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Can we teach effective listening? An exploratory study

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Can we teach effective listening? An exploratory study

Abstract

This paper describes an exploratory study that was conducted with Business School and School of Population Health undergraduates to assess whether we can teach effective listening. Effective listening is conscious listening when the listener hears both verbal and non verbal communication that is being transmitted by the sender. We developed an intervention using open space technology that was administered to both groups of students to explore our research focus. Drawing on our findings, we argue that effective listening can foster transformative learning. However, this requires educators to plan to manage the listening factors/filters that influence effective listening in the same way that they plan to teach content and generic skills to students. Our study provides some empirical understanding of the factors/filters that influence effective listening by students. The study also makes a theoretical and practical contribution to a gap in teaching and learning literature about listening.

Introduction

Listening is not the same as hearing. While hearing is a physiological process, listening is a conscious process that requires us to be mentally attentive (Low & Sonntag, 2013). The obvious place for scholarship about listening is in communication studies. In this domain, listening is seen as the obverse of speaking, and is conceptualised as “a process that involves the interpretation of messages that others have intentionally transmitted in the effort to understand those messages and respond to them appropriately” (Burlinson, 2011, p. 27). When viewed this way, listening engages a sequence – of “acquisition, process and retention of information in the interpersonal context” (Bostrom 1997, p. 247), making the skill of listening to comprehend the intention of the sender’s message so as to be able to formulate an appropriate response.

While interested in listening, the focus for our study is on *effective listening*. Thompson, Leintz, Nevers and Witkowski (2004, p. 240) describe effective listening as the “dynamic, interactive process of integrating appropriate listening attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours to achieve the selected goals of a listening event.” Thus, effective listening is more than a cognitive process; to ‘hear’ the listener must not only understand what is being said verbally, but also the non-verbal communication that informs what is said. This refers to the communication goals of both sender and listener, and the context framing the act of speech (Wolvin, 2013). In other words, understanding the contextual and ‘socially coded acoustic clues’ that are embedded in the message (Swaffar & Bacon, 1993). When viewed this way, it is clear that listening is both an individual and shared process. As Low and Sonntag (2013, p. 785) suggest, “listening is highly personal, dependent on our social location and, at the same time, shaped by the listenings of others as well as our relation to the speaking other.” Thus, listening is relational, and plays a role in the everyday development and maintenance of social and personal relationships (Halone & Pecchioni, 2001). However, as Pecchioni and Halone (2000) show empirically, the influence of listening on everyday relations is also related to the nature of the relationship between the listener and sender.

The complexity associated with understanding listening is one reason why there is a neglect of research about listening (Rowley-Jolivet, 2002). The ‘low profile of listening research’ is further accentuated in the specific case of listening in university or academic environments (Lynch, 2011, p. 78). Yet, students spend more time listening as a way to learn than they do using any other communication ability such as writing, reading or speaking (Barker, Gladney, Edwards, Holley & Gaines, 1980; Davis, 2001). For instance, in their study of how college students spend their time communicating, Emanuel, Baker, Daufin, Ellington, Fitts, Himsel, Holladay and Okeowo (2008) found that listening comprised 55.4 per cent of the total average communication day of college students. In addition, listening is a key skill in fostering collaborative learning (otherwise referred to as team work or group work), which is an approach to teaching that dominates many tertiary classrooms (Remedios, Clarke & Hawthorne, 2012).

Furthermore, listening is regarded as a soft skill employability factor (Finch, Nadeau & O’Reilly, 2012). For instance, listening is described as an ‘indispensable attribute’ to effective practice in the accounting profession (Stone, Lightbody & Whait, 2013). Listening further underscores the effectiveness of problem-solving skills, which is a graduate attribute that is core to employability (Reid & Anderson, 2012), and is ranked only second to soft skills by employers as a key factor affecting undergraduate employability (Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin & Zehner, 2013). In summary, listening is pivotal to learning as well as enhancing the employment opportunities for undergraduates post-university.

However, Thompson et al (2004, p. 226) suggest that few opportunities exist for undergraduates to develop listening as a skill, and suggest that even in communication studies units that incorporate listening, the focus is on the development of listening (such as active listening) rather than the broader competency of listening as a learning ability (Janusik & Wolvin, 1999). Notwithstanding, there are clear challenges in 'teaching' listening. It is the least explicit of communication skills (Vandergrift, 2004) and difficult to assess (Rowley-Jolivet, 2002); listening rarely has an observable 'product' (Lynch, 2011, p. 80) to which we can apply a marking guide. From a practical perspective, the 'crowded curriculum' of generic skills development that now exists in universities presents further difficulties in identifying 'space' to develop yet another skill such as listening in students (Stone et al, 2013), while the trend towards large classes limits the face to face time available to interact with students to foster their listening skills (Parker, 2011). The emphasis on digital teaching that is rapidly growing in universities but which also limits face-to-face interaction with students accentuates this challenge further. Thus, while there is a case for teaching listening in our classrooms, the challenge is to develop strategies that may counter some of these difficulties.

Our study therefore makes two contributions. The first is to contribute to the gap in research about listening in a university setting by evaluating students' perceptions of whether a formal 'listening' intervention using open space technology (OST) enhanced their understanding of a task. The second is to describe an intervention that can be used by others to foster effective listening by students. Our intervention was conducted with undergraduate degree students in the Business School and School of Population Health during semester two, 2014. The paper begins with describing our research approach, findings and a discussion about these. We conclude by considering the implications and limitations of our study.

Research approach: listening to learn

We used OST to explore the potential to engage our students in an activity that fostered listening to learn. OST is traditionally used in management consulting to facilitate business issues such as strategic planning, future goal setting and managing organisational change (Owen, 1997). Characterised by its informality, OST allows participants to debate ideas about a pre-defined task. Any topics are allowed, as long as they are relevant to the task. At the conclusion of the discussion, participants usually generate a 'report' that summarises the discussion and guides their future action (Pereira & Figueiredo, 2010).

However, in OST participants normally host their own discussion groups and are free to move between these. While Population Health students hosted their own discussions, we used facilitators to host the discussions with Business students. Our OST intervention for both groups was also conducted at the university, whereas when used in management consulting OST is generally conducted off-site as a way of stimulating greater creativity and innovativeness in debate and ideas (Owen, n.d.).

We were attracted to OST because it suited our objective of allowing students to organise themselves to discuss the task that had significance for them. As 'co-producers' of their learning outcomes (Finney & Finney, 2010, p. 278), we suggest that OST provided students with the opportunity to engage in a conversational style of learning, which has been highlighted as a learning approach that is appropriate for adult learners (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002; Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

In implementing the listening intervention, our aims were thus to broaden students' understanding about the task, and enhance their knowledge about the specifics and requirements to complete the task. Thus, the question that guided our project was *can students' understanding of the task that was set be enhanced by listening to others?*

The listening intervention for Business students focused around two questions that had been assigned for their major term essay assignment. Students were provided with one pre-reading to undertake prior to attending the OST session that was also made available electronically through the University's learning management system. Students were advised in their unit outline and via a notice on the learning management system about the open space discussion, and a schedule of the format for the session was also posted on the learning management system (see Appendix A).

The session was conducted during a normal seminar time and ran for 90 minutes. A tiered lecture theatre that holds approximately 300 people was used. The session was conducted in the middle of the day with no break in the session. After a welcome and introduction, students were shown two key *YouTube* clips that related to the essay topics. The unit lecturer then described the program and asked students if they required any clarification. Students were then asked to choose one of the topics and accordingly divide into two groups (n = approximately 30).

A focused discussion was facilitated in these smaller groups by lecturing staff. The staff had developed a content analytics sheet for each topic prior to conducting the session. This covered aspects such as key definitions, key concepts and relevant empirical material (for example, case studies), and were used to guide the discussion with students. However, students also posed their own issues and topics in the small group discussion, such as querying length of the task, and use of appropriate terminology in their writing. The small group discussion took place for thirty minutes after which the two groups re-convened into a larger group. The lecturer then summarised the ideas of both groups and facilitators and students were asked to clarify any points that emerged.

Population Health students completing a 450 hour health industry based practicum were engaged in an open space discussion to explore situations experienced on placement, and discuss strategies used to address these situations. Students were advised through the learning management system and unit outline to be prepared to reflect on an incident, experience or event that stood out from their placement to date at a scheduled session. This was conducted at a mid-way point of the placement (for most students) and was scheduled during the usual tutorial time with no break. The venue was a flat seminar room with moveable desks and chairs. Students were welcomed and introduced to the task; this included a short presentation on what open space is and the distribution of an information sheet (Appendix B). Students rearranged the room and formed a circle with their chairs. One by one each student shared and reflected on their practicum experiences. Students were then grouped into 'discussion topics' based on practicum experiences with each group consisting of three to four students. A thirty minute discussion was facilitated by the students themselves to gain a deeper understanding of a specific situation. The small groups re-convened into a larger group and summarised key points.

To collect student perceptions of their experiences, we administered pre and post-surveys and a final survey at the end of the semester to both student groups. The pre-survey for Business students asked whether they understood the topics set, had undertaken the readings and had chosen a topic. The pre-survey for Population Health students asked whether they understood the range of situations they may face on placement and if they felt confident to deal with these situations.

Using a 5 point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree) the post-survey for Business students (8 items, with the opportunity to write comments) asked whether the large and

small group discussions had helped them understand the topics, whether listening to the views of others had helped them to understand the topics, and whether the exercise had helped improve their own listening skills. A similar survey was administered to Population Health students (5 point Likert scale, 5 items, no additional comments). The survey asked whether listening to others helped students understand the range of situations they may encounter on placement and develop strategies to deal with these, and whether the exercise helped make them aware of their listening skills. A 7-item survey was also administered to one observer (Business and Population Health) canvassing perceptions about student responses to the exercise, listening skills and aspects such as whether time, venue and format were appropriate (the observer attended the small group discussions).

In the Business School, the end of semester survey asked similar questions to the post-survey with the additional question as to whether students had found the exercise helpful in completing their assignment. The three item end-of-semester survey in Population Health included questions similar to the post-survey.

Findings

There were 76 Business students who completed the pre survey, and 45 who completed the post-survey, as a number left the venue before this survey was administered; 13 completed the end of semester survey. In Population Health, 17 students attended the tutorial and all students completed the pre and post-survey (pre and post-survey questions were included on the same survey instrument). Nineteen students completed the end of semester survey, of which 14 had attended the open space session. We did not ask students for identifying information, as we were conducting an exploratory study to understand student experience, rather than seeking to compare differences on the basis of individual characteristics. Students' levels of agreement on statements regarding the open space exercise are listed in Table 1 (Business School) and Table 2 (Population Health). As the total number is small, numbers only are presented in tables.

Table 1: Business School students' levels of agreement on statements regarding the open space exercise

Evaluation	Questions	SA	A	N	D	SD
Pre-evaluation n = 76	I understand the topic that has been set	2	24	18	25	3
	I understand the key readings that have been made available	6	45	0	0	6
Post evaluation questions n = 43	The large group discussion helped me the most	2	23	9	4	1
	The small group discussion helped me the most	7	21	5	4	2
	Listening to the views of others helped to understand the topic	5	19	11	3	1
	Listening to the views of others helped me to understand the readings	4	15	15	5	1
	Listening to the views of others helped me develop my ideas for the topic	7	21	9	2	1
	The exercise has helped me become aware of my listening skills	6	15	11	6	0
End of semester n = 13	The large group discussion helped me the most	1	4	4	2	2
	The small group discussion helped me the most	4	2	2	2	3
	Listening to others helped me to complete the task	2	4	3	3	1

Table 2: Population Health students' levels of agreement on statements regarding the open space exercise

Evaluation	Questions	SA	A	N	D	SD
Pre-evaluation n = 17	I understand the range of situations (e.g. incidents, experiences, events, etc.) students face on placement/ in the workplace	1	14	1	1	
	I am confident I have strategies to deal with a range of situations I may encounter on placement/ in the workplace		14	2	1	
Post-evaluation n = 17	The large group discussion helped me understand the range of situations (incidents, experiences, events etc.) students face on placement/in the workplace	8	9			
	The small group discussion helped me gain a deeper understanding of a specific situation	5	11	1		
	Listening to the views of others helped me understand the range of situations I may encounter on placement/in the workplace	7	10			
	Listening to the views of others helped me develop strategies to address the situations I may encounter on placement/in the workplace	2	11	4		
	The exercise helped me become aware of my listening skills	2	14		1	
End of semester n = 14	Listening to the views of others helped me understand the range of situations I may encounter on placement/in the workplace	5	9			
	Listening to the views of others helped me develop strategies to address the situations I may encounter on placement/in the workplace	3	11			
	The exercise helped me become aware of my listening skills	2	12			

The results suggest a mixed response by Business School students to the intervention, whereas Population Health students were more overwhelmingly affirmative that the intervention had been of use in debating issues and triggering ideas about how to manage their task. In particular, the findings indicated a notable difference in the perceptions of the two groups in terms of how listening to the views of others had helped them to understand and complete their task. Once again, Population Health students were more affirmative in their view that listening to the views of others assisted them in their task (see post-evaluation and end of semester ratings for evaluations beginning with *Listening*), while Business students were more ambivalent in their responses (see post-evaluation and end of semester ratings for evaluations beginning with *Listening*). Finally, neither group of students indicated a clear preference for either large or small group discussions (see post-evaluation and end of semester ratings for evaluations beginning with *The large/small group*). In summary, the findings suggest that listening to the views of others enhanced the understanding by Population Health students of the task more than that of Business students. We draw on these, the observer feedback and our own observations to discuss the findings below.

Discussion of findings

Pearce, Johnson and Barker (1995) suggested that effective listening is influenced by internal and external conditions. Thompson et al (2004, p 22) referred to these as listening filters, which they describe as internal and external factors that affect the listening process and that the listener can address. Examples of internal factors include personal attributes (Pearce et al, 1995) such as gender, attitudes and assumptions, and prior knowledge (Thompson et al, 2004), while external factors refer to atmosphere (Thompson et al, 2004), time of activity and external distractions such as an open class door, or the room seating (Pearce et al, 1995). Drawing on the feedback from observers and our own observations, we identified a number of listening factors/filters that we suggest influenced the opportunity for students to effectively listen. In reference to external factors/filters we identified the physical space in which the OST was conducted, the timing of the session and class size as having an influence on the students' opportunity to effectively listen.

The room used for the Population Health open space discussion was a flat seminar room with moveable desks, thus enabling easy mobility by students, especially when forming small groups. However, separate break out rooms would have been more useful to enable discussions to be more focused and limit the intergroup distraction. Nevertheless, the manoeuvrability of the physical space in which we held the Population Health OST fostered a more effective listening experience, compared to the challenges of the tiered lecture theatre space in which the Business students' OST was conducted. The size of this venue made it challenging to foster student interaction, given that they could not easily create physical distance between groups. Even when students had to cluster closer together to engage in the small group discussion, the seating configuration limited non verbal communication between them, and created difficulties in being able to hear each others' responses. Importantly, both small group discussions for Business students were held in this space. Thus, students faced significant distractions from the other group in the small group discussion in particular. Therefore, while the physical space was not optimally conducive for the Population Health students' OST intervention, it was only minimally suitable for the Business students' OST activity. Physical space undoubtedly minimised the opportunity for the OST intervention to have a positive influence on the ability of Business students to listen effectively, while the contours of the physical space in which Population Health students conducted their OST enhanced their opportunity to listen effectively.

In terms of timing of the activity, it was suggested by observers that the session may have conflicted with Business students lunch hour, thus contributing to restlessness that was observed in some students. However, given that the session was conducted over 90 minutes with no break, this restlessness may also have been due to the length of the activity. While the timing of the activity did not appear to be a factor, it was suggested that the scheduling of the OST was appropriate for Population Health as the students had been exposed to the workplace environment for six weeks and therefore had some experience to draw upon to prepare for their task. Earlier in the semester would not have been useful as experiences may have been limited, and later in semester would not have been useful because students would not have had the opportunity to apply or implement the strategies they had learned as part of their discussions. Scheduling did appear to influence Business students' perception of the activity as well with one student suggesting that *'the time between the open space discussion and the due date for the essay was too far apart and I found myself not remembering what was said in the discussion'*. Thus timing in terms of when the session was conducted and scheduling appeared to have been a factor/filter that could have influenced effective listening by both Population Health and Business students, albeit in different ways.

Finally in terms of class size, in Population Health there was a smaller number of students (n=17) compared to Business (n=75) where even the ‘small group’ discussion numbered approximately 30 for Business students. The significance of class size is that coupled with the challenges of physical space and the issues surrounding timing, these limited the opportunity for Business students to interact with each other. Lynch (2011) identifies interaction as a significant strategy that fosters academic listening because interaction fosters reciprocal listening, that is two-way listening. However, the conditions that promote interaction by students include a relaxed atmosphere and small class size (Morrell, 2007). Undoubtedly the combination of physical space, timing and class size factors/filters were key external factors that did not foster a ‘relaxed atmosphere’ for Business students as compared to Population Health students. These inhibited the ability of Business students to interact and engage relationally in listening. This is discernible by noting the breadth of feedback to the items *listening to the views of others helped me develop my ideas for the topic* in the post-evaluation feedback and *listening to others helped me to complete the task* for Business students in the end of semester feedback, as per the more focused feedback to the comparable item *listening to the views of others helped me to develop strategies to address the situations I may encounter on placement/in the workplace* that Population Health students were asked to rate in both the post and end of semester evaluations.

However, the findings also indicate a difference in the perceptions of the two groups in terms of how listening to the views of others helped them to understand their task. Exploring the influence of internal factors (Pearce et al, 1995) and internal listening filters (Thompson et al, 2004) again assists us to understand these findings. The Business students were drawn from a number of discipline areas across the Business School and the University. The unit in which the OST was conducted forms part of the employment relations, human resource management and management major in the undergraduate Commerce degree; it is also classified as a broadening unit that is available to students from across the University to complete for the degree program. However, students who participated from Population Health were enrolled in a full semester load second semester unit (Health Industry Practicum) that is completed as the concluding requirement of the Bachelor of Health Science program. They had therefore developed everyday personal and social relationships throughout their degree program, and attended the OST with a relational history that had prepared them to be able to enhance their understanding of the task by listening to each other. Their feedback to the post evaluation and end of semester *Listening* items highlights this.

Importantly, Population Health students shared a common knowledge base that Business students did not have. They had progressed through a degree program as a community of learners from the same discipline, whereas this was not the case for Business students. The multi-disciplinary nature of the Business students’ sample positioned their learning in the unit as their common intellectual foundation. However, the variation between students understanding of this content as a result of their multi-disciplinary nature limited their opportunity to interact even on this basis. Thus, we suggest that as a result of the influence of these factors/filters, the nature of the relationship between listener and sender amongst Population Health students made it more likely that their everyday relations would foster effective *relational* listening (Pecchioni & Halone, 2000). The length and nature of their association gave them an already established platform upon which to engage in effective relational listening with the flow-on to enhancing their understanding of the task. The diversity of internal factors/filters amongst the Business students meant that they not only had no experience of relational listening, but, importantly, they did not have a platform from which to build relational listening that may have fostered effective relational listening. An end of semester comment by one student that *‘the tutorial discussion was more useful (than the OST intervention)’* supports this: that is, the regularity of meeting coupled with the interactive nature of tutorials wherein conversation is the norm rather than the exception, helped students to build

relational listening in that environment leading to more effective listening that may have helped this student to understand the task rather than the OST intervention.

Moreover, the influence of these factors/filters lead us to suggest that Population Health students were ultimately more ‘intellectually present’ during the OST intervention, because they shared a common knowledge base and were therefore able to participate more fully as both speaker and listener (Thompson et al, 2004, p. 228). In contrast, the fact that many Business school students had not even completed the pre-reading influenced their ability to be intellectually present and able to engage in the conversation as either speaker or listener. In summary, internal factors/filters fostered the ability of Population Health students to be able to act as a ‘listening community’ (Low & Sonntag, 2013, p. 781) who were able to support each other with their task; in contrast, the internally-linked diversity amongst Business students splintered the possibility for them to coalesce this way, thus affecting the opportunity for them to listen to learn.

When analysing the influence of these external and internal factors/filters it is not surprising that neither group valorised either the large or small group discussion format as being any better in enhancing their understanding of the task by listening to the views of others. As a relational construct, the potential to effectively listen is necessarily diminished if there is limited or little opportunity to interact (Low & Sonntag, 2013; Lynch 2011). While external and internal factors/filters fostered interaction by Population Health students, lack of opportunity to interact by Business students because of these undoubtedly then affected their opportunity to enhance their understanding of the task by listening to others. We therefore argue that it is these factors/filters rather than format (as per large versus small group discussion) that will influence effective listening by students.

Implications and limitations of research

The major implication that arises from our study is that closer attention should be paid to identifying the factors/filters that may prevent effective listening by our students. In this study we have only identified a few of these; we have no doubt that there are many others that other similar studies may identify.

However, we argue that we should pay closer attention to both identifying and developing strategies to counter these if we are to foster ‘transformative listeners’ rather than encounter ‘passive learners’. Coles (2008) distinguished transformative listening from evaluative and interpretive listening. Evaluative listening is when listening is seen as someone else’s responsibility and occurs when someone responds immediately to another’s suggestion with a judgement that it is correct or incorrect. Interpretive listening is when listening requires an active interpretation in the manner of a feedback to the speaker, not by evaluating what is said, but rather by offering an interpretation and asking for clarification. Transformative listening on the other hand is listening to the speaker that “includes a willingness to alter ideas in a discussion, to engage in dialogue, to entertain other points of view, and hold them as valid, independent of whether they are accepted or not.” (Coles, 2008, p. 24). In other words, listening that engages thinking and – most importantly – listening that *changes* the status quo of knowledge, assumptions and even behaviour, to reflect new and innovative strategies. Engaging in transformative listening however requires “care-full” listening (Shalif, 2005) that is not only attuned to the context or social clues that are embedded in the other’s speech (Swaffar & Bacon, 1993) but engages with the “coping and resilience skills, resistances to problems, exceptions to the problem-saturated story, and absent but implicit hopes, values, skills and knowledge” that are also implicit in the spoken word, but

often not explicitly enunciated (Shalif, 2005, p. 37); in other words, relational listening. We suggest that if we can foster this approach to listening in our students, we become more effective in not simply our teaching and learning strategies; our teaching and learning can have a greater impact upon the ability of our students to transfer what they learn into what they do after completing university.

Our study highlights that achieving this vision requires paying close attention to the factors/filters that inhibit effective listening by students. Thus, further research should seek to empirically substantiate these, and how they influence the ability of students to listen to learn. There is little research that currently offers this understanding. Future research should also seek to more closely establish the 'cause-effect' of listening, in particular transformative listening. While there is undoubtedly a canon of literature that seeks to understand this complexity in the field of critical social enquiry (see Freire, 2006 for instance), we argue that the concept of transformative listening is highly relevant in the everyday teaching and learning environment, such as the research sites in which we conducted our study. If we are able to foster transformative listening in the everyday classroom, we argue that the opportunity to stimulate learners to become innovative in their thought and subsequent action becomes more possible.

Undoubtedly, our study has many limitations. Apart from the obvious, a limited data base, our study does not have the benefit of being able to attest to the efficacy of the intervention, as we did not have a control group against which we could assess this difference. We have also been unable to undertake any statistical analysis to assess either the robustness or significance of the items that we used, as we did not have the statistical power to be able to undertake this. There may also be influences that are disciplinary related, that is, related to the topic for discussion. Finally, perceptual data is always vulnerable to the critique of bias. Methodology that uses multiple methods is one strategy that can counter this critique. Nonetheless, we view this as an exploratory study from which we will build a future research agenda, and thus be able to take these methodological limitations into account. Drawing on the findings from this study however, we make the following suggestions for 'teaching' effective listening:

Effective listening has to be consciously taught: while appearing tautological we nonetheless argue that similar to listening being a conscious act, so too must we consciously (and systematically) 'teach' effective listening, ensuring that students are aware that they are being 'taught' to listen to learn.

Effective listening has to be taught experientially: similar to our own intervention, we argue that effective listening has to be learnt by doing. Comparable to how we use case studies to provide students with a simulated experience to develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills, we suggest that exercises (such as the OST intervention) should be used when teaching effective listening, as this simulated experience subsequently provides a basis for analysis and discussion with students.

Teaching effective listening has to be 'planned': our study clearly highlights the importance of factors/filters that influence effective listening. While we are aware that the findings may question whether it is possible to teach effective listening to large classes in a traditional university environment, at the same time we suggest that by considering the possible factors/filters that may inhibit effective listening by students, we can manage these factors/filters and be able to 'teach' effective listening even in these environments. However, we can only achieve this if we plan to teach effective listening in the same way that we plan to teach our course content.

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Appendix A

Business Students: Open Space Discussion

Overview:

The purpose of this exercise is to provide you with the opportunity to explore a topic relevant to contemporary Australian employment relations through the use of an open space discussion. **The topics of the discussion are your essay topics for the unit.** The nature of an open space discussion will be explained to you at the start the exercise.

At the conclusion of the exercise you will be requested to complete a short (1-2 min) evaluation of the exercise.

Please Note: Due to the nature of an open space discussion, **it will NOT be recorded.**

Date/Time/Venue:

Date: Week 5, Thursday 28 August, 2014

Time: During lecture time, 1.00 – 2.45

Venue: Lecture Theatre [details withheld to ensure anonymity]

Format:

Following a general discussion, we will break into small groups where you will be able to discuss your topic of interest. We will then re-group into a larger group to summarise key points.

We will conclude with a short evaluation of the exercise.

Topics:

1. Can and should Australian ER be depoliticised?
2. Can and should Australian employment relations legislation contribute to workplace productivity and performance?

Preparation:

To prepare for the exercise it is recommended that you read the preparatory reading for each topic., that is:

1. Can and should Australian employment relations be depoliticised?
(Key Sources: Chs 1- 7 of Bray et al, 2014; Cooper, R (2010) Industrial relations in 2010: 'Dead, Buried and Cremated'. *JIR*, 2011 53: 277)

2. Can and should Australian employment relations legislation contribute to workplace productivity and performance?
(Key Sources: Chs 8-13 of Bray et al, 2014; Peetz, D (2012) Does industrial relations policy affect productivity? *ABL* vol 38 (4), pp 268-292.)

Appendix B

Population Health: Open space discussion

Overview:

The purpose of this exercise is to provide an opportunity to explore a range of situations (incidents/experiences/events) faced by students during placement/in the workplace and consider strategies to deal with these through the use of an open space discussion.

The topic of the discussion is a reflection of an incident/experience/event that stands out from the first 6 weeks of practicum.

The nature of an open space discussion will be explained to you at the start the exercise.

You will be requested to complete a short (1-2 min) pre and post evaluation of the exercise.

Date/Time/Venue:

Date: Week 6, Friday 5 September, 2014

Time: During tutorial time, 9.00-10.45 AM

Venue: Lecture Room 10 [details withheld to ensure anonymity]

Format:

Following a whole group discussion, we will break into small groups where you will be able to explore a specific topic/situation of interest. We will then re-group into a larger group to summarise key points.

We will begin with a pre evaluation and conclude with a post evaluation.

Topic:

Think about an incident/experience/event that stands from the last 6 weeks of practicum. In reporting to your peers please provide:

- *A description* of the incident/experience/event
- Your *interpretation* of the situation
- The *outcome*