



The Meaning of Listening in Facilitation

3rd Thursday Assembly

Nilisha Mohapatra: Dear 3rd Thursday Assemblers: let's get this gathering going! Welcome back, or, if it's your first time WELCOME! This is a wild, wonderful format we have been developing where people contribute and discuss a topic on a specific question about creative facilitation.

Today, we will be discussing **THE MEANING OF LISTENING, IN FACILITATION**. And I can't wait to hear about your experiences.

Below you will find: A Check-in Question (please answer!), Goals and Agreements for today's session...

GOALS for February 19th, 2015

- 1) To understand the essence of listening, in facilitation.
- 2) To explore possibilities and practices of expanding our listening capacities.
- 3) To gain unique insights into the foundational skill of listening.
- 4) To connect, recharge and have a meaningful, fun time online.

In order to achieve the goals, here are some suggestions for agreements to make our time together flow really well. We are still experimenting with this form, so be sure to add what you need or want **AT ANY TIME DURING THE PROCESS**.

AGREEMENTS

- 1) No put downs of self or others. Keep a positive, energetic vibe.
- 2) Share at your level. Everyone is welcome, no matter their level of experience. All questions are important, and all answers (or further questions) are valuable. It is also okay and important to respectfully disagree with each other.
- 3) Show your presence, by **LIKING** and by responding to keep the flow. Ask questions, make comments, connect. The technical trick for this format is to **REFRESH** your browser fairly often. **LIKING IS MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN EVER SINCE FACEBOOK HAS CHANGED AND WE CAN NO LONGER SEE HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE READ A POST**.
- 4) Answer any questions in the **COMMENTS** below the question to keep the conversation organized and readable. Only open **NEW** questions in new threads.

5) You can come and go as you please, take as long as you like to respond, and basically enjoy the text-format to make this work no matter whether you are just waking up, just going to bed, or on your lunch break (time zones unite!!). Feel free to add to the discussion even after our 90-minute session is over.

CHECK IN for today:

What are your three favourite sounds?

Kitty Jackson: I love the sound of rain falling, i love the sound of voices singing together in harmony and I love the sound of waves (who doesn't!)

Nilisha: Such soothing sounds! Thanks, Katie. My favourites would be some hearty laughter, the pitter-patter of rain and the oven timer going off to indicate that the cake is done!

Virtually Ally: My partner's voice, ocean waves & the song of an ice cream truck on a hot summer's day!

Nilisha: Virtually Ally, the ice cream truck sounds sooo inviting! Thanks for sharing!

Arindita Gogoi: The sound of water droplets falling from leaves and trees right after a downpour.

Nilisha: Arindita, so good to have you with us. Welcome back! The time is right and ripe Love the falling leaves sound. Made me look outside my window when I read it.

Dolphin Kasper: Silence, the ocean, the sound of children laughing.

Nilisha: Ah the endearing sound of silence. Thank you for that, Dolphin Kasper!

Nilisha: Discussion Question #1: From your experience, what does listening really mean to you?

Kitty Jackson: Listening well means being present and focused. I think the art of listening has been lost a little in recent years. People want to entertain each other and say something funny so they don't really listen well.

Nilisha: Ah, yes! It is an art. I am with you on that. More defenses around it. To me listening means a flow of life force and energies. A mutual sharing of sorts.

Kitty: I love that Nilisha - you framed that so beautifully

Virtually Ally: Being fully present. Deferring judgement. Gifting your essence. I just read this quote, "What you do today is important because you are exchanging a day of your life for it." Listening = exchange.

Nilisha: Thanks, Katie! I was reading about it in Dawan Markova's 'I will not die an un-lived life'. It opened up so many possibilities. I love how you say it is a gift. So rare to be present. I'd love to create that quote into a poster and share it here.

Kitty: Giving someone your full attention and listening skills is a huge gift. It's actually so very rare to be given that gift.

Nilisha: I was thinking along the same lines. Something so simple, so precious and such a life - changing experience. All these meanings are giving me goosebumps!

Virtually Ally: Thank you both...I'm curious, do you remember anyone at school ever teaching you "how to listen"?

Kitty: Nope - I do remember people telling me I took too long to respond when people said something to me. I think that was really damaging to my ability to listen actually. It made me panic and feel the need to say something, anything before I really digested what was being said to me


Nilisha: Hah that takes me down a memory lane. Actually I don't remember that! I had a teacher who would take us to the fields and let us listen to nature. And that was moving. But never to people. Or the why of listening.

Kitty: That's a great exercise though Nilisha - there is something intuitive about that. Intuitive listening, just finding that peace and pausing to listen to what is around you. I think without explaining that it can be so powerful, especially to inner city youth

Nilisha: Yes I agree. That stillness then was so unnerving. But it has such deep impact. She used to call it expansive presence. Like we are everywhere when we listen.

Kitty: Wow - that is true. In mindfulness training one of the quick ways you learn to get to a more mindful state is to tune into every noise around you. We spend so much time tuning out noises and filtering what we are hearing, it really breaks patterns when you focus on the little sounds around you Very powerful.

Virtually Ally: Wow, Kitty, thank you for sharing...imagining how that panic felt... *ugh* ..*sigh* *blech*. You remind me that everyone listens at their own pace but our current structures don't always support that. As a facilitator we are to be aware and honor that "pacing variation in the room"...and it is not always easy to remember that! Nilisha, thank you for sharing "expansive presence" story. Reminding me of Lee Glickstein's Speaking Circles work aka "relational presence. Virtually Ally, I hear you. Even I find it challenging to understand the impact and reach of the space I hold with groups. I love your observation about the different pace of listening. It also makes me think about how people interpret and process that information. One word means so many different things to different people, and I feel listening is also about wanting to capture all that subjectivity.



Arindita Gogoi: Listening for me would mean being open to ideas, different outlooks and opinions...acceptance of the fact that there is the 'other' vis-a-vis your own presence and that, the other voice also is a product of a certain experience. It is an art...especially as educators sometimes we're too engrossed with our own delivery and we forget the real art of education is facilitation of learning and that happens when the learner perceives the presence of a listener and hence willing to share. I, personally need to really improve in this area.

Virtually Ally: Arindita, thank you for your powerful wisdom!

Nilisha: As I read your sharing, Arindita, what comes up for me is that the 'whole of me is with whole of you'. I am thoroughly enjoying your perspective. Case Study #2 is something you will LOVE.

Dolphin Kasper: Being fully available and receiving what is "landing" in, on and around you. We listen with much more than our ears and if we tune into these other modes of reception the quality and nature of our listening changes. Our intelligence and ability to relate, communicate and participate with one another is not limited to what is experienced in our conscious minds. Just letting the reality of this in allows us to be more available to what is taking place. Both on the level of what we can perceive and all that we, at least at first, cannot.

Nilisha: Discussion Question #2:

What are various sources of information that we can listen to, when facilitating?

Kitty Jackson: I like to listen to my own intuition - it's so easy to overrule it but it's such an asset! I also like to listen to what is not being said and to think about why that might be

Nilisha: That's a gold mine there, Katie! I find it challenging to lean in to my intuition, and sometimes end up listening to the other voices inside of me.

But I believe if we listen to our bodies, it tells us much more than we can imagine. The different sensations, shifting energies and postures, the manifestation of feelings.

Nilisha: Kitty, that is an interesting point. Could you tell us a little more about it.. the listening to what is not being said?

Kitty: For example (as per Virtually Ally's agreement) I once led a conversation on the topic of gender stereotyping and not one of the young people said anything about the way men are stereotyped. I decided to raise the question and it opened a whole huge and very passionate conversation. In the silence around that issue I heard a lack of permission for the boys to talk to their own experience and pain

Virtually Ally: Kitty, I just got chills! I wish I were there to see/listen to you & the students. Talk about a gift moment for the boys! Those unspoken, perhaps even, unconscious assumptions in the room...oh, why do they hide? he he

Nilisha: Wow, that sounds powerful. That there is presence at play. And a willingness to take risks as a facilitator. Thanks for that example, Katie. I have this visual of your embracing a wide space

I also often look out for words or phrases that are repeated more than once or twice. Even metaphors. And try knowing what's behind them.

Virtually Ally: Listening for the unasked questions!

Kitty: That's interesting Nilisha - why are some things sticking with this group? What is it that needs to come forward?

Nilisha: Yes, you've captured it right. It is the need, which usually hides behind jargon or metaphors.

Kitty: I think there is also listening without judgement - not sure that answers your question here really, but it's another skill to learn and it's so important. I guess it's listening neutrally - not imposing your own ideas or experience on what you are hearing

Nilisha: Ooh I love that one. Such a tough one tough. It is the subjectivity that Virtually Ally was talking about too. I get caught in that web. Something that helps me to untangle myself is calling it information.

Nilisha: Virtually Ally, when you say listening to unasked questions, would that be something similar to silences?

Virtually Ally: I listen for my "giggle". It's this feeling that I get when the group is flowing and I feel I'm just smiling inside and that's when I know I'm truly present with the group and I'M GONNA GO OFF SCRIPT IN 3...2...1...to truly be in the flow big time. You know, Nilisha...I don't know the answer yet, it's something I'm chewing on...it's more than the silences...any ideas?

Nilisha: I relate to the 'giggle'. I have right now!! And yes, I guess it IS more than silences. I am thinking when we move into uncomfortable/learning zones of the group process/self, the surge of energy or even the inner voices there could fall into that category. What say?

Arindita Gogoi: Listening to the basics...the questions of participants with an open mind without judgment. And waiting to listen to their answers or thoughts in totality without clouding our mind with assumptions. I can see a resonance of our discussion on mindfulness practice over here. Listening is such an integral element to that.

Dolphin Kasper: People's words, peoples emotional affect, the movement of the group, interpersonal dynamics in the group, meta information in what people share, your own intuition and emotional movements,

spontaneous thoughts and insights, what isn't said, shifts and changes in how individuals and the group is feeling/behaving, what is there in the gaps and spaces that doesn't initially register as anything at all (following subtleties in the space that aren't immediately obvious to you).

Nilisha: The flow of our conversation here really make me want to ask this.

Discussion Question #3:

How can you expand your capacity to listen for transformation?

Virtually Ally: I can continue to study the art of asking powerful questions.

Nilisha: Ah, so being curious with questions?

Virtually Ally: Yes! Discovering and framing questions to generate curiosity in the listener and to stimulate reflective conversation. To invite creativity and new possibilities.

Kitty Jackson: I also think that you can see when transformation happens. Something suddenly shines, like a light. Body language changes and you will start to hear excitement as someone starts to think in a new way

Nilisha: Fantastic! Curiosity and possibilities create such a lively dance!

I was going to say that when I want to listen for transformation, I keep asking myself 'What is possible here?'. It also helps when I focus on the strengths of the group and work from that space. And another practice that has helped me before is to notice when the groups energy is erupting and explosive. That has often been an indication of a tipping point.

Virtually Ally: Thank you both, extremely helpful support.

Nilisha: Virtually Ally, your insights have been deep and have guided our conversation into new depths!

Virtually Ally: Thank you! I'm not quite sure how to formulate this but I'll try...when you listen for and witness a student's transformation "the ah-ha moment" - what is the facilitator's role as listener?

Nilisha: Mmm such an important question. I'd say continuing to be curious and find out what's happening, what they are thinking, feeling, how do they see this impacting them.. Listening for the shifting energy and increasing possibilities. And its transformation, so it's big.. So following that with validation. I would also want to see how the rest of the group might relate to the transformation. Does that answer your question? Kitty?

Kitty: Yes Nilisha - I love that. I think the role is literally that, to facilitate and make sure that this aha moment amounts to something. When you see an aha moment it's always good to follow up by asking a question like, what will you commit to changing in the next 2 weeks in light of this realisation? Make sure that they fully grasp the new insight and that they know what to do next - hope that answers the question Virtually Ally

Virtually Ally: Thank you both for LISTENING. My question is answered.

Dolphin Kasper: Have no attachment to any preconceptions about what is happening or where the conversation/process is going. It's our preconceptions that get in the way of seeing/hearing more clearly.

Virtually Ally: Dolphin, Thank you for sharing your powerful wisdom with me. I need to remember that. A pod of dolphin off the coast here in Santa Cruz this morning send their deepest affection and admiration, too!

Arindita Gogoi: As a facilitator I'd like to keep reminding myself to not to speak more than a minute and to speak mostly in questions.

Nilisha: Case Study #1:

You are meeting a group of 15-18 year old girls at a care home to run a workshop on the topic of 'trust'. What role would listening play in this workshop?

Kitty Jackson: I think you would want to make sure that you started with listening early on instead of arriving with assumptions or guess work on what issues they may be having around trust

Virtually Ally: Listen as if I am the student and they are my teachers.

Nilisha: Niicee. So I hear that we would want to listen to the resourcefulness of the group and listen without judgments.

Virtually Ally: Idea: place an empty seat in the circle of girls for "The Listener" - a gentle reminder that everyone will be seen, heard and felt. Trusting the imagination. I know, kind far out and maybe not appropriate for young girls in a care home...but I'm just putting it out there.

Nilisha Mohapatra: That idea looks exciting. Tell me a little more about it. The intent, the process.

Virtually Ally: The intent is to hold an empty seat for the wise sage that is inside all these girls. That safe person in their life, be it real or imagined, that has their back. The process might be to take them through a

short guided meditation where they "meet" that sage in the forest or on a beach and have a short conversation about their trust bond and what that feels and looks like and then share with the group...

Nilisha: Thanks for that! How intense and powerful! Working at sharing the trust from within. I'd love to call it something like 'Meet Your Inner Wise Self'. I feel a visual arts piece would fit in gracefully with this too. For me in this scenario, I would explore listening to our emotions and feelings. Understanding what they are telling us. Unpacking them and meeting them. Oooh and listening for each step towards awareness, to celebrate. I feel celebration would be a big part of this session.

Arindita Gogoi: I would start with an exercise of listening...three minutes of silence, eyes closed and just listen. I'd instruct them to listen to each and every sound they can hear....starting from sounds that are apparent, like the sound of the air conditioner, to the clock ticking to people speaking in a distant room, to gradually listening to their own body, their own breathing, their own heartbeats, listening and becoming aware of their own being. To add to what has already been discussed, it is important as facilitators to be always curious about 'what next?' This also would mean we are still open to possibilities and are not assuming that we already know what the outcome or background is. Thus opening our minds to more listening.

Nilisha Mophapatra: Case Study #2:

You are meeting 15 teachers and facilitators who have a lot of experience in working with people/groups. The aim of this session is to glean insights into listening and learn something more about this magical skill. What would you like to do in this session?

Nilisha Mohapatra: I am curious to know your thoughts on this one. It's an opportunity to go places! I am drawn towards employing the power of theater. To work on intuition and body wisdom.

Virtually Ally: Yes! A Sensitivity Line activity with guided themes i.e. "Share a story about a time when you heard the unspoken in the room."

Madhu Shukla: I could also consider getting participants to share personal stories with partners. And have partners respond back with a personal story that emerges from them after they are done listening.

Nilisha: Madhu, Welcome to the assembly. So so glad you joined us I love how your activity invites partners to really tune into each other. How would it be to follow that up with a group sculpture?

Virtually Ally: Ask each of the 15 magicians to write down one short magical piece of listening advice on an index card in the shape of a bunny. Then all of the bunny cards are put into a black top hat and then each of

the 15 wise magicians pulls a bunny out of the hat, reflects on it and shares additional personal wisdom stories. Then the audience can reflect on the tricks of the trade and additionally note bunnies can be put on a wall (because bunnies/ideas always multiply) he he

Nilisha: Haha Virtually Ally that is such a fun approach. Thank you for that. Listening is after all, magical! Love love love the metaphor.

Dolphin Kasper: There are a number of simple and powerful dyad exercises that bring listening from the conceptual to the practical.

Nilisha: Dolphin Kasper, would you share a couple of them with us? We would love to have them in our resources.

Dolphin: Connecting with a partner with no words, just eye contact. :listening to what we see/feel in the other in the absence of conventional communication. Another where you speak in gibberish in various situations. Another where pairs speak to one another with no dialogue. One is speaking while the other listens. Then at intervals they switch. It's amazing the kind of communication that happens when one is free to simply speak without the other jumping in with a thought or idea. Things go quite deep quite quickly in this. It reminds me of the Steven Covey quote:

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

Nilisha: What a coincidence! We started our discussion with that quote today Now the circle is complete!

Dolphin: Nice! I got in late so hadn't seen it. And here I thought I was being so insightful and original.

Nilisha: Hahaha... Ofcourse you are being insightful. You captured the essence of this entire chat, in no time! That is solid intuition there.

Madhu Shukla: Sorry nili . Thanks for the warm welcome. I'm still on the road hence low connectivity. Enjoyed reading all the thought provoking questions

Arindita Gogoi: It would be interesting to hear case studies in which these facilitators or teachers realised that they fell short of listening and how they feel they'd handle it if given a second chance.

Nilisha Mohapatra: Case Study #3:

You are working with a group of facilitators who are starting out fresh, and would be working with youth from schools. How can you teach them listening as a skill, in light of today's conversation?

Virtually Ally: Share catchy mantras. "Embrace the Power of the Pause", "Easy Going in the Not Knowing"

Nilisha: Ha they capture a lot. I'm going to write the first one down in my journal! I would have them work with some mindfulness practices and also embodying each others energies. Maybe also do a listening game to uncover needs or values.

Arindita Gogoi: I'd start with an activity in which they spend about five minutes with a chosen partner and then they introduce one another in order to introduce active listening. Also, I'd do a few meditative practices for bringing about calmness.

Nilisha Mohapatra: Okay, amazingly insightful people! This brings us to the end of our 90 mins together. But feel free to respond after this. I practically had goosebumps throughout the session because all your sharing was so powerful. I am grateful for the stunning wealth of wisdom that this group has. Kitty will share a transcript and word cloud of this discussion soon. It'll be a great opportunity to celebrate the awesomeness! So, thank you for the energizing time. I'd like to leave you with this poem, which echoes the power of listening. Adios!

