seeking to use social scientific theory and methodology to continually adapt and inform the practice of both academics and activists.

Chris Howson

See also Boal, Augusto; Freire, Paulo; liberation psychology

Further Readings


LISTENING GUIDE

The Listening Guide is a feminist, voice-centred, relational and psychological methodology for narrative data analysis. Originally titled 'The Reader’s Guide', the Listening Guide was created by Carol Gilligan and a team of graduate students (including Diane Argyris, Lyn Mikel Brown, Elizabeth Debold, Judy Dorney, Barb Miller, Richard Osborne, Annie Rogers, Steve Sherblom, Mark Tappan and Janie Ward) in the 1980s at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. This team of researchers developed the Reader’s Guide to render systematic the method Gilligan used in In a Different Voice and to address some significant shortcomings in psychological research methods at the time—that is, acknowledging the significance of the researcher’s subjectivity and the researcher-participant relationship.

The Listening Guide, as a feminist method, was originally designed to amplify voices that have been marginalized or silenced by dominant cultural frameworks. In the feminist methodological tradition, the Listening Guide intentionally acknowledges and attends to the positionalities of the researcher and the participant. Knowledge, as viewed by the Listening Guide, is relationally located in the participant’s relationship to self, culture and the researcher. It is represented by the voices of the participant and given an opportunity to be heard in the relationship that evolves between the participant and the researcher. The Listening Guide invites psychological association and interdisciplinary knowledge—such as music and literature—into the research relationship and into the construction of new ideas. As such, this methodology is creative, unpredictable and generative.

This entry discusses the structure and process of the Listening Guide, the role of the interpretive community in the analytic process and educational action research applications.

The Structure of the Listening Guide

The Listening Guide is a polyphonic analytic methodology in that it seeks to pick up the many voices in which people speak of their lived experience. Its theory and practice are shaped by interdisciplinary theories stemming from the fields of psychology, literary analysis and music. In order to render such a complex understanding of a given narrative, the Listening Guide requires at least four separate listenings. The first listening, sometimes referred to as the ‘plot’ listening, asks the listener to construct a landscape of the interview. What stories are told? What are the major landmarks of the narrative (e.g. repeated phrases, words, contradictions, etc.)? What are the major themes? What are the silences, the stories left untold? In listening for the silences, the researcher becomes a ‘resisting’ listener, drawn from Judith Fetterley’s notion of the ‘resisting reader’. The first listening also requires a ‘listener’s response’ drawn from the notion of reader response theory. During this listening, the researcher attends to her own emotions, associations, reactions, questions and confusions. In this way, she can be sure to be alert to the issues that she brings to the analytic process and make every effort not to project her own voice onto that of the participant.

The second listening, sometimes referred to as the ‘listening for self’ is the core of this methodology. In this phase, the researcher is tuning in closely to the way the participants ‘speak of themselves’. The researcher must remain conscious of the fact that since it is a relational process, participants speak of themselves in relationship to the researcher in response to the questions asked and influenced by the place and time of the interview. In other words, this is a humble stance of listening for a self-in-relation. In order to hear the aspects of self that the participant shares in the interview, the researcher extracts ‘I phrases’ (the word ‘I’ plus the immediate following verb, e.g. ‘I want’, ‘I need’, ‘I think’, ‘I know’, ‘I don’t know’, etc.) in strict order as these phrases appear in the text. This ‘I’ is one representation of the participant’s self-in-relation, one
expression of how the participant expresses her lived experience. In extracting these phrases, Debold discovered that they fall in line poetically, forming what is often called the ‘I poem’, a way to listen for the ways the ‘I’ speaks. This ‘I voice’ is often in dialogue with other internal voices—sometimes a more removed ‘you’ voice, a collective ‘we’ voice or a distant ‘she’ or ‘he’ voice. When listening to the dialogue between these voices, the researcher can hear the internal dialogues that are often articulated as people reflect on the relational contexts of their lives. In describing the second listening, Gilligan often recounts that it is a way of magnifying the participants’ voices or of making their voices more ‘magnificent’. By drawing out the ‘I voice’, the researcher can temporarily quieten the surrounding voices, narratives and competing stories to hear the desires, confusions, questions and needs of the participants.

The third and fourth listenings, often referred to as the ‘contrapuntal’ listenings, help elicit the multiple voices spoken through the interview. The notion of voice here is distinguished from the notion of ‘theme’ in that voice is a more textured, nuanced and embodied articulation of a lived experience. In addition, the goal of this phase of the method is to hear the voices in relation to one another. Are they harmonic, dissonant, a marathon of solos or a clear duet? In listening for the tension between and among the voices, this set of listenings seeks to unearth the complexity of a narrative, rather than flattening it into a series of codes or themes.

The final step in the Listening Guide process is to create an analytic synthesis, bringing together the four listenings in an attempt to create an interpretive narrative. The standard for validity in this process answers the question that Gilligan often poses in relation to this step in the Listening Guide analysis: ‘If I followed your footsteps, saw what you saw and heard what you heard, would I understand how you reached this interpretation?’ Once an analytic synthesis is rendered, the researcher returns to the participant to explicitly inquire how the participant views the synthesis and to surface areas of interpretive agreement and disagreement.

The Role of the Interpretive Community

The Listening Guide requires that the researcher construct or join an interpretive community in which his emerging interpretations can be articulated, confirmed and challenged. The centrality of the interpretive community, clearly described by Stanley Fish in 1980 and later by Mark Tappan in relation to the Listening Guide, stems from the importance of helping the researcher to see his blind spots that may be hidden because of his own cultural, relational, professional and/or personal experiences. In one particularly vivid example, Jill Taylor, Carol Gilligan and Amy Sullivan describe the centrality of the interpretive community in their use of the Listening Guide in order to understand girls’ experience of race and relationship. In their study, they discovered that in order to hear the nuances, silences, resistances and hints in discussions of race and relationship, they needed to continually expand and grow their interpretive community to include women of different ethnicities, races and socio-economic classes. They found that this evolving community became so central to the work that they created retreats for the researchers to process their own experiences of race and relationship.

The interpretive community is also a key aspect of the validity/trustworthiness process of the Listening Guide. It can help the researcher construct, challenge and evaluate the trail of evidence that supports a given interpretation. Within this forum, interpretations can also be corroborated, deconstructed or augmented by co-researchers.

Applications of the Listening Guide

The Listening Guide has been used in many educational action research and action-oriented studies. Originally designed for studies of self and moral voices, it was used to listen for voices of resistance and capitulation in the Harvard Project on Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development’s (Harvard University Graduate School of Education) landmark study of girls’ development at the Laurel School (Cleveland, Ohio) in the mid-1980s. The results, reported by Brown and Gilligan in Meeting at the Crossroads: Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development (1992), were deeply influential in understanding the experiences of both students and faculty at the school and, more generally, in thinking about girls’ education. Similarly, Gilligan’s study at the Emma Willard School in Troy, New York, led to changes in practice at the school and the collaborative publication of the volume Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School.

While the Listening Guide was originally used in psychological research, it has since been used to understand relational experiences in the fields of education, history and women’s studies. Raider-Roth has used the methodology to examine how children and teachers understand the ways their relationships with one another shape student learning and teacher practice. In an effort to understand the relational world of boys in school, at home and in their friendship worlds, Niobe Way and Judy Chu utilized the Listening Guide to hear the multiple voices and tensions expressed by the boys they interviewed. Similarly, the Listening Guide has been a core methodology in Lyn Mikel Brown’s work
in understanding the relational worlds of working-class girls. Internationally, Tova Hartman has applied the Listening Guide in listening closely to the voices of modern women in orthodox religions, while Natasha Mauthner in the UK and Andrea Doucet in Canada have theorized the ways in which the Listening Guide offers a unique stance for accessing the methodological, epistemological and ontological subjectivities of the researcher-participants. Numerous-doctoral-students have used the Listening Guide as a core methodology in their action research dissertations, such as Eric Giseg's investigation of teachers' relationships with the self and others in the face of the US Federal education policies; Christina Cruz's research on female coaches' relationships to the self, others and their profession in university athletics; Vicki Stohla's study of teachers' understandings of the relational web of school life; Billy Hensley's examination of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning) university students' understanding of the notion of 'safety' on their college campuses and Angie Woods' study of college students' relationships to language, culture and community when engaging in service learning courses, among many others.

While the Listening Guide's application to the field of educational action research is relatively recent, it offers a unique opportunity to understand the psychological and relational dimensions of educational experiences. Such understandings can help practitioners and researchers shape educational experiences to be more relationally aware, in tune and caring, thereby fostering healthy resistance and resilience. In such a climate, genuine and robust knowledge grows and flourishes.

Miriam Raider-Roth

See also data analysis; discourse analysis; educational action research; feminist ethics; intersubjectivity; narrative inquiry; positionality

Further Readings


LIVING LIFE AS INQUIRY

Action inquiry is the process of bringing a fierce curiosity to every aspect of one's life. It is an ongoing process of questioning one's experience, paying attention to what one finds and making appropriate adjustments as one goes along. For an action inquirer, every moment of every day can become a subject of curiosity and investigation, every part of life grist to the inquiry mill. 'Living life as inquiry', a phrase coined by Judi Marshall, captures this pervasive nature beautifully.

Individuals' beliefs, values, aspirations, feelings and behaviours are all interconnected aspects of their experience, and action research involves opening all of that up for questioning and dealing with what is discovered through thoughtful processing and appropriate action. It involves being curious as to whether and how what one actually does is congruent with what one espouses and engaging with any discrepancies between one's values and one's actions. Living life as inquiry means paying attention to the stories individuals tell themselves about their world and about themselves within it and being mindful that they are all constructions, influenced by their perspective and by their purpose. Social constructionist paradigms point out that the social context shapes discourse and influences the values held and that any descriptions given of the world, or any account given of personal experience, are culturally situated and subjective. Action researchers need to work with the challenging implication that their view is not the truth and that others may have very different versions of reality.

Inner and Outer Arcs of Attention

Action inquiry involves what Marshall calls 'inner and outer arcs of attention'. Inner arcs refer to developing self-awareness, noticing meaning-making processes, patterns, themes and repetitions, while in the midst of action. This can be hard work, because this discipline is not part of any personal, organizational or scientific