



Listening for Transformation: Discovering Third Space and Connection Using a Listening Protocol

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INTRODUCTION

We share the evolving story of a group of interdisciplinary global scholars', the Transformative Listening Collaborative, collective work and exploration of listening as a space for transformation. As we share our story, we also seek to cultivate a space within the context of this chapter

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where the reader joins us in the process of continued exploration of listening not only as a space but as a third space in the quest to expand our notions of transformative learning. Specifically, we invite readers to join in the conversation and engage in the continued iterative development and research on the Transformative Listening Protocol (hereafter referred to as the Protocol) for transformative discovery.

This is a time of significant individual and global evolution, and we recognize that an important goal of transformative education is to create opportunities for people to become change agents, through connections and relationships across intersections of race, class, gender, ethnicity as well as cultural, national, generational, functional, or disciplinary boundaries. With a focus on social justice, equity and liberation, we see the need for empathy, understanding, deep relationships, and human connection as critical in today's world (Schwab, 2016).

Finding voice, telling stories, and generating new meanings are important components of transformation. Engaging in storytelling, and more specifically listening to another person, can play a key role in creating conditions to facilitate true and authentic connection, foster sense-making and deeper understanding of self and others (Lipari, 2014). The dialogic threshold space formed while listening to the story of another is what Bhabha (1994) describes as a third space through which narrative interpretation and understanding of the other emerges. In many interpersonal exchanges of storytelling, speech is often privileged over listening (Jacobs & Coghlan, 2005) with the role of listening often assumed but not always specifically addressed (Pery et al., 2020). Jacobs and Coghlan

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(2005) suggest, “by listening to another person, we acknowledge the other in his or her difference and thereby prepare the relational ground for intersubjective generation of new meanings” (p. 129). The interpersonal nature of storytelling in dyads is key and presupposes a storyteller and a story listener. To date, storytelling in dyads, and specifically research on listening in dyads, is underrepresented in the literature (Greene & Herbers, 2011; Joshi & Knight, 2014; Pery et al., 2020). We see transformative listening through story, with its focus on attention and presence, as a crucial condition for the formation of trust and connection, required for transformative learning that can promote connection, empathy, and understanding. With this premise, we co-created the Protocol that facilitates a process of reciprocal storytelling and story listening, connection, and possible transformation. Together with the reader, we seek to explore the potential for applying the Protocol in multiple contexts to create transformative spaces.

Our research addresses a specific gap in the literature which is to understand the experience of listening through story as a space for transformation in dyads (Imhof & Janusik, 2006; Pery et al., 2020). Our intended contribution over time is twofold: (1) To the theoretical discussion of the role of listening in transformative learning theory and (2) the practical/methodological iterative process of developing the Protocol to foster transformative listening in a wide range of settings and cultural environments.

Against this backdrop, in this chapter, we begin with *listening as a space for transformation*, telling the story of our collaborative, interdisciplinary research process in developing the Protocol and its theoretical framework. We also provide an emergent iterative prototype inquiry methodology for assessing or describing the Protocol and its application in a variety of contexts (Bogers & Horst, 2014). We move into *rediscovering third space for transformation* where we describe the themes that emerged and the nascent theory arising from the experience of using the Protocol. Finally, in *further listening*, we describe the possible implications of transformative listening for transformative learning theory as well as the implications for practitioners dedicated to facilitating purpose and meaning, equity and justice, and hope for a better world.

LISTENING AS A SPACE FOR TRANSFORMATION

The Transformative Listening Collaborative, an interdisciplinary research team, listened to a call or invitation to gather in the summer of 2017 over our shared passion for bridging divisions, creating connection and understanding across differences, and recognition of our shared humanity. What started as our participation in the International Day of Listening subcommittee for the 2018 Transformative Learning Conference became a dynamic group of scholars and practitioners exploring, learning, and listening together well beyond the experience of the conference. We came together with the common goal to foster dialogue in collaborative spaces in which all are welcome. As researchers and practitioners, each of us brought to our learning community different ways of being and knowing informed by our past experiences and discipline-specific paradigms. We draw from different disciplines and theoretical backgrounds that inform our worldviews and thus the development of the Protocol and our research.

During the process of developing the Protocol as a collaborative interdisciplinary team, each individual brought forward ideas framed by their respective areas of expertise and knowledge with the common goal of developing a tool to facilitate listening for transformation. Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2008) contend, “interdisciplinary research provides an opportunity for researchers to think outside disciplinary boundaries” (p. 2). In our experience, we found that each of us contributed to the creation of the Protocol, while leveraging and adapting our disciplinary perspectives as we learned with and from one another (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leary, 2008). In this way, we created a holistic and iterative journey where all team members were heard and respected, and through our collective and generative experience, co-inquiry, and reflections, the Protocol was developed and an idea for a research study emerged (Heron, 1992).

At its core, our theoretical framework for the Protocol is framed by transformative learning theory and our intentions to understand and situate listening as an essential element of transformative learning. At the edges, and informing the core, are the multiple disciplinary perspectives and our lived experiences as researchers and practitioners. When we started we were very pragmatic in our process. Each researcher informed the process and the Protocol from our respective perspectives. The dialogue around our own underlying theories followed because

we made assumptions about theoretical foundations which necessitated conversations about how we all approach transformative learning and also listening. We offer as part of our theoretical discovery intersections that were previously invisible to us. We invite readers to contribute their disciplinary perspectives and experiences to this sensemaking journey of listening.

Through this process of discovery, we see that the development of the Protocol was informed, in particular, by holistic transformative learning, narrative/storytelling, listening, and third space theories. Transformative learning theory, attributed to Jack Mezirow (1990), involves a change in one's perception of the world, or a part of the world, from one frame of reference to a new one. It is the application of this new or different frame that facilitates meaning making. The Protocol is founded in an holistic embodied framing of transformative learning recognizing both the cognitive rational and extra rational, reflective, imaginative, emotional, and social aspects of learning (Cranton & Roy, 2003). We saw storytelling as a way for people to be present and connect with one another's mind, body, and spirit. Indeed, adult learning, in the context of storytelling, deepens and transforms (Tyler & Swartz, 2012); promotes holistic attention and connection to oneself and another (Taylor & Cranton, 2012) and, we suggest, helps us connect with one another and find new meaning (Heron, 1992; Jacobs & Heracleous, 2005; Kofman & Senge, 1993; Wheatley, 2002).

Heron (1992) offers storytelling as a linguistic kind of presentational knowledge, where the pattern of a good story symbolizes what the listener feels is significant and meaningful about the structure of the story of their own, someone else's, or anyone's life—what Boje describes as mutually gifting stories (2020). Engaging in storytelling, and more specifically listening, can facilitate the creation of a space for transformative learning; and therefore, listening is at the center of the Protocol. The Protocol has a strong dyadic component, where two people engage in reciprocal storytelling that is associated with intimacy. Listening and speaking qualities are reciprocated or intertwined at the dyadic level, but only listening quality, and not speaking quality, predicts intimacy and consequently willingness to help (Kluger et al., 2019). “Storytelling or hearing stories told places us on a threshold between two worlds: the world of our physical sense experience and the world of the story—this phenomenon of straddling two sets of consciousness is a liminal space” (Curteis, 2010, p. 7) what Bhabha (1994) calls third space. We further suggest that listening

invites us to quiet our inner voices and noise so we may hear what others are sharing and hear how we receive and respond to their stories (Isaacs, 1999).

The Protocol includes time and questions to reflect on the storytelling process. As supported by Tyler and Swartz (2012), “Key to this process [of transformation] is the ability of the listeners and the teller to engage in post-telling conversations that explore the stories in ways that clarify, deepen, enlarge, expose new facets, and experiment with new meaning.” (p. 465).

TRANSFORMATIVE LISTENING PROTOCOL

We offer the Protocol as a process to create a learning space for reciprocal storytelling where deep transformative listening becomes possible. As researchers, we are particularly interested in the kinds of experiences participants have when engaging with others in reciprocal storytelling. We are curious to discover how participants’ existing practices of listening help, or inhibit, their abilities to cultivate meaningful connections; if and how participants gain a deeper appreciation for the other person in their learning contexts; and, finally, if and how using the Protocol influences the learning space by enhancing participants’ connections, relationships, bridging cultural differences, and/or contributing to sensemaking ability.

In designing the Protocol (Table #24.1 below), we applied an emergent iterative prototype inquiry method (Bogers & Horst, 2014). To date, the emerging prototype of the Protocol has been tested in various settings and cultures by seven researchers, with feedback provided by users and researchers informing further modifications of both the Protocol and its implementation. Given our assertion of the importance of lived experience in the transformative listening process, and the narrative foundation upon which this project is built, it was believed that an iterative process would provide authentic opportunities to gain insight, make sense of, and understand the experiences of participants. We believe the ongoing, iterative process of creating, developing the Protocol in diverse settings with participants, and engaging with participant and researcher reflective feedback allows for a continuing evolution of the Protocol (Table 24.1).

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling at each site (adults 18 or over) who were students in investigators’ classrooms,

Table 24.1 Accessible transformative listening protocol*Accessible Transformative Listening Protocol*

This activity was designed by the Transformative Listening Project in conjunction with the 2018 International Transformative Learning Conference, “Building Transformative Community: Enacting Possibility in Today’s Times.” It is meant to improve appreciative listening skills through sharing and responding to stories in pairs and in groups

1. Before the Story: Storyteller and Listener(s)
 - a. Take a deep breath and relax
 - b. Be fully present to the story and your body’s responses
 - c. Listen to the story without judgment
2. Instructions for the Listening Activity
 - a. The Storyteller: describe an experience of yours in three to five minutes:
 1. What and whom did you see? Hear? Smell? Feel? Taste? Sense?
 2. What happened?
 3. How did you feel during the experience? After the experience?
 4. What made this experience important to you?
 - b. The Appreciative Listener(s): listen deeply as if you are there:
 1. What and whom do you see? Hear? Smell? Feel? Taste? Sense?
 2. What do you perceive is happening?
 3. What are you feeling? What do you perceive the storyteller is feeling? iv. If your mind wanders or you find yourself wanting to ask questions, refocus on the story
 - c. The Appreciative Listener(s): after the story, share in three to five minutes:
 1. What particularly stands out for you in the story
 2. If listening stirs up feelings or memories you have had in your own experiences
 3. What you appreciate about their sharing
 - d. The Storyteller: listen to the listener(s):
 1. Is/are the listener(s) understanding you well?
 2. How are the listener(s)’ feelings alike or different from yours?
 3. What new feelings or meanings are emerging for you?
 - e. The storyteller: reflect on and share what you are feeling or learning in three to five minutes:
 1. What did you feel or learn when you were in the story?
 2. Are listener comments leading to new feelings? Insights? Questions?
 3. What are your “take-aways”?
 - f. The Appreciative Listener(s): listen again to the storyteller and other listeners and share in three to five minutes:
 1. Is listening to their reflections leading you to new feelings? Insights? Questions?
 2. What are your “take-aways”?
- g. All: Afterward, sharing new feelings, insights, stories:
 1. You can dialogue, e.g., share similar stories
 2. Another person may tell a different story
 3. Share reflections on how this process has helped you to tell stories and listen more effectively
 4. Thank each other for sharing and listening

students and/or professionals (i.e., faculty, trainers, coaches, and facilitators) convened for the purpose of testing the Protocol and/or professional development in workshops, classrooms, symposiums, and conferences with varying size groups of participants. All participants were volunteers. No one who attended was excluded; however, anyone could voluntarily choose to leave or opt out of sharing post-experience feedback.

Once participants were recruited, facilitating the Protocol followed a consistent process applied in all settings and contexts:

1. Participants were informed about the context and history of the Protocol development. Participants were invited to find and/or assigned a partner.
2. Participants were invited to take a deep breath, relax, and become fully present to the storyteller and story.
3. Dyad partners were instructed to listen to one another tell a story/or experience without using the Protocol.
4. The process of using the Protocol was explained.
5. Participants were instructed to take turns being a storyteller and listener working through the Protocol step by step.
6. After each storytelling, the story teller and listener reflected on their feelings, meaning making, and insights.
7. After both participants shared their stories, they were invited to reflect on their experiences of using the Protocol and the impact it had on their perspectives of listening and storytelling by engaging in a debrief dialogue and/or reflective writing.

In some settings, a small group of participants shared stories around a circle. Some debriefs took place at the group level after individuals had a chance to reflect. On average, it took 60–90 minutes to facilitate the use of and reflection on the experience of using the Protocol. The anecdotal data was aggregated across all research sites using the Protocol.

The word cloud in Fig. 24.1 is representative of the themes that emerged from the data. Preliminary data themes suggest that for participants using the Protocol a third space was created where transformative listening took place and participants felt they were better able to meet others where they were, hear them, and gain a deeper appreciation for who they were while also feeling validated and being heard themselves.

way that allowed new insights and frames of references to emerge and transformation in thinking. For example, Brazilian graduate and doctoral students found their narratives reinforced that the Protocol helped them put themselves in the storyteller's shoes and created some helpful, reliable empathy. Furthermore, participants shared that a positive shift in their perspectives of listening resulted through participating in the exercises in which the Protocol was used.

DISCOVERING THIRD SPACE FOR CONNECTION AND TRANSFORMATION

What we saw emerge from the data was a third space, rediscovery of what Bhabha (1994) describes in other contexts. Key to our discovery is that listening through storytelling in dyads creates a third space as a catalyst for connection and the potential for transformative learning. We find support for our discovery in the literature on listening, storytelling, third space, and transformation and see this as adding to existing literature on transformative learning.

The use of the Protocol for listening created a bridge to help meet across differences and was a vehicle through which participants began the process of understanding one another and learning from/with one another. A Brazilian graduate student shared: "I asked questions to understand and to check if my understanding was correct, which I might not do if I did not have a Protocol." An International graduate management student in Italy found "A good listener is able to listen with the eyes of another, this means that listening to another is to listen to her/his needs."

We acknowledge that the current dialogue in the literature discusses the physiological process of listening, or more precisely hearing, and study of communication, and listening's place (or lack thereof) in it, and the mechanics of what is deemed effective listening, are beyond the scope of this chapter. However, we learned through use of the Protocol that listening is embodied, relational, and intersubjective (Lipari, 2014), and is learned and largely informed by culture (Imhof & Janusik, 2006; Isaacs, 1999; Lipari, 2014; Purdy, 2000). The notion of culture has been identified by some as a "difficult term to define, as it has many accepted meanings" (Jarvis, 2006). According to Jarvis (2006), a simplified definition for culture might be, "the totality of knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and norms and mores of a social grouping" (p. 8). According

to Bruner (2010), cultures emerge and maintain their respective structures and boundaries through narrative. Indeed, Bruner (2010) posits, “narrative is rather an all-purpose vehicle. It not only shapes our ways of communicating with each other and our ways of experiencing the world, but it also gives form to what we imagine, to our sense of what is possible” (p. 46). The reality of our current uncertain and rapidly changing context in our lives, and thus our cultures are “perpetually open to improvisation” (Bruner, 2010, p. 46).

Culture, through our narrative, illuminates “the ways we have learned to listen, to impose or apply meaning to the world, [and] are very much a function of our mental models, of what we hold in our minds as truths” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 84). Participants found there was a significant difference between how they listened the first time they shared a story with one another without the Protocol and when they shared a story using the steps of the Protocol. For example, at an Academy of Management conference in 2019, participants who were scholars from different countries, some of whom met for the first time during the conference, shared they “felt more connected to the process” of listening; “our group had very connected conversations;” “the first conversation was better than most in the Academy, but the second was a true connection;” “the Protocol experience was more emotional, open, and connected;” “More vulnerable in sharing, trust;” and “Tension turned into softness, resentment into acceptance.” In another example, a management graduate student in Italy said, “In my opinion, everyone needs to be listened to before being a good listener.”

Polkinghorne (1988) describes that through story, our identities and self-concepts are intertwined as part of a narrative whole, as we hear how our stories unfold and intersect in the developing story of others. Story listening (Tyler & Swartz, 2012) which is different from active listening, allows space for care, compassion, trust, and authentic exploration to emerge. In an unfolding transformative story experience, one person’s response can validate, affirm, or reflect the other’s and may depend importantly on locating ourselves with each other or within each other’s story to sustain a mutually supportive interchange (Gergen et al., 2001). Engaging in storytelling, and more specifically listening, can play a key role in creating spaces and facilitating connection. Some participants experienced a feeling of profound connection and communion, even though many of the dyads met for the first time using the Protocol.

An Academy of Management participant in 2020 shared their use of the Protocol in reciprocal storytelling was “emotional, we bonded in a way I didn’t know was possible in such a short period of time.” Isaacs (1999) calls this “koinonia...it means ‘impersonal fellowship’. In this state people connect very intimately with one another, but not intrusively” (p. 103). Not only do people connect in this state, the co-created listening space allows for storyteller and story listener to move beyond the boundaries of one another and together imagine new possibilities (Lipari, 2014). Participants shared that using the Protocol provided a space through which they could meet the other where they are, be focused on the moment and be fully engaged. As they shared in listening to one another: they were not judging the storyteller; could feel the emotions of the story/experience being shared; and felt empathy and learned something new. Participants who shared their stories felt heard, validated, and connected with the listener, and the listener seemed “with them.” Graduate students from Italy found the Protocol served as a catalyst for them to share personal stories, they were thankful for having the space where they felt free to be open and self-disclosing with each other. The Protocol was an effective tool to enhance the quality of listening to the other and self-awareness about their emotions to the other’s story. The notion of a third space through which one may meet and learn about the other, establish trust, connection, and co-create meaning was a common theme among the majority of participants in all contexts in which the Protocol was tested. For example, Brazilian graduate students shared “when the storyteller exchanged positions with the listener, they have already built a trusting relationship.” We propose it is the third space, cultivated through listening, that opens the door for transformation to occur. In Bhabha’s view, it is in third space where narrative interpretation and understanding of the other emerges. The third space allows for a blurring of boundaries where cultural meanings are resignified and reconstituted (Kramsch & Uryu, 2012). One might consider third space as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, third space is a container, a bridge, a location betwixt and between two or more people, cultures, and identities coming together through story (Bhabha, 1994). Further, it is a hybrid space that “displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures” (Bhabha, as cited in Rutherford, 1990, p. 211).

We suggest, if the third space emerges and resides through the narrative or storytelling domain, listening is a critical component and catalyst to co-creating a sustainable third space. As a verb, third space is active

energy co-created through the intersubjective communication of two or more people, constituted around and through encounters through story. This space can be framed as a container of sorts (Isaacs, 1999) where it is possible for listening and receiving to occur. The body, mind, and emotions are all holistically involved to set the stage for intersections, connections, and creative transformation to emerge (Isaacs, 1999). Pery et al. (2020) suggest the shared space generated through interpersonal exchanges holds the potential for those participating in these conversations to cultivate connections, co-create new meaning, and make discoveries about self and another. The context and the quality of listening create the energy in which the telling and listening of stories generates new understanding and insights not previously available (Tyler & Swartz, 2012). Participants shared they: came to understand the other person's perspective better, opening their hearts, minds, and thoughts to something different; bonded in a way they didn't know was possible; experienced a deeper level of connection, and felt emotional, open, and connected.

When considering the identities of two people engaged in conversation or storytelling, one might suggest that each person's identity may be viewed as being in a constant state of flux and flow, and informed by their encounters in third space with others (Bhabha, 1994). Our identities and our ways of viewing the world are transformed—shifting and changing through those intersecting moments as we listen. Connection does not arise just because of speaking, but because of listening. We become one when we listen together (Isaacs, 1999; Lipari, 2010).

FURTHER LISTENING...FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Seeking to understand something new or different requires one to suspend what is already understood—to reach out into the precipice of the unknown, be uncomfortable and release what is familiar (Lipari, 2014). As a group of scholars and practitioners, we continue to suspend our assumptions, be open to a diversity of views, and sit within the discomfort of not knowing. We offer this chapter as an opportunity for the reader to potentially be uncomfortable and release what is familiar by continuing to further explore transformative learning in their own contexts of storytelling, listening, and third space. We encourage readers

to continue to evolve the story with us and engage in the iterative development and research on the Protocol, and listening as a re-emerging force into transformative discovery and learning.

During this time of significant individual and global evolution, the importance of the goal of transformative education to create opportunities for people to become change agents across intersections of race, class, gender, ethnicity as well as cultural, national, generational, functional, or disciplinary boundaries cannot be overstated. Listening engages the whole person and provides opportunities for individual transformation where individual change may lead to community change and then to social change. We propose the following implications, questions, and possible areas for further exploration as catalysts for researchers and practitioners as they continue their quests to generate new understandings, facilitate empathy, understanding, connection, purpose and meaning, equity and justice, and hope for a better world.

In what ways might transformative listening through storytelling in dyads, and more specifically the Protocol, facilitate spaces in which transformative learning might occur? We invite dyads to practice embodied listening through the use of the Protocol to help create the conditions for connection across differences and development of a deeper understanding of self and others. In addition, dyads may learn to appreciate the complexity of the simple act of listening and to value listening as an everyday practice that can be developed. We offer the Protocol with the hopes of awakening an awareness of our interconnections and shared humanity.

How might developing authentic connections within dyads enhance listening, learning, and potential for transformation? How might further interdisciplinary collaborations drawing from diverse disciplines and cultures provide opportunities for new and unique perspectives for transformative listening and learning? We invite colleagues to lean in, listen, and further explore the role of listening for transformation. Nagy Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2008) eloquently share:

neither the paradigm shifts nor the turn to interdisciplinary within academia have occurred in a vacuum. Rather social and political forces have shaped both the social world and our methods for learning about it. Entirely new paradigms have emerged as a result of the changing social world: examples include feminism, multiculturalism, queer studies, critical race theory, and third world perspectives. (p. 4)

Might there be an opportunity to engage with current political forces and bring listening out from the margins and create a space for transformative listening as a paradigm within the auspices of transformative learning theory?

Might we imagine listening and reciprocal storytelling anew, as a re-emerging force for holistic transformation, that holds the potential to transform a person's worldview through listening in dyads using the Transformative Listening Protocol? We encourage expansion of the concept of listening in dyads as a third space to foster the potential for transformation, as well as further exploration of the role of storytelling and listening in holistic transformative learning. Our chapter endeavors to expand the conversation on transformative learning by focusing on listening as an essential third space to transformation.

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