Listening Matters!:
The Challenge of Genuine Listening in a Higher Education Setting for the Purpose of Change

Helen J Parkin and Dr Emma Heron

Sheffield Hallam University

Methodological Innovation to Meet 21st Century Societal Challenges, Manchester
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Overview

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Aim:

To present the use of innovative data **collection** and **analysis** approaches to listen to the student voice and engender strategic change at a UK University

This session will:

- present the Listening Room method to elicit understanding of students' journeys through university study
- explore the use of Round Table Analysis to engender strategic change
- explore the application of these methods to societal challenges

Method 1: Listening Rooms

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- Rationale
  - importance of the student voice - strategically, morally
  - the problem with surveys - limited voice, shallow, authentic?
- How?
  - Friendship pairs, egg timer, 6 cue cards, 1 hour and cake, no researcher
- Who?
  - Pairs of students, identified on a project basis
- Discuss what?
  - Belonging, Becoming, Journey, Success, Confidence, Happiness
  - No explicit questioning and no wrong answers

- How does HE listen normally?

Method 2: Round Table Analysis

- Rationale
  - To analyse large qualitative data sets
  - To reach consensus over data
  - To achieve stakeholder buy-in
- How?
  - Identify appropriate stakeholders and bring them to the table
  - Guided thematic discussion
  - Recorded and transcribed
- Who?
  - Anyone who can make change happen (not just those with power and authority)
- Discuss what?
  - transcripts generated through Listening Rooms

Shared Values

Listening Rooms method: What do we hear?

In general, the method allows for ease of conversation:

- *'Helped to feel more comfortable and open to telling the truth'*

- *'Voices of minorities and others in society should be heard and researched'*

- *'It was good because the answers can be real as you can speak freely'*

- *'I hope that some of these points will give insight and used to change things'*

Round Table Analysis as a tool for change

- *"I found the transcripts provided a catalyst to have a conversation with colleagues about an area of work in a way that I would not normally have the opportunity to do."*

- *"I have spoken about this in several meetings and with colleagues ."*

- *"It made me realise that we are sitting on a huge amount of knowledge and understanding of our students that you cannot see in the metrics."*

- *"It alerted me to nuances and sensitivities around BME."*

Application

- Institution-wide activity
  - LGBQT+
  - BAME
  - Study Skills
  - Disabled Student Support
  - Academic Advising
  - Digital Capability
- Course-level activity
  - Course identity (Physics, Architecture, Business, Nursing etc..)
  - Placements
- External activity
  - Outreach and Recruitment
  - Critical Friends to SRHE Funded Project

Impact

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- Institution-wide activity
  - Adopted into Business as Usual
  - Investment in two dedicated 'Listening Rooms'
  - Institutional recognition of value of methods

- Course-level activity
  - *"As a result of the project, we've revisited our approach to induction across the board, with a greater focus on inclusivity" (Physics Course Leader)*
  - *"I learnt how successful our previous strategies had been through the listening rooms project. It was something we had done in an ad-hoc way before - I aimed to make it a consistent and regular feature" (Course Leader, Early Years)*

- External activity
  - Methods embedded into qualitative research projects for schools, other training providers, local authority and interest from Department for Education

Methodological impact

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Listening Rooms

- Utilises the energy and dynamism between friends (participants)
- Deliberate disruption to the conventional interview
- Provides meaning-making for participants
- Generates deep and rich data

Round Table Analysis

- Immerses stakeholders in the genuine voice of the student
- Shares the burden of data analysis
- Allows stakeholders to reach a consensus over the data (removal of bias and greater validity)
- Generates stakeholder buy-in at a much earlier stage than traditional approaches

Methodological Challenges

Listening Rooms

- Moving from enthusiasm to commitment
- Understanding of the method
- 'at distance'
- 'loners' excluded?

Round Table Analysis

- Identification of stakeholders is key to success
- Preparation prior to session is essential for all participants
- Time intensive (for a wider set of stakeholders)

Helping wider societal challenges?

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Listening Rooms

- See 'hidden' voices
- Consensual 'fly on the wall'
- Embolden & empower
- Deeper understanding of how things are experienced

Round Table Analysis

- Action as a result of shared discussion
- Evidenced-based change
- Democratic change
- Co-production of change

What's next?

- Tool for institution-wide evaluation, including:
  - university's employability strategy, as experienced by students
- Symbol of a Listening Organisation
- Providing data for subject level TEF
- Embedding into external projects with following foci, including:
  - parents of pre-school children
  - longitudinal study for Educational Endowment Foundation
  - working class male student university experineces

Thanks for listening

- Any questions?

- Email:

  H.J.Parkin@shu.ac.uk

  E.J.Heron@shu.ac.uk

  On Listening Rooms:
  Heron, E (forthcoming)
  Friendship as method: reflections on a new approach to understanding student experiences in higher education
  Journal of Further & Higher Education