CHAPTER 10.

DAUNTING COMMUNITY LISTENING: DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY LISTENING FRAMEWORK AND ACCOUNTABILITY GROUP FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Informed by their work with Authoring Action (A2), an arts-based organization in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, that centers teen voices, the primary authors of this chapter discuss the short co-curricular program they designed to train undergraduates in community listening. To facilitate this training, the authors collaborated with a student organization to develop the Community Listening Accountability Group (CLAG) using tenets of community listening from rhetoric and composition and listening pedagogy in communication. Throughout the process, they closely collaborated with Nathan Ross Freeman, Artistic Director and Co-Founder of A2, who described listening in community partnerships as "daunting," inspiring the concept of daunting community listening (DCL). A set of embodied communicative praxes that center the community partner's voice, DCL is also a disposition or openness to the discomfort that listening and related learning can entail. In designing the CLAG and its programming, and reflecting on the process with Nathan, the authors came to understand the significance of listening-in-process and reflecting-in-the-moment as primary components of DCL. As noted in the contributing undergraduate authors' reflections, these components were particularly helpful in the pilot course. Ultimately, the CLAG emphasizes the need for undergraduate students to experience discomfort

> *and risk-taking in community listening practice without the pressures of grades or official assessment from traditional academic courses. The authors name the long-term goals of the CLAG and practice of daunting community listening as "listening to ourselves and our histories, listening to one another, and listening to our phenomenal partners . . . who model this radical listening every day.*

Discuss "emanate." *Go.*

Nathan Ross Freeman, Artistic Director and Co-Founder of the nonprofit Authoring Action, opens educator training sessions with these three words. The group, known as A2, is an arts-based organization in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, that offers teen authors conceptual tools for creating authentic pieces of writing, music, and film. When Nathan founded the organization with Lynn Rhoades in 2001, they saw a need for teen voices to be amplified in the community. In particular, they wanted local politicians and community leaders to learn from young people's lived expertise on social justice issues, including gun violence, sexual assault, and racism. To that end, A2 was founded on community listening, and in over two decades, it has become a powerful community resource. Not only does A2 help teens learn to listen to themselves and to their peers, but it also helps ensure they are heard by the local community and its leadership.

To foster the teens' confidence in writing and speaking, the A2 curriculum deliberately centers the teens' voices. Their words, stories, and experiences are the only content they use—from the "First Ink Discussion" that asks them to discuss a single word like "emanate" through the final stages of the process. Nathan's method, founded on Socratic dialogue, facilitates knowledge-sharing and confidence-building as the teens listen to how each other arrived at their own understandings of the prompt. After the authors dialogue for several minutes without Nathan's intervention, Nathan finally reenters the conversation to introduce a synonym (for example, "how is 'emanate' different from 'originate?'"). His method necessarily decenters the teacher, requiring that the instructor listens intently rather than contributing, correcting, or even affirming the students' remarks. Nathan simply repeats what students have said and presses them to "tell [him] more." This approach encourages students to clarify their perspectives and demonstrate how they understand the prompt (Ballard et al. 182). Moreover, the teens are encouraged to shift their attention away from the instructor and toward one another and themselves as they negotiate possible meanings of the prompt as a group. At the end of the "First Ink Discussion," Nathan then introduces other stages of A2's writing process that takes the authors through invention exercises across three different genres (a word table, a mosaic, and finally, a

written piece in the author's chosen genre) to create pieces in spoken word, film, and/or music that artfully communicate the teens' stories.

Many events and relationships serendipitously led us to Authoring Action, but for the purposes of this chapter, we focus on how our group from Wake Forest University was drawn to community listening and what we could learn about it from A2. Initially, Keri, a faculty member in Writing, and five undergraduates participated in Nathan's five-hour, intensive educator training workshop. Keri arranged the session after participating in a previous A2 educator workshop, and she invited Casey, Zoe, Hannah, and Lauren, all student leaders affiliated with the student organization Wake Women Lead, to join her. Keri also reached out to Rowie Kirby-Straker, a colleague in Communication who teaches an undergraduate course on listening, and she also extended an invitation to Kaitlyn Taylor, an undergraduate researcher who led efforts to identify relevant research and scholarship on community listening in both rhetoric and composition and communication. Together, the seven of us began planning ways to incorporate community listening into campus programming, especially for undergraduate students involved in community-engaged work. Based on her experience with listening pedagogy, Rowie explained that there were limited resources for the kind of community listening instruction at the heart of Nathan's pedagogy, and we were eager to learn all we could from him. These goals informed our long-range decision to develop an extracurricular program that centered on community listening and prepares Wake Forest students to work with A2 as mentors to teen authors. In the short term, Rowie's observation led us to pilot the Community Listening Accountability Group (CLAG), which invites everyone involved in A2's training—students, faculty, and community partners—to reflect on their individual community listening praxes and to work together to formally define community listening and evolve effective ways of teaching it, as well.

Over the four semesters that CLAG has been in development, our understanding of community listening has evolved into something Nathan taught us to call "daunting community listening," or DCL. Through our work with him and others at A2, our scholarly research, and our collaboration with initial CLAG participants, we have come to know DCL as a community listening practice that is productively intimidating and transformative for all involved. We have adopted Nathan's definition to center constant reflection: not only of the listening event in isolation, but also of the relationship between the parties and the issue(s) that brought them together. This reflection calls listeners to pay layered and contextualized attention to community events and involves not only listening in the present moment and discerning traces of the issues and relations that inform that moment; it also requires regular self-reflection and genuine consideration of listeners to examine their own ideas and assumptions along

with their prior and possible future actions. Nathan's point is that such listening can, and even should, be daunting, especially in difficult community conversations, and we concur. From an academic perspective, as we gained experience with DCL, we came to see how it distinctively compels listeners to make tacit knowledge explicit and open to both consideration and challenge or change.

In short, according to Nathan, DCL demands uncomfortable accountability and transformation, especially the kind that comes with honest, recursive interrogation of how and why we listen—and what it means to listen at all. In designing the CLAG, we did not necessarily start with this definition of DCL, but we realized throughout the pilot that DCL was our goal as we continued to work closely with Nathan and A2 throughout the program. In the early planning stages, we found ourselves needing to go beyond traditional instructional practices for listening outlined in communication scholarship (reviewed in the next section). Similarly, we found many useful tenets of community listening in rhetoric and composition research, but we quickly realized that we needed to situate and expand on these tenets in our work with A2. In what follows, we review this literature and outline our workshop sessions and their evolution as we strengthened our own DCL practice with Nathan and other A2 members. Throughout the chapter, we describe the importance of listening-in-process and reflecting-in-the-moment as primary components of DCL that appeared particularly helpful for undergraduate students based on our group's writings and interviews.[1] We end by reflecting on the community partner's and students' insights to capture where we are now and where we are going in our efforts to prepare undergraduates (and ourselves) for the hard work of DCL.

COMMUNITY LISTENING IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION

We began building the pilot in Spring 2021, just a few weeks after Keri, Casey, Zoe, Hannah, and Lauren participated in Nathan's intensive training session. When building our curriculum, we looked to listening scholarship in rhetoric and composition and communication studies to help us identify and fill gaps we saw in undergraduate listening education. We found particularly helpful theoretical support in the 2018 special issue of *Community Literacy Journal*. In the introduction, editors Jenn Fishman and Lauren Rosenberg explain community listening:

> as a literacy practice that involves a deep, direct engagement
> with individuals and groups working to address urgent issues
> in everyday life, issues anchored by long histories and compli-

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1   The study is approved under IRB00024321.

> cated by competing interpretations as well as clashing modes of
> expression. When we speak of community listening, we are not
> simply talking about paying attention, though keen attention
> is vital to any deep listening practice . . . . Instead, community
> listening is an active, layered, intentional practice. (1)

Fishman and Rosenberg's attention to action and the multifaceted, evolving process of community listening is critical to how we understand the need for more focused preparatory listening training.

Building on Fishman and Rosenberg's definition of community listening in the same special issue, Karen Rowan and Alexandra J. Cavallaro introduce a preparatory listening model to help combat the deficit narratives about communities that the media creates and perpetuates, specifically in the San Bernardino community, by identifying community assets first. To do so, the authors suggest "standing under" the discourses of these communities, as Krista Ratcliffe's theory of rhetorical listening calls us to do (30). In differentiating community listening from rhetorical listening, Rachel Jackson and Kiowa Elder Dorothy Whitehorse DeLaune (in the same special *CLJ* issue) note that community listening allows for storytelling and storylistening as a form of resistance to colonial narratives of Indigenous people. In our work, we apply the spirit of their perspective to the listening preparation work of the CLAG. Preparing to listen to community voices includes an embrace of counternarratives and existing assets, especially those of the teens of Authoring Action who often have difficulty finding authentic, meaningful spaces to share their voices.

We relate our preparatory efforts to the feminist ethics that Fishman and Rosenberg discuss. In our work, it applies most to the ways that adopting a listening stance necessitates change within ourselves. This idea of welcoming self-transformation closely aligns with Lisa Blankenship's theorization of "rhetorical empathy," which she identifies as an epistemology, a place, and a stance we must assume. Blankenship concludes:

> approaching others in rhetorical engagements must begin
> with changing ourselves, with listening, with trying to un-
> derstand the personal and political factors that influence the
> person who makes our blood boil. This approach to rhetoric
> is very different from one that listens to others to make a
> point and change them. It goes beyond audience analysis and
> considering our audience and instead asks that we become
> vulnerable enough to consider our own motives, our blind
> spots, and our prejudice. Adopting this stance is vital for peo-
> ple with privilege; it is no longer an option. (8-9)

In our work with A2, this theoretical framework helped move us beyond academic approaches to audience analysis to thinking more critically about our own transformations through full-body community listening.

Ultimately, we find that the common phrase "community-engaged work" tends to flatten the complex community contexts where faculty and students participate, and DCL has helped us to consider this work's complexity more fully as we prepare for our collaborations. Attention to intentional preparatory listening can be adapted to multiple settings, including an organization in the nascent stages of development or one with a decades-long history like A2. In community contexts, listening can also be adapted over time or even at a moment's notice. For us, from the start, listening meant a lot more than the process of receiving, comprehending, interpreting, evaluating, and responding described in Thompson et al. (2004). Especially early on, community listening involved preparing for and practicing engagement of our full selves with A2's organizers. These practices guided our pilot, and they helped us to prepare to listen with complete intellectual, emotional, and embodied engagement.

LISTENING IN COMMUNICATION: GAPS IN EDUCATION

After reviewing community listening studies in rhetoric and composition, we identified communication scholarship focused on listening, highlighting how students' particular needs are addressed (Bodie, Graham, et al.; Markgraf; Janusik). Listening research and pedagogy can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century, and some have argued that it can be traced back to even earlier in that century (Beard and Bodie 210). The research on listening pedagogy helped us detect oversights in listening instruction, and we began to imagine how we might prepare students to work with A2 as well as other community partners. It was clear from the literature that although students spend a considerable portion of their time listening, their exposure to listening instruction during (and likely before) college is extremely limited (Janusik 203; Wolvin 125). Researchers and educators have highlighted the limits of listening instruction in the introductory communication course (Ford et al.; Thompson et al. 227; Wolvin 9), where students' limited exposure to listening best practices barely scratches the surface of the complex and multifaceted roles of listening in communication overall (Janusik 5; Thompson et al. 227). This means that college students engaged in community work, whether individually or through campus organizations, tend to be grossly underprepared to be community listeners.

Interestingly, however, students often have rather optimistic perspectives on their listening skills at first. In a pre/post survey of 469 students enrolled in a basic communication course, for instance, Wendy S. Zabava Ford, Andrew D.

Wolvin, and Sungeun Chung found that students perceived themselves to be better listeners at the beginning of the course than at the end in several listening contexts (9). The authors suggest these self-assessments partly result from "students' enhanced awareness of the complex set of behaviors required for effective listening" and a "heightened sensitivity to their listening inadequacies" (11). The review of the student authors' reflections included later in this chapter reveals a similar gap (i.e., a gap between perceived and actual listening competence).

As we developed the CLAG, we learned all we could from other scholars who have worked on listening curricula and pedagogical practices. With Laura Janusik, we noted that there has been steady interest in this work but little consensus on the *how* of listening instruction (194). Among available options, the Integrative Listening Model (ILM) developed by Kathy Thompson, Pamela Leintz, Barbara Nevers, and Susan Witkowski stood out to us. They recommend a four-step process to becoming a better listener:

1. preparation,
2. application of the listening process model (receive – comprehend – interpret – evaluate – respond),
3. assessment of listening performance, and
4. establishment of new goals. (230)

This model incorporates elements of the International Listening Association's (ILA) definition of listening, which is "the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages" (Thompson et al. 226). Developed by faculty at Alverno College, the ILM has been successfully used to train students in listening competence (Janusik 201). Training in listening using the ILM is part of Alverno's ability-based curriculum which situates listening as an ability to be reflected on, learned, and developed, beginning with a communication placement assessment taken before students start their first semester. The assessment includes a listening activity and self-assessment that sets up students to "not only listen to learn, but also learn to listen" throughout their college experience (Thompson et al. 236). Students are then introduced to the ILM in required communication seminars and are given multiple opportunities to apply the model (236). Details of how Alverno College applies the ILM in practice are found in Thompson et al. Given that this model had been continually used to train college students to listen, we elected to adopt it in the pilot CLAG, as well.

We did not, however, simply import the ILM into the CLAG curriculum. Instead, we used it and other resources we collected to help our students get genuine and robust training in listening. We wanted the CLAG to help them do more than pay attention to what A2 members might say. We also wanted them to be ready to manage the affective, behavioral, cognitive, and relational dimensions of listening

that became the most salient in their work with A2. The students in our first pilot revealed to us that even basic knowledge about the listening process, group discussion of its complexity, journaling, and critical reflection about listening behavior in community engagement contexts can facilitate listening growth at the personal and community levels. Using the aforementioned literature, we aimed to create a recursive approach to understanding community listening and accountability that allows flexibility as we negotiate what that means within ourselves, within the group, and with the community partner.

DAUNTING COMMUNITY LISTENING (DCL): EXPERTISE FROM OUR COMMUNITY PARTNER

While the scholarship outlined above was tremendously helpful, our most important resource was the artistic director of A2, Nathan Ross Freeman. In many ways, his ideas about community listening and DCL specifically were consistent with academic perspectives. For example, in an interview with Keri, Nathan's definition of DCL echoed Thompson et al., who characterize listening in general as "[t]he dynamic, interactive process of integrating appropriate listening attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors to achieve the selected goal(s) of a listening event" (229). Furthermore, Nathan seemed to agree with the International Listening Association that listening is "the process that includes construction of meaning and response to verbal and nonverbal messages" (Thompson et al. 226). Nathan's definition similarly requires intention, preparation, attention, and reflection; notably, however, his understanding of DCL begs for more reflection on listeners' personal histories as well as their motives and goals for listening events and relationships. Rather than reflecting on listening in general or in isolation, Nathan says that we should dwell in the discomfort of interrogating ourselves about what we really want out of each collaboration. Doing so, he believes, helps us as listeners identify where biases or selfish intentions might be driving our interactions or leading us to try to change those to whom we listen rather than ourselves.

Nathan's definition of DCL also widens the Integrative Listening Model (ILM) to encompass the entire relationship between the institutional representative and community partner, going beyond one listening event or message exchanged in that event. Further, Nathan's definition requires that the institutional party continuously seeks to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and respond to their role in the relationship and the shared goals of that relationship. Consequently, the institutional parties become more aware of their changing attitudes toward themselves, the community partner, the relationship, and their approach to the issue at hand.

Nathan also changed the way we look at the rhetorical triangle. So often, scholars call attention to the meaning-making it illustrates by focusing on the messages

that people send. Nathan's sense of DCL, by contrast, centers on the listening process along with relations between interlocutors. Nathan does not think that settling a meaning is necessary; instead, he sees being committed to building and maintaining a genuine relationship as more important. This perspective is supported by Jackson with DeLaune, who suggest that community listening should "activate relationships between peoples and places through collaborative meaning making" (37). This approach to listening allows us to "listen differently, with a community rather than to a community or for a community" (42).

In the interview, Nathan talked a lot about the listener's role, attitude, and goals. While we listen for many different reasons, when Nathan talked about DCL, he emphasized the processes of self-reflection and building relationships as the real goals. Explaining this process further, Nathan likens community listening to a deposition because of the importance of witness testimony and the intentional, thoughtful work that goes into preparing for the deposition. Based on his experience taping depositions and the mentorship he received in that role, Nathan uses the analogy to demonstrate how multiple factors work together to accurately reflect the witness testimony. He explains that just as it is crucial to plan for supporting elements of a deposition—the camera's angle for taping the witness, the location where the witness sits, the time of day, the type of room, and other factors—so, too, must the listener consider multiple contextual factors that determine what is heard, seen, and felt as the witness testifies. Nathan considers this level of careful planning as a way to "create an atmosphere of intimacy" required for community listening. He states that, like a deposition, while the actual listening interaction may take a few minutes or hours, the preparation may take days or weeks. Our review of listening pedagogy scholarship made it clear that this kind of attention to the labor of community listening is lacking in undergraduate education and must extend well beyond a typical fifteen-week semester. The timeliness of the CLAG thus became even more apparent.

In the next sections, we discuss how we initially designed and implemented the pilot undergraduate accountability program and what the students gleaned from these sessions. Then, we reflect on how we are infusing DCL in our redesign to ensure that future undergraduate participants are given more time and more tools to dwell in the discomfort of listening in community partnerships.

DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING THE PILOT UNDERGRADUATE COMMUNITY LISTENING ACCOUNTABILITY GROUP

Again, we were learning about DCL while the CLAG pilot was underway; even at the beginning, however, we wanted to center the reflexive and relational focus

that Nathan later clarified for us. The program goals listed below are where we started, and as we worked together, we continued to refine the focus on listening-in-process and reflecting-in-the-moment:

PROGRAM GOALS

1. Self-assess listening styles in a community-engaged setting
2. Consider the role of active empathetic listening in community-engaged settings
3. Determine best personal listening practices in community-engaged settings
4. Apply personalized listening framework in community engagement project with A2
5. Learn the community partner's interpretation of listening and align our listening behavior with their expectations.

LONG-TERM GOALS

1. Self-reflect on listening throughout programming with A2
2. Use listening skills to adapt to changing organizational needs
3. Develop sustainable, authentic, reciprocal relationship with A2.

We designed four, ninety-minute workshops described below (and more fully in the Appendix A) to help the students meet these eight goals. The four workshops were completed over four consecutive weeks during Summer 2021.

SESSION ONE: "INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNITY LISTENING INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK"

The first session introduced the students to a range of listening scholarship, but primarily focused on the ILM (see Appendix A). In reviewing listening scholarship, we hoped to decenter the transactional model of communication to accommodate our evolving understanding of DCL. Ultimately, the session provided space for students to discuss speaking and listening as independent processes and to reflect on their own listening processes. This session emphasized introspection as a crucial part of preparatory listening and listening-in-process.

SESSION TWO: "LISTENING FOR COMMUNITY PARTNER NEEDS: A CONVERSATION WITH A2'S CO-FOUNDERS"

This session included a conversation with Lynn Rhoades, Executive Director and Co-Founder of A2, and Nathan Ross Freeman. Here, we wanted to learn about the organization's current needs and the listening strategies discussed in the first

workshop (see Appendix A). While we prepared questions, the conversation was intentionally partner-driven and allowed us to learn more about A2's goal to expand the educator training and the organization's current writing program with mothers of gun violence victims. At the end of this session, Nathan succinctly described what needs to happen before DCL can take place: "We have to *want* to listen. We have to mutually create an atmosphere of intimacy. I always ask the authors: 'What are you doing here? I can't listen to you if I'm not real with you.'" We left this session with that question for ourselves: "What are *we* doing here?" and used it to reflect more intentionally before the next session, as DCL calls us to do.

SESSION THREE: "RHETORICAL EMPATHY AND LISTENING ACROSS DIFFERENCE"

In the third session, we shared what we heard to be A2's described needs and reflected on how they were different from what we initially assumed. Keri then moved on to the topic of rhetorical empathy as a way of listening across difference. Specifically, Blankenship explains, "rhetorical empathy [is] both a topos and a trope, *a choice and habit of mind* that invents and invites discourse informed by deep listening and its resulting emotion, characterized by narratives based on personal experience" (5, emphasis ours). This definition gave us another tool to use as we prepared for listening, listening-in-process, and reflecting-in-the-moment.

SESSION FOUR: "PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED"

This session focused on practicing DCL as we prepared for future partnership opportunities with A2. We focused on being honest with ourselves by acknowledging our own capacities and highlighting A2's assets; this part of the preparatory listening process led us to emphasize our ethical obligation to not over-promise the organization. For instance, we felt that we had strengths in marketing and fundraising for A2's summer programming. We determined we could offer writing/mentoring support during the weekly advanced writing workshops; however, this was only a small portion of their needs, and we would need to plan to connect them to others who might have the skills and resources that we lacked. In the spirit of accountability, we ended this session by promising that we would continue to come together, even informally, and assess why/how we were showing up and evaluating our long-term vision for our relationship with A2.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

We have a sense of what students learned from the CLAG and their work with A2 thanks to the reflective writing and interviews that Zoe, Lauren, Hannah,

and Casey contributed. Three main themes emerged from the students' reflections: (1) acknowledgment of their shortcomings as listeners, (2) a new understanding of what community listening entails including its limitations, and (3) resolve to continue the hard work of growing as community listeners. These takeaways helped us to see what we were already doing well in preparing undergraduates for community listening and the areas that we could emphasize in the CLAG redesign with a more intentional emphasis on DCL.

THEME 1: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THEIR SHORTCOMINGS AS LISTENERS

Students highlighted that prior to the A2 training and the listening accountability group meetings, they really did not know what listening was nor how applied in a community engagement context—that they had mischaracterized it and that they were worse listeners than they originally thought. Hannah puts it this way:

> During our very first accountability group session, I quickly realized that my expertise in listening was all but a construct. When I reflected on the way that I "listened" to others both in my personal life and in my relationships with community partners, I realized that my idea of "good listening" was totally wrong. What I thought was good "listening" had really not been listening at all. . . . I realized that despite the many hours I spent completing service projects and working with community partners, I could not think of a single time where I slowed down enough to ask, "what do you need from me?" (Hannah Hill)

For Zoe, the realization that she was not as strong a listener as she thought came with the recognition that listening was indeed a process that included continuous reflection. She notes:

> Before working with Authoring Action, I thought I knew what being a good listener was, even going so far as to identify as one. Yet, I had never thought about how effective of a listener I was. The thought of being a good listener was a quality I always thought I should obtain, but I never explored where I was in terms of my development as a listener. (Zoe Chamberlin)

THEME 2: NEW UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT COMMUNITY LISTENING ENTAILS

Each reflection details how the students have come to a much deeper and nuanced understanding of what listening is and ways to approach it in a community partnership. This understanding is evident in the personal definitions of community

listening that highlight the value of preparation, open-mindedness, self-awareness, and self-reflection. Lauren's reflection demonstrates how the students became attuned to the complexity and multifaceted nature of listening. She states:

> Where I used to see listening as complete understanding, I became able to see it as a humble recognition that I can never completely understand, but I should always try. Like all worthwhile endeavors, listening is hard work. It requires patience and persistence, concentration and compassion. It is the perfect harmony of body and soul: nodding my head, focusing my eyes, positioning my body, evaluating my biases, preparing my mind, opening my heart, finding as much power in the hush of silence as the crescendo of offering a response. Listening is not just hearing, it is an internalized, all-encompassing experience in which I am intricately intertwined with the music of the moment, continuously seeking to hear and listen and learn and understand with every part of myself entirely present and intimately engaged. (Lauren Robertson)

In unpacking how the listening process functions in a community partnership, students also underscore the importance of being comfortable with uncertainty. Casey Beiswenger states, "I realized that effective listening requires a willingness to lack all the answers, as well as a radical suspension of my preconceptions," and Zoe Chamberlin opines that although empathy and nonverbal communication were essential, "the most important aspect of listening in my eyes is the willingness to be uncomfortable." The reflections also demonstrate that students are aware of both the benefits and the limitations of community listening. Casey explains this reality:

> In working with Authoring Action, this meant acknowledging that despite my desire to work with students, the organization did not need me as an educator and I could provide more impactful support in other areas. This realization marked a significant improvement in the efficacy of my listening abilities, as well as a turning point in my approach to community partnership as well as interpersonal relationships. (Casey Beiswenger)

THEME 3: RESOLVE TO CONTINUE GROWING AS COMMUNITY LISTENERS

Although the students' reflections characterize community listening as hard work and an ongoing process, their resolve to continue to put in the effort needed for growth is evident. Lauren Robertson states, "More than anything, this

experience has taught me that listening is less about being perfect, and more about actively choosing to immerse oneself in the continuous process of preparation, empathy and reflection." Hannah Hill notes, "This is not to say that my work on listening is over—in fact, it has only just begun. Listening in community spaces demands follow-through and requires flexibility and humility."

Perhaps one of the most heartwarming outcomes of the CLAG is the way it has inspired students' plans for their careers, as Lauren's reflection demonstrates:

> This experience has inspired me to pursue a Master's program centered around seeking to understand and develop similarly innovative efforts in education. Only by opening ourselves up to listen and learn from what's new and different and ground-breaking, can we maximize a better future. (Lauren Robertson)

For all of the students, the program was the first time they had ever been asked to reflect on their listening practices, and it was certainly the first time they had reflected on *community* listening. The excerpted reflections offer a few glimpses of the work that they did and, notably, show them inviting discomfort and a full-body listening experience, as DCL requires. These takeaways intersect with what we were learning from Nathan and led us to incorporate these topics more intentionally in the CLAG redesign. The students' complete written reflections are found in Appendix B so that the "listeners" of this collection might learn from them directly.

REFLECTING ON AND EMBRACING DAUNTING COMMUNITY LISTENING IN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION

After reflecting more on the pilot and debriefing with Nathan, we are determined to focus more intently on the following aspects of DCL in future programming. This more radical reflective approach, we argue, is essential for an undergraduate training program that we eventually hope to offer more widely across campus.

First, we want to emphasize the time commitment even further. In the pilot, we not only realized the necessity of preparing for our community partner interactions through research, training, and pre-interaction reflection, but also the necessity of making time to debrief and discuss the interactions with each other and with the community partner more frequently. This debriefing includes giving ourselves the proverbial space to unpack our cognitions, emotions, and behaviors during the time spent with our community partner and the youth with whom they collaborate. While this observation seems obvious,

we recognize how easy it is for all of us—faculty and undergraduate students alike—to confine ourselves to the typical academic calendar. As we continue the CLAG and our work with A2, we want to be more mindful of our time commitment and A2's resources. Reflecting more intentionally on DCL now, we can more clearly see that we are getting more out of the relationship than we are giving, and our long-term dedication is a big part of accountability. We need for future groups of students who participate in the CLAG to reflect deeply on the time commitment and the likelihood of uneven labor as they enter listening events and consider the longevity of the community relationship.

Second, we want to highlight more clearly that community listening involves listening with our entire being and bringing our whole selves to the interaction with our partner, flaws and all. Just as we were reminded by Nathan that listening is *seeing* the other person, we are reminded that we need to *see* ourselves first and show up with every part of our being. Nathan clearly summarizes this idea here:

> the degree to which I can subvert my gender, ethnicity, height, weight, appearance—the degree [to] which I can subvert those and predicate my person . . . . Even in my educator workshop . . . I have to leave my baggage outside. What does baggage mean—anything that is going to get in the way of me being vulnerable and open . . . . When I say 'I am listening to you' what that should mean is that '*I* am listening to you.' I *am* listening to you. I am listening to you past all my biases, I am listening to you with the essential me. (Nathan Ross Freeman)

We appreciate this perspective because in listening literature, including the best practices taught in public speaking, scholars emphasize centering the audience—not acknowledging the need to work on ourselves first to prepare for an honest interaction with the audience. Relatedly, we are intrigued with Nathan's take on honesty, which he defines as "telling the truth timely." Nathan seeks such honesty in the answers to the two fundamental questions he asks everyone in the A2 educator workshop:

1. Why are you here?
2. What do you want to leave here with?

In bringing our whole selves to each interaction, we become fully present while at the same time allowing the person to whom we are listening to be fully present also. We elevate their *presence* over ours: a balancing act. To this point, Nathan highlights the fluidity of *seeing* the other person, stating that while he prepares a syllabus for his educator workshop, that syllabus is never complete

"until [he] see[s] who [he is] dealing with." This viewpoint is critical for our accountability group's evolving content, as it allows us room to grow as we get to know our partner better. Furthermore, specifically for undergraduate students, this kind of dynamic listening necessitates acknowledging their (likely) temporary residence and the histories of the local community's relationship with our private liberal arts institution. Bringing the questions that Nathan poses into our programming, we hope, will encourage undergraduate students to be honest with themselves about what they want from a relationship with A2 and other potential community partners and to think about the long-term effects those goals can have on the community partner after they have graduated.

Relatedly, on the topic of performativity and full-body listening, the student collaborators in this chapter reported being conflicted by the need to pay attention to their nonverbal communication while avoiding pretense and performative listening behavior (e.g., excessive nodding). A conversation with Nathan after the CLAG's pilot made it clear that such a concern should take a backseat when one brings one's whole self to community listening. As a believer in the saying "the body can't lie," Nathan argues that in bringing one's entire being to a listening interaction, the body naturally demonstrates listening and not simply hearing. His understanding goes beyond what much of the active listening literature suggests in terms of body language best practices, such as physically leaning in, giving eye contact, nodding, and having an open posture. In contrast, Nathan deemphasizes thinking about our body language because, in his words: "when I am listening to someone, I am also talking to them, in terms of everything, because my body will form a posture that matches my attitude." While this alignment between body and attitude is ideal, he added, "it can be challenging." This challenge is one we want to address directly in the next CLAG to help undergraduate students avoid overthinking their body language and/or trying to overperform as "good students" in each listening interaction.

Lastly, reflecting on the title of our group, we have begun reevaluating what we mean by "accountability." Nathan's interpretation of DCL inextricably links with accountability and the need to be honest with oneself. Accountability relies on all of the above steps to prepare and to *show up* honestly with one's whole self in an interaction. Nathan suggests that reflecting on one's accountability involves "the degree to which I can recognize my part in something and I can share it, and I share it in such a way where there is no argument in terms of whose fault it is, what was my part in an event or a discussion or a thought." At first, we were using "accountability" loosely—mainly referring to our promise to take time to learn with one another each week and do our homework. Now, we see more clearly how accountability necessarily extends into the relationship with the community partner.

Ultimately, as we reflect on the pilot, we understand that daunting community listening is not fixed or product-oriented; instead, it is *active*, *embodied, context-specific*, *evolving, recursive,* and *ongoing*. Additionally, as Nathan noted, we have come to understand DCL as "predicat[ing our] person" and as a "deposition" that requires a full-bodied experience, immense preparation and engagement with all of our senses, and understanding of time and space in that moment. This daunting practice necessarily pushes us to see and question our comfort zone boundaries and transcend them to bring our full selves to the community partner and engage with them as honestly and ethically as possible. In a co-curricular program like the CLAG, we need to emphasize this discomfort and risk-taking, as the program gives students the opportunity to do this work without worrying about a grade or other official assessment.

As we redesign the CLAG and invite more students and faculty to participate in Authoring Action's programming, we are excited about settling into the daunting task of listening to ourselves and our histories, listening to one another, and listening to our phenomenal partners at Authoring Action who model this radical listening every day.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX A. SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

SESSION ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNITY LISTENING INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

Session Goals

1. Create community among group
2. Contextualize the significance of listening in community engagement
3. Introduce key principles of listening scholarship

4. Introduce self-assessment strategies to better understand listening styles
5. Establish next steps for monitoring listening in various contexts.

Brief Session Description and Rationale

The overarching goal of this workshop was to provide some background on listening scholarship, much of it published in the International Listening Association (ILA) journal, International Journal of Listening, and complemented by best practices from ILA resources found on their website, listen.org. Rowie facilitated this workshop and emphasized the preparatory listening stage, and asked the students to reflect on their own listening processes and start a listening journal. She also asked the students to read "The Integrative Listening Model" by Kathy Thompson, Pamela Leintz, Barbara Nevers, and Susan Witkowski, among other scholarly readings (listed below). The introductory reading significantly offered a foundation of listening theory and practice, and the students referenced the theory directly and repeatedly in their interviews and written reflections. The workshop began with centering listening in the basic transactional model of the human communication process, which illustrates the relationship between speaker, audience, message, channel, feedback, and context. This transactional model of communication is commonly found in textbooks used in introductory communication courses, but as discussed in the workshop, it does not include listening, which, as previously mentioned, tends to be included in a separate chapter of the textbook as a separate process. Furthermore, we talked about the role of emotions and emotional intelligence in the listening process. We concluded with an introduction to reflective homework activities each of us would complete before meeting the following week. The session ended with a homework activity that included taking a listening self-assessment (we recommended one from mindtools.com) and starting a listening journal. Students were encouraged to identify five ways to improve their listening as goals toward which to work in the coming weeks, to make a personal listening improvement plan to help achieve that goal, and to record their progress in their listening journals.

Additional Readings/Materials

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Session Two: Listening for Community Partner Needs: A Conversation with A2's Co-Founders

Session Goals

1. Apply the listening strategies discussed in the first workshop and continue to develop a sustainable, authentic, and reciprocal relationship with A2
2. Create/sustain community among group
3. Review core principles of listening scholarship
4. Discuss reflections of listening styles and experiences since the first session
5. Establish next steps for monitoring listening in various contexts.

Brief Session Description and Rationale

The purpose of this workshop was primarily to open up space for A2 to lead the discussion and share their goals with us. As indicated by the aforementioned goals, we hoped to begin practicing some of the listening principles introduced in the previous workshop and continue reflecting on our own listening practices that we had written about in our listening journals over the past week. Some of the significant takeaways from this session included practicing giving time/space for the community partner to share without our interruptions or suggestions. We were able to ask a few important questions that we could reflect on ourselves over the next week and come back together to debrief what we heard and how we felt we could honestly and fully show up for the community partner to help them meet their needs (continued in the next workshop description).

Session Preparation

The questions we prepared (but did not foreground during the session) included the following:

1. What is it like being someone's (namely, students' or faculty members') "community partner?" (Shah) Another way of asking might be: "what is it like to be/feel like someone's service project?"
2. What are some of the most meaningful partnerships you have had with students and/or faculty? What made those relationships so successful?
3. What are some of the most important steps to you in the beginning stages of establishing a partnership?
4. What are some of your goals for A2 in the next year? Next five years?
5. What can our group do for you? What are the processes, outcomes, etc.? How can we specifically partner with you to help you achieve the goals you just mentioned?
6. Follow-up or more specific question: And what are some other ways

we could continue our education, etc. with you beyond the Educator Workshop?

Additional Readings/Materials

Shah, Rachael W. *Rewriting Partnerships: Community Perspectives on Community-Based Learning*. Utah State UP, 2020.

SESSION THREE: RHETORICAL EMPATHY AND LISTENING ACROSS DIFFERENCE

Session Goals:

1. Create/sustain community among group
2. Reflect thoughtfully on our conversation with A2
3. Determine action items from A2 conversation
4. Discuss distinctions between "empathy" and "sympathy"
5. Determine the role of empathy in community listening
6. Establish empathetic practices to implement into community listening sessions, specifically with A2.

Brief Session Description and Rationale:

As addressed in the chapter, a significant portion of this workshop was designated for debriefing our conversation with A2. We devoted much of this time to discussing how their described needs deviated from our vision at the start of the conversation. We determined that while we still felt we could not satisfy all of the organization's needs, at least we knew we could use our strengths and resources to meet the goals that we could and then help connect the organization with additional resources at the university. We agreed to come back to this discussion in the fourth and final workshop series so that we could give some more time to reflect on our own strengths and where those might fit with what A2 prioritized. Doing so would give us more room for the slow thinking we would need to do to show up fully and honestly in our future interactions with A2.

The session's main topic, which interplayed nicely with our debriefing, was "rhetorical empathy," as theorized by Lisa Blankenship. Keri introduced this foundational principle of community listening and briefly introduced the book (see https://shorturl.at/630dq for an overview of the content). In reflecting on rhetorical empathy, we began by answering general questions about what we think empathy is, how it differs from sympathy, and how it intersects with/ might inform our community listening. Then, Keri asked a more difficult and pointed question: "can you ever truly feel *with* others whose identity positions are unlike your own?"

This question led us into a deep discussion of how empathy is often performed, and we wondered about ways to activate a practice of rhetorical empathy in community listening that was more authentic, radical, and transformative for us as listeners. Lisa Blankenship offers four characteristics of rhetorical empathy that helped us envision this practice: "1. Yielding to an Other by sharing and listening to personal stories. 2. Considering motives behind speech acts and actions. 3. Engaging in reflection and self-critique. 4. Addressing difference, power, and embodiment" (20). We found this list to be particularly helpful in thinking about how our understanding of community listening aligned with Nathan's and how we could then put these principles to practice as we moved forward in the work.

Ultimately, we looked to Blankenship's components of "rhetorical empathy" to better understand how we should enact these practices in our next interactions with A2 and the teen authors they serve. Blankenship's principles reinforced how we were already attempting to adopt a community listening stance that required intensive self-reflection and attended to unlearning/unlistening to dominant narratives of difference and power that have been deeply problematic in university-community partnerships in the past. Furthermore, the first characteristic aligned with Nathan's call for us to "leave our baggage outside" and, as much as possible, strip our biases so that we could understand the goal of the relationship and listen with our full, essential selves in our interactions with the community partner. We left this workshop committed to enacting these practices and reflecting on the question of "truly listening *with* community partners" before returning for our last session.

Additional Readings and Materials

Blankenship, Lisa. *Changing the Subject: A Theory of Rhetorical Empathy*, Utah State UP, 2019. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/wfu/detail. action?docID=5964813.

Session 4: Preparing for the Unexpected

Session Goals:

1. Create/sustain community among group
2. Reflect on key points from previous sessions and self-reflections
3. Determine plan of action for assigned tasks with A2
4. Establish accountability plan for our group beyond structured program sessions
5. Determine goals for follow-up meeting with A2.

Brief Session Description and Rationale:

This session allowed us to return to what we heard from Lynn and Nathan as the goals and needs for A2. During this session, we outlined specific roles that individuals in our group might offer A2, while recognizing that we would not be able to provide everything they need. Identifying our limitations, we outlined a list of possible connections—including departments and other campus offices—that might have more resources than our small group could offer. We ultimately determined what they need is support for structural components that fall heavily on their three staff members: namely, grant writing and marketing. Ultimately, too, they want their trained educators to bring the A2 curriculum into schools and areas across the nation that they have been unable to reach. After completing the training and beginning these listening sessions with them, we realized we could support them in these areas, and that is where our group's energy is directed now. In other words, as Karen Rowan and Alexandra J. Cavallaro urged us to do, we listened first for the assets and later determined where we were needed to fill in the gaps that they identified.

Since this final formal session, we have met in smaller groups and plan to meet again as a whole group to continue discussing our listening work and assess our program before starting the next program. We have begun by trying to meet some of A2's needs by assigning tasks to individuals based on their strengths and reviewing our tasks in a series of follow-up meetings with A2. Some of our action items have been accomplished: Keri recently was elected to A2's board of directors (a dire need they expressed early in our conversations) and is working with teens in the Advanced Writing Workshops on Tuesdays and Thursdays as the teen authors prepare for upcoming engagements. She is also on the planning committee for upcoming fundraisers. Rowie has been instrumental in connecting A2 with other faculty, staff, and students who have different capacities and skills that we do not have in our small group. Lauren and Zoe have developed a new school partnership that we hope will incorporate A2's curriculum in their afterschool programs. Hannah, Lauren, and Casey have worked together on marketing strategies for getting more people interested in completing the educator training. Thanks to some of these efforts, we recently recruited more WFU students to participate in the educator training we hosted at Authoring Action, and we are currently designing the next CLAG as a follow-up to this invigorating training session.

APPENDIX B. STUDENT REFLECTIONS

Zoe Chamberlin

Seeing yourself—whether it is through media, the classroom, or elsewhere—has the power to transform your life and completely shape experiences. Listening,

however, has the same potential for impact. Think about the role of listening in your everyday life. When do you listen? When do you think you listen? There is a fine line between effective listening and assumed listening or hearing. This line, however, and the power of this effective listening is consistently ignored. For, if people knew the true meaning of listening and how to truly listen, most problems we have in society would dissipate. As president of Wake Women Lead, a campus organization dedicated to mentoring children in the Winston-Salem area, my experience with community engagement thus far has been incredibly soul-feeding. Throughout my experience with Wake Women Lead, we have partnered with numerous schools and organizations. First, we primarily partnered with a non-profit organization in Winston-Salem that allowed us to work with middle school girls at a local under-resourced school. We helped these girls with their literacy skills and had social events as well. However, because the power of representation is so transformative, as an organization we wanted to expand our reach and further impact the youth of Winston-Salem. Authoring Action immediately caught our attention for a potential partnership.

When I think of Authoring Action a few words come to mind: liveliness, expression, and listening. As an organization that helps Winston-Salem students, from elementary to high school, find themselves in writing, it truly blew me away. Their unconventional methods made me excited to get involved in any way I could. Authoring Action's dedication to making writing fun and showing every student they teach that they are capable of creating something meaningful is something I will eternally admire.

To work with Authoring Action, every potential volunteer must go through a training process. This training process is over four hours long and includes conversation (called the "First Ink Discussion"), participating in numerous exercises, free-writing, and most importantly, listening. One thing I specifically remember is performing an exercise where we were given a word and told to free-write. I remember my mind flowing freely as I wrote a deep account about the inner workings of my mind. However, I immediately became uneasy when Nathan noted that we would have to share our entries with the rest of the group. I heard each of my peers read their pieces, but I was not truly listening to their words until we analyzed what their words meant, finding a deeper meaning in their thoughts. Through this process, I saw things in my peers that I have never and would have never noticed before. Before working with Authoring Action, I thought I knew what being a good listener was, even going so far as to identify as one. Yet, I had never thought about how effective of a listener I was. The thought of being a good listener was a quality I always thought I should obtain, but I never explored where I was in terms of my development as a listener. Therefore, because I did not prioritize this quality I took several things away from the Authoring Action training session.

First, I learned that listening is very different from hearing. The way I interpret it is, hearing is simply letting a series of sounds enter your ears but failing to keep track of the sequence of the sounds enough to retain what is said. Listening is understanding; listening involves empathy. It involves responding with more than words; expressions are involved, physical contact may even be involved. However, the most important aspect of listening in my eyes is the willingness to be uncomfortable.

When working with students with a contrasting positionality from oneself, while listening to their experiences, there will inevitably be a point where an uncomfortable topic arises from either party. To be a listener, one who is not simply hearing, we need to allow ourselves to get into uncomfortable states and discuss uncomfortable topics so that we truly understand who we are trying to assist. You may wonder, "how can I do this?" Well, with practice it becomes less complex than one would think. The most important aspect, however, is letting your guard down and allowing yourself to put yourself in the shoes of the person you are interacting with. Though my racial positionality matched those I worked with, I was still commonly in situations where I was uncomfortable. In these moments I took a deep breath, imagined I was the person before me, and listened, analyzing each word and searching for a deeper meaning just as I had done during my transformative training session. Community engagement is more than going into a soup kitchen, making a temporary impact, and never returning. It is about learning about the people with whom you are engaging. When we know exactly who we are helping we can assist them in a way that is more personalized to them, and therefore generate a greater potential impact. As I continue working with the Winston-Salem community, specifically in a new partnership with a local school, I have seen the benefit of these listening practices in terms of how I am able to connect with the children I work with. My listening skills have allowed me to create lasting bonds with the children I am around to the point where they call me their sibling—true connections. Additionally, through this work, I see how Authoring Action's practices could be beneficial in other settings. Authoring Action is a pioneer in community engagement in Winston-Salem. Aside from the unconventional methods they practice that I feel should be incorporated into every classroom, I believe what we should all take from them is the importance of listening skills and the potential impact we can have on others if we work on the development of these skills. Learn to listen, not to hear.

HANNAH HILL

Each August, just over a thousand students travel to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, to begin their college career at Wake Forest University. As they arrive,

they anxiously await the chance to dive into classes, make friends, and explore new opportunities typical of the college experience. However, many of the students who have chosen Wake Forest to further their education have done so because they're ready to make an impact on the community. After all, the university motto is "Pro Humanitate," or "For Humanity," and is broadcasted widely to both prospective and current students. There is an expectation that Wake Forest students will serve the community, and many are eager to accept.

However, serving the community is typically tacked on to a laundry list of involvements for busy Wake Forest students. Many of us are all too often eager to maximize our impact while minimizing our time commitment, and it becomes second nature to view "doing service" as only something that checks off a box and adds to a resume. Looking back, it is clear that the concept of service I was familiar with had nothing to do with listening and had everything to do with my own ego and motivations.

Truthfully, when I was initially invited to participate in our group's workshop with Authoring Action and subsequent accountability group, I was less than enthusiastic. After all, I was a great listener, and had been told so all my life. I was sure that I had nothing to gain from spending many hours learning how to do something I was already an expert at.

During our very first accountability group session, I quickly realized that my expertise in listening was all but a construct. When I reflected on the way that I "listened" to others both in my personal life and in my relationships with community partners, I realized that my idea of "good listening" was totally wrong. What I thought was good "listening" had not been listening at all. Instead, I would hear what others had to say, but before they finished speaking, I had often compiled a mental list of how to solve the perceived problem regardless of whether the speaker requested it. My "listening" was almost entirely focused on "fixing," and I would often totally disregard conversation and collaboration with others for the sake of solving what I perceived to be the problem as quickly as possible. It was almost an impulse—I couldn't help wanting to dive right in and get to work in whatever way I thought was best.

As we continued to meet as a group over several weeks, I found my ideas and perceptions about what listening was being continually unraveled and challenged. I learned that there are major differences between true listening and "listening for action," or what my concept of listening seemed to be before. Before I participated in the Community Listening Accountability Group, I felt as though I had fully committed to the "Pro Humanitate" spirit of the university. I was confident that I was doing what was expected of me: making an impact on Winston-Salem. Yet when I reflected on the ways in which I listened during our group meetings, I realized that despite the many hours I spent completing

service projects and working with community partners, I could not think of a single time where I slowed down enough to ask, "what do you need from me?"

As busy students who are eager to make an impact, this is all too common of a mindset. We often enter into spaces of community partnership with an action plan before even speaking with those who are directly involved. We are eager to create solutions and massive change for the sake of showing others that we can, while completely ignoring the actual needs of the community. Service becomes something that is glamorized and allows us to pat ourselves and each other on the back, instead of being something done selflessly for the needs of others. Listening is an afterthought, not a first step—a fatal flaw that dooms the best of intentions before service even begins.

When we enter into community partnerships with a listen-first mindset, our action plan changes. Instead of focusing on our perceptions of what they "need" and jumping into action, we instead approach the relationship with a willing-ness to slow down, reflect, and collaborate. When asking community partners what their needs are, instead of assuming, we set the foundation for long-lasting relationships that have the potential to change the community. Am I listening to "fix," or am I truly focused on what the other individual has to say? By estab-lishing a listen-first mindset, I know that I can be more helpful, supportive, and compassionate to others. I can create positive change, rather than a meaningless, or at least temporary, fix.

This is not to say that my work on listening is over—in fact, it has only just begun. Listening in community spaces demands follow-through and requires flexibility and humility. When I approach community partnerships with the goal of intentional listening, I must learn to be okay with being wrong, and must be willing to change my own ideas and plans entirely if needed. Listening is a continual process that is not bound by a set of processes or rules, but something that requires me to prepare, reflect, and grow in a way that is tailored to each situation and partnership.

The phrase "Pro Humanitate" has taken on an entirely new meaning for me. It is no longer a phrase that is simply characterized by the idea of "doing service" or checking off a box. Rather, the phrase represents intentional listening, deep empathy, candid humility, and above all, a willingness to keep learning. After all, to be for humanity, we must first listen to what humanity has to say.

Casey Beiswenger

Prior to participating in the Community Listening Accountability Group, I be-lieved that good listening only required the ability to sit silently, not interrupt, and allow the speaker to talk as long as they liked. In my early years of school,

"listen to me" and "be quiet" were often used synonymously by adults, and, thus, following instructions or memorizing information were the only actions that accompanied listening. From this experience, I considered myself a mediocre listener and miscategorized individuals as great listeners simply because they demonstrated those passive qualities.

The listening research shared in the Community Listening Accountability Group prompted me to approach listening differently. Our discussion of listening frameworks and existing listening processes allowed me to craft a new definition of good listening. I came to define "effective listening" as "active listening," not a passive activity, including skills I had considered in relation to classroom learning, like speaking intentionally, preparation, and a present mind. Additionally, Hannah, another student in the CLA Group, concluded that sometimes we predetermine the purpose of a listening situation. I realized that I must approach each situation with an open mind and recognize the correct purpose of my listening. From these observations, I started to approach listening as I would a learning opportunity.

In redefining my listening, I gained a repertoire of listening tactics that led to a deeper understanding of the people around me and stronger grasp of the content I was listening to. One listening skill profoundly affected the way I listen: the ability to "echo" rather than to "project." Asking clarifying questions and repeating what I was taking away from the speaker allowed the conversation to advance. This echoing skill was not one I naturally possessed, but it dramatically improved the quality of my conversations. A new depth and nuance of the conversations followed qualities that my passive listening never allowed me to achieve. In times of active listening, I found myself responding more thoughtfully, connecting more with my younger sister while I was home for the summer, as well performing better and learning more during my technology internship. I also felt my relationship with Authoring Action become more collaborative. I saw how intentional engagement, guided by my preparation, self-reflection, and open-mindedness, was necessary to connect with the speaker, as it reaffirmed my interest and allowed for a correct understanding of their words.

When applying this idea to a conversation with Authoring Action, I realized that effective listening requires a willingness to lack all the answers, as well as a radical suspension of my preconceptions. The suspension of my preconceptions required of effective volunteers extends far beyond what any bias training has ever provided me with. I began community literacy work as a sixteen-year-old, driven by a desire to help younger students develop a skill I was so grateful to possess. My sense of gratitude for my exceptional educational opportunities ignited sympathy for others who, only by circumstance of the ovarian lottery, had not received the same opportunity. I previously worked as a reading

comprehension tutor in my hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, and continued to serve as an academic mentor with Wake Women LEAD upon my freshman year at Wake Forest University. But no pre-program training had ever prepared me to be an empathetic mentor as opposed to a sympathetic mentor. Authoring Action's educator training helped me better understand the social and academic realities of the students involved. For example, working with a student's limited understanding of the parts of speech requires an empathic understanding that I had yet to fully grasp. Continuing to connect with the organization while redeveloping my listening abilities allowed me to gain an understanding of the mission that went beyond reading about it online.

Experience taught me some abilities required of an effective mentor, but throughout my participation in the CLA group, I began to understand the stark contrast between my perspective as a sympathetic listener and an empathic one. As a sympathetic listener, I approached situations saying, "I want to help," immediately offering my own solutions. As an empathic listener, I ask, "do you need help?" I focus more on partnership and collaboration than I do on a clear cut, predetermined solution. This empathic mindset can be gained from experience with community organizations, or more quickly and effectively, I believe it can be gained through focused listening training.

The CLA Group's conversation with Authoring Action was about determining what the organization truly needed, not necessarily how I could be involved, as I had originally anticipated. Eliminating my presumptions resulted in greater mutual benefit. By accepting that my personal role was relatively insignificant, I gained an understanding of the organization beyond its written mission statement. Rather than assuming I can help in a predetermined way, I surrender the mic to the experts, allowing them to lead the conversation. In working with Authoring Action, this meant acknowledging that despite my desire to work with students, the organization did not need me as an educator, and I could provide more impactful support in other areas. This realization marked a significant improvement in the efficacy of my listening abilities, as well as a turning point in my approach to community partnership as well as interpersonal relationships. Now, rather than looking to volunteer as an educator with Authoring Action, I'm looking to help them connect with organizations outside of Winston-Salem and spread their pedagogy, something they expressed greater need for than additional teachers. I'm also interested in helping the organization connect with students and other partners through social media, as marketing was a topic of importance during our meeting.

Now, I approach listening opportunities as a learning experience. I have found myself responding in a more adaptive manner, speaking more intentionally, seeking to understand an issue rather than to solve it, and connecting more

deeply with those I converse with. This is a continuous process which requires effort and self-reflection, yet I feel markedly more qualified as a "good listener."

Lauren Robertson

I remember the first moment I ever consciously thought about the art of listening. It was two weeks into the Community Listening Accountability Group, at the end of an eight-hour workday at my eye-opening yet exhausting summer job, and I was aching to escape the blistering hot sun and relieve myself of the twenty rambunctious eight-year-olds in the class I was teaching.

When, suddenly, I saw her. The genial and gentle, sweet and soft-spoken student in my class, usually so peaceful and personable and positive, suddenly sulking on the tire swing with tears streaming down her face. I pulled her aside to talk yet was quickly stunned into silence as she began unveiling deeply personal and profound struggles, strained by her parent's messy divorce and feeling unloved by her own father, a weight that no eight-year-old should ever have to bear. I was at a loss for words. How could I respond to give her some sense of comfort? How could I even fathom what comfort looks like for her? I could not relate to her experiences—I had no desire to relate to her experiences. I could not make any promises or guarantees that her concerns would resolve, or her situation would improve. I could not fill the void of her pain no matter what I'd say or do.

In that moment, it was my participation in the Community Listening Accountability Group that, like a lighthouse, guided me, not to understanding every detail or offering the perfect solution, but to work intentionally to show her I am here; I am listening; and I care. Where I used to see listening as a definitive product, I became able to see it as a never-ending process. Where I used to see listening as complete understanding, I became able to see it as a humble recognition that I can never completely understand, but I should always try. Like all worthwhile endeavors, listening is hard work. It requires patience and persistence, concentration and compassion. It is the perfect harmony of body and soul: nodding my head, focusing my eyes, positioning my body, evaluating my biases, preparing my mind, opening my heart, finding as much power in the hush of silence as the crescendo of offering a response. Listening is not just hearing, it is an internalized, all-encompassing experience in which I am intricately intertwined with the music of the moment, continuously seeking to hear and listen and learn and understand with every part of myself entirely present and intimately engaged.

As an aspiring elementary school teacher, I know how important listening is in the classroom setting. Listening is not always easy, especially with limited

time, ongoing distractions, and having your own things to say. But, in education as well as life, the consequences of not listening, especially for children in critical developmental stages, can leave a noticeable and enduring strain on the ways in which people view their worth within and beyond individual interactions. Furthermore, when people do feel listened to and loved, they open up in magical ways, sharing experiences that add immense value to both classroom communities and society at large. Children, like all people, are connected by their aching eagerness to know that others care, to know that someone values their voice. As educators, the greatest impact we can have on students is not what we teach them, but how we make them feel; and at the heart of feeling loved is feeling listened to. We listen to show we care.

Beyond working with individual students, listening also allows opportunities for larger scale innovative transformations in education. Working with Authoring Action, for one, has opened my eyes to a trailblazing pedagogical approach–predicated on listening–of integrating the arts with literacy. While this approach drastically differs from the more traditional, textbook-driven methods that I encountered during my own career as a student, taking the time to absorb the wonder of the unfamiliar in their work has allowed me to better appreciate all that this non-profit has to offer. This experience has inspired me to pursue a Masters program centered around seeking to understand and develop similarly innovative efforts in education. Only by opening ourselves up to listen and learn from what's new and different and ground-breaking, can we maximize a better future.

After participating in the Community Listening Accountability Group, I find myself asking more questions, attempting to push aside outside distractions, and aiming to fully absorb the magnitude of people's words instead of putting pressure on myself to emit an immediate response. I am also exponentially aware of moments when I did not really listen and have realized that, far from being able to call myself a "good listener," this work has only just begun. But, more than anything, this experience has taught me that listening is less about being perfect, and more about actively choosing to immerse oneself in the continuous process of preparation, empathy and reflection.