes it easier for a question to be open-ended, tying in with the first point. Even with the "how," question, tempting answers can include "Good" or "It was fine." By starting with "what," the question encourages description, exploration, and deep thought.

- Be concise. I remember during the clearness meetings of Training for Social Action, one of my largest struggles was ruining a good open-ended question with too many details. I would ask something such as, "What has led you to your current beliefs?" which is strong but then immediately follow it up with "For example…" or "…current beliefs? Your life, your experiences, the people you spent time with, etc." These add-ons detract from the original question which is simple yet full of possibility. During the first several listening projects, I noticed that I did this a couple times. Toward the end of the ten projects, I was able to feel myself being tempted to add these unnecessary details and stop myself.

- Be appropriate in relation to the speaker. A couple of my subjects tended to be more introverted and keep to themselves. For these subjects, I tried to be more intentional by asking, "What drives you?" as opposed to "What inspires you to act?" Jumping toward an action, especially since that is not a primary objective of these particular listening projects, might have felt threatening to those less prone and/or ready to act. As it is important to meet the participants where they are, so too must the strategic questions.

Defining Language

Listening projects reinforced for me the importance of defining key terms and making sure that everyone is working with an understanding of the terminology. For example, when I asked the question, "What would your ideal world look like?" to several of my interviewees, they answered that question with different interpretations of "world." For some, the world was their local community. For others, it was the United States of America. For others, it was Planet Earth. I think of the world as Planet Earth, so I had assumed that would be the case for all participants.

Next, subjects had different definitions for "social justice." Some had not even thought about the term before I asked and some directly expressed, "This is a multi-faceted idea which has different meanings for different people." One participant even directly associated the national politics of the United States with the term. Similar to social justice, injustice came up.

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What constitutes an injustice? This is all to say that in the training room, words need to have common definitions or at least an understanding that definitions differ so that clear conversation can happen.

Community

A theme that came up through all five types of the listening projects was the idea of community. About her old community, one participant remarked there was "a church at every corner" and "without neighborhoods, a town dies." As social action training is strongly connected to the community and the way in which it functions, it is essential to know about the community's history; as well as understand what is important for community members. By conducting listening projects, trainers can learn about the ways to connect people's desire to find their place and their voice in contributing to the community. We can understand to what extent people watch over each other, thus enhancing the way we frame our trainings. As one participant put forth, "When the community works together, there's no limit. The limit is your vision."

What Unites Us?

There were some of the participants in which I resonated with most of what they were saying. And there were others who pushed me with almost all of what they were saying. Whoever I was listening to, I tried to listen in the same way. This is important as a dynamic listener searches for a way into another's thinking, feeling, dreams, and essence (Peavey 1994). When it came to everyone's ideal world, the commonalities became numerous with desires such as equality, education for all, happiness, love, peace, and the elimination of homelessness. So while potentially cliché, it seems there is more that unites us than divides us. Yet, we tend to

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expend more energy on the divisions thinking we are divided on everything, chasing the need to be right, and creating the idea of the "other." Knowing we have the overarching commonalities is powerful coming into a training room.

Social Action

I am enthralled in that some of my biggest learnings around social action came from simply listening to other people's experience and knowledge. I learned that the sustainability of actions and projects happen when people are brought together, even with differences of opinion. It is critical that people must clearly communicate, have an unlimited vision with the never-say-never approach, plan, and work together. People must be valued over profit.

Everyone has a partial truth (Kahane 2004). In an idea that goes along with that, one subject remarked, "Not one person has all the right ideas – the collaborative is better than the singular…in most cases." Listening projects show that social action work must simultaneously remember yesterday, be aware of today, and consider tomorrow in order to be effective and sustainable. Listening can lead us to latent solutions (Peavey 1994), creative solutions, the development of new community leaders, and the formation of uncommon coalitions and alliances (Walters 2016).

People feel empowered in different ways. Some might feel empowered when they are able to forgive both others and themselves as it allows them to be more present. Some feel empowered when they do not accept less than what should be done. Listening projects create the space where both the speaker and listener can learn about empowerment. For example, during the course of one participant's exploration, the subject came to the realization that she might be too enclosed within her own bubble and not getting the challenge she desires. This led to her

brainstorming possible actions to take. Both the realization and her approach led me to do my own brainstorming on this issue.

Listening projects allowed me to hear how the Civil Rights Movement inspired one of the subjects I interviewed. It is beneficial to learn which movements inspire people, why they do so, and what actions result because of that. This same subject also spoke of calling 300 people the day before an event she was organizing. We live in a world with numerous e-mails, notifications, and text messages. Perhaps telephone calls represent a unique way in today's world to connect with people and encourage them to show up in a way in which other methods of communication cannot. Listening projects allow for the sharing of social action techniques. They themselves are a social action technique which can help us understand language, grasp the importance of community, and work to the strengths of our commonalities. Change happens not by telling but by listening (Co-Intelligence Institute 2003).

LEARNINGS AND CONCLUSION

I have learned a great deal from this project. I hope to apply this knowledge both personally and professionally. My principles have allowed me to smile during disagreement, work closely with others through different ways of operating, and maintain energy when exhausted. Personally, I absolutely plan on recording the life stories of both my parents by combining the tools of life stories and oral histories. It is my intention to practice listening without interrupting during interactions with friends, family, and anyone I cross paths with. Listening is a way to silence one's own voice and give another a place to explore. Listening projects have taught me that I benefit from intentionally setting up a structured listening environment. This allows me to mentally prepare for the exchange while negating some of life's distractions. Similarly to a work meeting or doctor's appointment, perhaps by intentionally creating space for listening and sharing, we (myself included) will be more inclined to listen and share.

Again, I used to interrupt without thinking about it. Previous versions of myself would try to show interest by asking questions in the middle of a story. But questions in the middle of a story are more about me and finding out what I want to know. What more could I learn by shifting my needs to the secondary and instead just giving the space? Showing interest through my body language and directing my energy toward the speaker are more important than interrupting questions. Thinking more on the past, when others would share, I might interject with a similar story of my own. That process now feels like a competition as opposed to spaces where the speaker is the focus or there is a created environment where interruptions are not happening. Providing others an uninterrupted, exploration will be a true joy. I hope to be able to

use strategic questions, created beforehand or on the spot, with all who I come across, whether I previously know them or not.

Looking back to the assessment tool in Appendix A, I completed it again in March 2017, after finishing my ten listening projects. Having dove into this assessment, I believe I am more prepared to be the kind of listener I want to be. I ended up with a "score" of 55. I do believe this demonstrates an increased capacity to listen – listening for values and facts, avoiding interruptions, dropping expectations, overcoming distractions, reading the nonverbal, etc. While not as high as my 56 from thirty months ago, I believe this is simply a result of the learning process. Again, this is an example of one of the beautiful ironies of learning in which by learning more about listening, I realize how much more I have to learn than I originally thought.

Professionally, as a Prevention Associate at the Western Youth Network, I can professionally use these increased competencies and skills to more effectively facilitate Watauga Substance Abuse Prevention community coalition meetings. It is my hope that these skills will further make distractions a non-issue. Additionally, I trust I will be able to create better environments in key informant interviews, focus groups, youth programs circles, and Western Youth Network dialogues. I have had success in some of these outlets already but my new skills and competencies will allow me to be more consistent while improving my effectiveness. Regarding social justice-based training, multiple groups have started up in Boone. I plan on getting further connected into these groups in Boone so I can see where I can best use my skills. Are trainings needed or listening projects or something else?

In Boone and Watauga County, I do not feel like people with different views living in different circles have conversations with each other. With several 'button-pushing' challenge projects completed, it does not seem as scary to start working toward creating space for those

conversations to happen. Preparing this capstone creates a bookmark to another chapter in my life. The project gives me a toolkit of listening techniques to take with me, and allows me to enter work, which I care about, more effectively with a new set of skills.

Further down the road, I do not know what I will end up doing but listening projects and the learnings from them seem ready to be of use in whatever situation I find myself in. Whether it is possibly practicing patience as a politician in a heated town hall meeting or making sure to be deferring to host country nationals as a Peace Corps Country Director or listening with an open heart as a youth empowerment facilitator, I hope the ideas behind listening projects will guide me in all that I do. I look forward to having time to allow the learnings of my assignment to sink in fully and make my facilitation work more effective.

An important component of facilitation is to handle situations by seeing through confusion and acting with confidence, poise, intention, and calmness (Stains & Herzig 2017). Essentially, I trust that by keeping these listening projects close to my heart, I can move closer to these possibilities. This is important because the qualities listed in conjunction with facilitation such as confidence and calmness are important for social activists and trainers. Social action work is not easy and requires much of the people engaging in it. Whether it is in my personal life, professional work, or on a larger national/international scale; listening projects and the skill of listening that comes with it create possibilities.

One way of analyzing training styles is through the four types of director, interpreter, coach, and listener (Pickren & Blitzer 1992). Through personal evaluation and conversations with others, I believe I naturally gravitate toward the listener type. This one trend, along with multiple other facets in my life, make me think listening is one of my guiding principles. Before I came to S.I.T., I tended to give advice, interrupt, and ask questions in the middle of another's

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story. During S.I.T., I learned more about what listening actually is along with the power of strategic questioning. That listening was aided through assignment guides. I am now outside of both S.I.T. and assignment guides. Therefore, I must be ready to switch in and out of intentional listening while creating my own guides and structures. I must be able to turn off several items present in my mind, set them aside, and give my energy to someone who needs to share.

So what are listening projects? Listening projects are needs assessments. Listening projects are a look at the past. Listening projects are a path toward going deeper. Listening projects allow for the practice of appreciation, empathy, and patience. Listening projects are social action. Listening is a way to address conflict and create solutions. Listening is a way to connect, learn, and work toward mutual understanding. Listening is a way to examine our own frameworks and principles from which we work as trainers. Listening is being willing to expose ourselves to something new from others (Kahane 2004); it is a way to examine the self. Listening is a way to keep moving.

"Pay attention – we are listening each other into being." ~Sally Atkins

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Appendix A. My Skill as a Listener

Worksheets and Other Training Tools, Appendix 31, *The Winning Trainer*

Listed below are 15 statements that relate to one's ability to listen to others. Rate each item by placing a mark in the appropriate box. Try to be as candid as you can in making your rating. When you have rated all the items take a straight edge and draw lines to connect the dots. This will give you a profile of your capabilities as a listener. Obviously the more your profile leans toward the right, the more capable a listener you are.

*Trainer's Note – On the actual appendix, next to each of the five questions were the possible answers of (1) never, (2) seldom, (3) occasionally, (4) frequently, and (5) always. Those went from left to right beginning with never and ending with always. Additionally, I assigned the five categories numbers of one through five, again going from left to right in order to serve as a "score."

1. Do I listen for feelings, attitudes, perceptions, and values as well as for facts?
2. Do I try to listen for what is not said?
3. Do I avoid interrupting the person who is speaking to me?
4. Do I actually pay attention to who is speaking as opposed to faking attention?
5. Do I refrain from tuning people out because I don't like them, disagree with them, find them dull, etc.?
6. Do I work hard to avoid being distracted from what is said by the speaker's style, mannerisms, clothing, voice quality, or voice pace?
7. Do I make certain that a person's status has no bearing on how well I listen to him/her?
8. Do I avoid letting my expectations – hearing what I want to hear – determine or influence my listening behavior?
9. Do I try to read the "nonverbal" the speaker presents – inflections, gestures, mood, posture, eye contact, and facial expression?
10. Do I work hard at overcoming distractions (sounds, noises, movement, outside scenes) that may interfere with good listening?
11. Do I tend to stay with speakers who may be hard to follow – those who are slow in their speech of whose ideas are poorly organized or who tend to repeat themselves?
12. As a listener do I use nonverbal communication (eye contact, smiles, occasional head nods) to indicate that I wish to hear more?
13. Do I tend to restate or rephrase the other person's statements when necessary so that he/she will know that I understand?
14. If I have not understood, do I candidly admit to this and ask for a restatement?
15. Do I avoid framing my response to what is being said while the other person is still speaking?

Appendix B. Participant Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: Listening Projects – Projects for the Self and Social Action

Researcher: Thomas "Tommy" Boyd

My name is Thomas Boyd and I am a student with the SIT Graduate Institute master's degree program.

I would like to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting for partial fulfillment of my MA in Intercultural Service, Leadership, & Management. Your participation is voluntary. Please read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy of this form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the act of listening and its impact. Listening projects are exchanges in which one person shares while the other is intent on listening. The listener is focused on understanding, not interrupting, and asking open-ended questions.

STUDY PROCEDURES

I would like you to participate in one listening project with me where you will be the primary speaker and I will be mostly listening, while asking questions. The project will take an estimated 45 minutes–1 hour and can take place in a location and at a time of mutual convenience. I will not be audio-recording the project but will be taking notes.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are not foreseeable risks to participating in this study and no penalties should you choose not to participate; participation is voluntary. During the interview you have the right not to answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

There are not direct benefits for you but I trust you will feel rewarded by your own ability to articulate your beliefs, experiences, and stories. This project will ideally contribute to our world by demonstrating the importance of listening and the multiple benefits it can create for all involved.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. The notes will not be shared with anyone other than me and you.

For my learning purposes, I may discuss specific parts of our exchange with my Professor, but all other reference to you will be done with broad descriptors. At the conclusion of my research, I will be writing about my findings in a final paper report and presenting to a group of students and faculty, as part of the requirements for the Master's degree. I will maintain your privacy and confidentiality in my reports by removing your name and any identifying information from my findings. I may quote you directly from what you have said in both my research report and presentation (when the results of the research is published or discussed in conferences), but again, I will remove any identifying information from what

you have said. An example of the extent to which you will be described could be, "A stranger who held different beliefs than me during a single-issue testimony listening project."

Any information about you entered into a computer will be password protected. All history, information, and notes about you will be permanently deleted and/or shredded upon the completion of my presentation.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

"I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older."

Participants' signature_____ Date_____

Researcher's signature_____ Date_____

Consent to Quote from Interview

I may wish to quote you from the interview either in the presentations or articles resulting from this work but a pseudonym (fake name) will be used in order to protect your identity.

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

_____ (initial) I agree to…

_____ (initial) I do not agree to…

RESEARCHER'S CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please contact me at Thomas.boyd@mail.sit.edu or my advisor at ryland.white@sit.edu

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by an SIT Study Abroad Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact the researcher please contact the Institutional Review Board at:

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