Listening and Being Listened to:
Insights from Environmental Communicators

by

CAYLEY WEBBER

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Social and Applied Sciences
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND
COMMUNICATION

Royal Roads University
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Supervisor: DR. ELIN KELSEY
May, 2020

COMMITTEE APPROVAL

The members of Cayley Webber's Thesis Committee certify that they have read the thesis titled

Listening and Being Listened to: Insights from Environmental Communicators and recommend

that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in

Environmental Education and Communication:

DR. HILARY LEIGHTON [signature on file]

DR. RICHARD KOOL [signature on file]

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon submission of the final copy of

the thesis to Royal Roads University. The thesis supervisor confirms to have read this thesis and

recommends that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements:

ELIN KELSEY [signature on file]

Creative Commons Statement

Abstract

By virtue of listening to texts, to Silence, to self, and to the experiences of four

environmental communicators from the Master of Arts in Environmental Education and

Communication program at Royal Roads University, this thesis exposes how highly valued yet

absent listening has been within environmental discourse and general approaches to

communication. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, along with

personal journal entries, using an orientation of Appreciative Inquiry and Constructivist

Grounded Theory Methodology. Findings indicated that listening is highly complex, with

internal and external factors influencing the caliber of dialogue. Findings also revealed how the

fruit of authentic listening can be insightful for both the listener and the speaker. Participants

voiced a desire for greater emphasis and more training to be placed on listening in

communication programs and places of employment, including developing skills of self-

awareness, learning to ask strong questions, and building confidence as a listener.

Keywords: listening, dialogue, dissonance, discourse, communication, Appreciative
Inquiry, Grounded Theory, Environmental Communicator, authenticity, self-awareness

Dedication

This work is dedicated to:

Those who have listened out my life by sitting with, walking with, and listening with and alongside me.

Grayson C. H. Adams, my patient and persistent encourager & ever-faithful listener.

Acknowledgements

- To Dr. Elin Kelsey, a master listener. No words can express my gratitude to and for you. Your commitment to this work and to me, along with your patience, encouragement, and guidance has made a permanent mark on this project and on my life. This project moved along at a slow pace, and you affirmed that and stuck with me. Thank you.

- To my research participants, who are also allies in this environmental quest, your willingness to share personal experiences, go out and listen, and gather in dialogue made this project possible. Thank you for listening and coming along for this wander.

- To Dr. Rick Kool, who, on the first day of graduate studies when I was feeling sheepish and out of place, spoke, "The invitation in a Masters degree is to master your own voice." Thank you for this early encouragement and impactful vision.

- To wild places, you are a master listener. Thank you for teaching me.

- To Mari Elias Joy, you arrived at the perfect time. May Listening be a close friend, always.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is the quality of the listening that determines the effectiveness of the interaction.

(Brownell, 2010, p. 144)

Hmmm….listening has little space for the tired mind and body. I came here feeling empty,

didn't set an alarm, laid down, curled up on my right side in-between Crooked Tree's two

prominent roots and slept. Hard.

(Personal Journal Entry, April 17, 2017, Whitehorse, YK)

I thought this was a weird topic for a thesis – listening experiences. But since

participating in my initial interview, I am starting to notice and think about listening – or

the lack of it – [laughter] *all over the place. I feel like, you know, like* [pause] *how have I*

never thought about this as a communicator?

(Participant RR, February 2019)

Background

'Holding the space' became a commonly used phrase amongst classmates in one of my

graduate classes on *Psychological Dimensions of Environmental Education and Communication*

(EECO 509, Royal Roads University). The phrase stemmed from an earlier class conversation

and offered a type of antithesis to the human tendency to compel people to change their

behaviors through incentives or motivational strategies when their apparent level of care does not

seem to align with environmental trends, goals, or movements. It also referred to the space we

gave to one another, as collective members of a learning cohort, when there was tension or

difference. This 'space' was a type of container that held the dissonance while cohort members

tried to understand one another's process or opinion. Martin (2005) explains "holding the space" as:

> Creating a safe space that consists of good intentions, positive attitudes, appropriate skills, and, over time and experience, a certain facility. Such a space provides a 'container' that can hold the many differences together…Can allow them to interact, even get quite heated, until something new begins to be born of the exchange. (p. 88)

This care to hold the space, and hold one another in that space, was a valuable part of many class discussions. I, along with many colleagues, spoke highly and frequently about the value of listening instead of trying to talk over, problem solve, one-up, or move past the words of other individuals.

Perhaps this is why, in addition to facilitated class discussions, I have found myself venturing to alpine meadows, sunny crocus slopes, and the gentle beaver creek near my home as another way to process with a sense of being heard and held at the same time. The silence and indifference of wild or wildish places, such as city parks, to host my queries and laments has been a profound teacher and gift through my entire Masters program. While sitting in silence and journaling has not been a major focus of my research or data collection, I wanted to acknowledge the personal work around listening that I have engaged with throughout this thesis journey. I will honor this practice by including personal reflections from my journal entries dating back to 2016.

My Process

I have come to understand that this dialogic experience was meaningful for me in more profound ways than just being with a group of people who listened with openness, which, is profound in and of itself. Through reflection, I have come to see that having a physical space to 'contain' and host the conversation was an important aspect. I am not referring to an exclusive listening space like the ones created for listening projects such as BBC Radio's *Listening Project*

Booth, a mobile recording studio where conversations between people are recorded and archived. Rather, this 'space' was no more than a scheduled class, in a set-aside location (in my case, a university classroom or under the bows of a tree), with participants willing to engage. Lacey (2011) identified how, until writing was invented, public life "had been lived out in acoustic space where citizens could be within earshot of each other" (p. 6). Of course, that shifted with the expansion of populations and the adoption of representative politics, but at one point, citizens appeared before one another instead of before a representative to express their ideas (Lacey, 2011). When I imagine filtering ideas through a professor or mediator instead of face-to-face with classmates, ideas indeed lose a potency for me. The in-class conversations regarding important environmental topics and how environmental educators and communicators can act or respond to areas of concern affirmed the importance of in-person dialogue, held within space, time and context.

With the freedom to speak comes the responsibility to listen.

The in-class discussions also seemed to support freedom of speech in that there *was* freedom to speak, but there were other important communicative devices present as well. For instance, there were people to listen; without a listener, the speaker goes unheard. Spano (2001) builds on this idea by writing "the freedom to speak…is joined by the responsibility to listen and the right to be heard" (as quoted by Penman and Turnbull, 2012, p. 69). Johannesen (1997) argues that for educators and communicators, awareness of the importance of the tension between freedom and responsibility is extremely important. He emphasizes the need for educators and communicators to teach that when we have freedom, we must exercise these freedoms in responsible and ethical ways. Communication, after all, is not a sequence of back

and forth between parties, but rather, communication can be imagined as a flow of activity

between people. Penman & Turnbull (2012) explain:

> We do not have a speaker (actual or metaphoric) 'voicing' and then a listener 'hearing'
> (actual or metaphoric) as a set of separate acts. Instead, as participants, we are speaking
> and listening co-temporaneously…speakers and listeners are never separate people in the
> communicative arena, but rather speaking and listening are things we jointly do in that
> arena. (p. 64)

Many of the class discussions affirmed the existence of this arena; the back and forth of

listening as much as speaking honored the active role that the communicative process required

on each person's part.

Listening out.

The quality of many of my conversations included openness, participation, attentiveness,

and connection. More than just a "receptive and mediatized communicative action" referred to as

"listening in," these unique class conversations were about "listening out," which Lacey (2011)

describes as active, attentive, and anticipatory in disposition (p. 7). Without fully understanding

Lacey's distinction between 'listening out versus in' at the time, the adjectives used to describe

'listening out' reflect the level of engagement I both craved and sensed as possible within

dialogue.

During our classroom experiences together, I found my environmental educator and

communicator peers to be exceptional listeners ('listening out') and 'containers' for my ideas

and processes. This 'holding' helped me feel understood, respected, and as though I could

process my thinking and feelings without having to defend myself as I did when I was at work or

involved with other interest groups ('listening in'). Outside of these mandated and facilitated

class times however, conversations between classmates seemed to default back to more

conventional methods of conversing. The same individuals, who could listen so attentively in

class, often reverted to telling more than listening or sought to brainstorm and solve 'problems'

when outside of class hours. Peers, in general, seemed intent on forming opinions about issues

instead of trying to understand what was beneath them.

As a classroom teacher, I am familiar with how behaviours that are present in a formal

classroom differ from those in an informal setting amongst peers, especially after a long day.

However, I found myself searching and yearning for skills of listening and a level of democratic

public discourse that could cross these situational differences. I have found myself wondering

how to develop these skills for myself, my students, and my peers.

I sensed that skill development around dialogic processes, specifically learning to listen

to one another, is a critical component in being active members of a democracy and engaging the

public. Lacey (2011) writes, "Listening….is at the heart of what it means to be *in* the world, to

be active, to be political" (p. 7). While there is something counterintuitive in considering

listening as an act, it is "a critical category that ought to be at the heart of any consideration of

public life" (Lacey, 2011, p. 11).

Yet, this level of listening and action, this drive for understanding and "listening out,"

does not seem to be part of our western societal narratives or norms. According to 20th century

philosopher Martin Heidegger, the West inherited "logos" as a Greek noun, understood as a

system of reasoning and forming logic, but lost its verb form, *legein*, which means "not only to

speak but also to lay down, to lay before"—that is, to listen (Stenberg, 2011, p. 251). Ratcliffe

builds on the work of Heidegger and further explains that the West's understanding of *logos*

merges rational thought with "forceful speech acts such as probing, scrutinizing, critiquing,

examining, and exploring" (Stenberg, 2011, p. 251). This conflated act, she explains, "represents

only one side of a two-sided coin: speech without listening. When listening is considered at all, it

is deemed speech's passive subordinate, its unequal partner" (Stenberg, 2011, pp. 251-252).

"Activities of speaking up, finding a voice, and making oneself heard" have received primacy to

the neglect of listening (Penman & Turnbull, 2012, p. 62). Bohm (2013) suggests that this has

equated to unprecedented levels of communication break-down, despite technological linkages

and advances around the globe.

Listening: So self-evident and yet so challenging.

Throughout my graduate courses in environmental education and communication at

Royal Roads University (RRU), I learned about a variety of techniques and tools available for

people wanting to engage others through listening: deep listening, compassionate listening,

motivational listening, the importance of acknowledging and understanding emotions instead of

just behaviors, appreciative inquiry, how to sense conflict, and unique initiatives happening

around the globe that highlight the healing powers of listening to one another. I couldn't quite

understand how – with these tools, resources and an acknowledgement that listening matters –

there continued to be an absence around incorporating listening into daily formal and informal

approaches to environmental communication. I took it upon myself to investigate whether this

absence that I perceived really existed, or if I had fabricated it, or if its existence only occurred in

unique circumstance. I found myself wondering if further skills in dialogic processes could

benefit environmental educators and communicators and their diverse roles within the public

sphere.

Statement of the Problem and Research Question

Without simplifying the act of communication into binary elements (speaking and

listening), I found myself wondering about the experiences of students in environmental

education and communication programs of 'holding the space' as a regular practice, especially when dissonance is present.

Hoffman (2011) suggests that environmentalists can often be perceived as insensitively "seeking environmental protection at all costs and [are] willing to sacrifice economic development and human economies toward that end" (p. 21). They then add, "...with this mindset, joint solutions through cooperative decision making become virtually impossible" (p. 21). In Canada today, there is a sense of urgency to act, insist, speak up, protest, urge, and motivate public and political leaders to change behaviors and laws to promote long-term environmental care and mitigate the impending and already-arrived effects of climate change. This urgency, however, identified by scientists and environmentalists, can result in a domineering force that removes openness to listening. Adam Kahane (2007) notes, "being an expert is a severe impediment to listening and learning" (p. 54). One reason for this is because "voices are drowned out by our own internal voices. We keep reacting and projecting, judging and prejudging, anticipating and expecting, reloading and drifting off. The biggest challenge of listening is quieting down our internal chatter" (Kahane, 2007, p. 107). Similarly, Alcorn (2013) argues that a conversation, in theory, should be comprised of people exploring evidence of differing truth claims. "Instead," he notes, the normal trend these days is for "the conversation [to] become only a series of assertions without any thoughtful attempt to focus on a claim and evaluate evidence" (p. 8).

David Kahane (1997), in reviewing Susan Bickford's book *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict and Citizenship,* summarizes Bickford's philosophical discussion of listening, by writing "[Listening] maintains one's own perspective as background while focusing on the situation and opinions of another: The point is not to merge voices but to hear

divergent perspectives in relation to one another" (p. 937). While this concept and practice of

holding 'divergent perspectives' together without merging perspectives is challenging, I rarely

feel encouraged to even try to practice this in my field. Rather, the encouragement regularly lies

in being heard, or, motivating and lobbying others to make a change.

Bickford (1996) emphasized that listening can act as a bridge for explorations of

difference and navigating the democratic process. I believe this valuable and critical act – that of

listening – is necessary for the type of understandings we need to develop; Understandings that

are going to engage people in generating movement around sustainable environmental choices

through promoting restored communicative space. This belief led me to my research project.

Under the guidance and council of my supervisor, I have conducted a study that

examined what can be learned by investigating the experiences of listening amongst

environmental communicators who are currently studying or have graduated from the RRU

Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication (MAEEC) program.

Specifically, I wanted to hear about heightened experiences of listening and being listened to as

well how environmental communicators have navigated skills of listening when divergent

perspectives or even overt conflicts are present. The primary question that drove my research

was:

What have been the experiences of environmental communicators of listening and being

listened to, and, listening across difference?

Researcher Perspective

I am a public servant, working as both an elementary school teacher in Alberta and an

educational consultant working through an Alberta Government grant to train teachers in Climate

Change Education. As I write this, I am also a graduate student working on my thesis in

Environmental Education and Communication at RRU, in Victoria British Columbia. I am

familiar with the experience of sitting with mentors and listeners in my own life who have helped

evoke views, understandings, and realizations simply through their willingness to listen and hold

the space for and with me. I long for conversations where listening – and hearing one another –

is at the heart of the interaction.

Through understanding the listening experiences of current and former graduate students

in the environmental education and communication in the MAEEC program, I have gained

meaningful insights into the processes, challenges, and gifts for and from people when they listen

and are listened to.

These experiences have certainly shaped and influenced the perspectives I bring to this

research and field of communication. Through a constructivist lens, however, I realize that the

perspectives I hold have shaped my level of awareness, the answers I seek to find, the type of

research project I have sewn together. It is hard (even impossible) to distance oneself from one's

perspective. I hold various underlying assumptions about the quality of communication in my

culture and field of study: as an introvert who values intimate conversations with one or two

other people, as the second child of four in my family who some days had to fight for voice at

the dinner table, as a person who appreciated feeling understood. These pieces of identity

certainly have influenced my project. However, I am aware of these orientations, and have

sought to bring trustworthiness and integrity throughout the entire research process. I sought to

be aware of and acknowledge my biases, without feeling limited by them, throughout the project.

Significance and Implications of this Research

I was excited to attend in the 40th annual International Listening Association (ILA)

conference. The ILA's mission is to *advance the practice, teaching, and research of listening*

throughout the world, and I have felt intrigued by the caliber of people and ideas they offer around listening, some of which can be found in this thesis. Even more alluring to me, was the theme of the 2019 conference, *Listening to Conflict*. I imagined the topic as a complimentary piece to my own research and a sort of 'next steps' offering for wrapping up my research. One can imagine how surprised I was, however, to find myself amongst professional mediators, educational listening specialists, lawyers, judges, and an array of highly regarded academics, without finding one session on the topic of environmental conflict and how practitioners, communicators and educators might navigate this time of increasing environmental dissonance through listening. This dissonance includes the impacts and signs of changing global climates and weather patterns as well as the polarizing conversations emerging throughout Canada and the world around natural resource management, climbing greenhouse gas emissions, access to agriculture, Indigenous land claims and rights, and energy production and transport. I was surprised to be in Vancouver – a city known for its innovative climate and environmental action plans – and find no sessions related to environmental discourse or how to hold the tension that arises for so many people around environmental topics.

　　　　This exclusion, I suspect, speaks to two major themes that I am hoping this body of research highlights for future studies. First, I suspect I have found and am studying a blind spot in the field of communication, that of how environmental communicators incorporate listening as part of their practice, especially when dissonance or conflict is present. Second, I suspect I have found an opportunity for growth in the academic field concerned with the role of listening as a critical part of communication, especially around the environment. I hope that both my findings, as well as the interactions with research participants to gain their insights and experiences, will challenge the absence that led me to this project.

Chapter 2: Scholarly Context

Shared Public Spaces

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed profound changes in art, science, and technology (Lacey, 2011). Lacey refers to the move from shared public spaces where the ear was responsible for gathering information to the eye being the primary filter in public affairs as "a *dislocation*, from embodied auditory space to the disembodied, abstracted and imagined community" (p. 9). This movement, from location to dislocation, has had resounding impacts. Lacey also highlighted how the Enlightenment tradition concerned itself with the freedom of expression rather than that of communication, which arguably, still remains the dominant narrative in today's western society. Lacey (2011) explains it as being:

> …a freedom caught up in the idea of the liberty of the individual, where individual expression is treated like a property, to be defended and protected insofar as and as long as the rights of others are not violated in the process. The speech act as "self-expression" was conceived as a product to be circulated and exchanged in the free marketplace of ideas. (p. 13)

The idea of speech as private property – something to be defended and protected – can be interpreted or viewed through different lenses. One lens involves the ownership of oral stories. For some Indigenous cultures, for example, certain stories belong to the story holder. You may listen, but not share or retell these stories. Another view of speech as private property is through a capitalist lens, where speech is a commodity owned by an individual and is to be moved and commodified in the marketplace. Speech as a commodity can be found across political parties, campaigns, and in public spheres around the globe. Rapid digitization and social media platforms also enables language to be produced and consumed at high speeds. Welton (2002) asks, "to whom [in a world wracked by cultural conflict and adversarialness] does power pay attention, who and what gets heard?" Bickford (1996) emphasizes that what tends to get heard in public

settings is "a way of speaking associated with those who control social, political, and economic institutions" (p. 97). In the current climate of 'fake news', conservative political elites fueling right-wing populism, social inequality and identity politics that thrive on assertive speech, there is a profound need for "attending-to and being attended to" that is critical in order to maintain civil society, commonwealth, and democracy (Taylor (1995), cited by Welton, 2002, p. 201). Listening cannot be taken for granted, especially in a time when dissonance and difference are fueling separation instead of becoming a juncture for leaning in to the democratic disposition of participation by seeking understanding. Welton (2002) insists that, "it is time to bring listening out of the theoretical basement" (p. 197). Arguably, our democracy depends on it.

The art and skill of listening has various connected terms. Many of these terms, and the pertinent academic and professional literature associated with them, have been highlighted or used interchangeably by my research participants. As I analyzed interview transcripts, I considered the beliefs and conclusions of this literature and looked for areas where these ideas are challenged, reinforced or absent. I now provide an overview of several of the terms linked to listening.

Communication

The scope of communication is vast, multi-disciplinary, multi-dimensional and comprehensive (Hannawa & Spitzberg, 2015; Rayudu, 2009). There are various theoretical and epistemological approaches to communication, as well as an understanding that communication can be written, seen, read, felt, heard, misinterpreted, relational, organizational or individual. Rayudu (2009) explains how the drive to communicate is inborn, while also requiring teaching and modeling in order to be effective. Communication process models and theories offer insight into the complex understandings of communication. Linear models, for example, do not consider

the response from the receiver of the message, whereas circular models of communication

include feedback, thus making it an interpersonal or interactional model of communication

(Rayudu, 2009).

The origin of the term 'communication' is based on the Latin 'commun' and the suffix '-

ie' (Bohm, 2013, p. 2). This means "to make something common," or, "to convey information or

knowledge from one person to another in as accurate a way as possible" (Bohm, 2013, p. 2).

Rayudu (2009) explains communication as, "a process involving the sorting, selecting and

sending of symbols in such a way as to help the listener perceive and recreate in his own mind

the meaning contained in the mind of the communicator" (p. 2). MacLennan (2008) emphasizes

that the interaction between people involved in communication is far more important than the

belief that communication is just an exchange of information. "It is less like a process of

information exchange than it is like a process of negotiation, which almost always involves the

interplay of feelings, assumptions, values, ethics, public status, self-definition, and social needs"

(MacLennan, 2008, p. 4). There is a "foundational presumption," Penman and Turnbull (2012)

explain, "…that communication can be seen as simply an instrument to bring about an effect" (p.

62). As people interact with others, however, there is more of a back and forth than there is a

clear transfer of information or knowledge. This difference is considered *making something in*

common instead of *making something common* (Bohm, 2013). Brownell (2010) expresses her

concern with current communication frameworks when she states, "The discipline of

communication has traditionally focused on the speaker and on message creation rather than on

the listener and the skills of reception" (p. 141). This binary notion "that directly implicates two

parties to the process" (Penman & Turnbull, 2012, p. 63) does not suffice for the level of

competent communication I pursued in my research. Verbal or written communication, the way I

am considering it, involves an ongoing, collaborative and creative process between people,

instead of an exclusive tool for persuasion, information and education (Deetz, Grim & Lyon,

2003; Penman & Turnbull, 2012). I believe communication, at its best, creates the valuable space

for negotiation and understanding instead of simply information and pragmatic exchanges.

Language is central to communication. Opportunities for verbal and symbolic dialogue

between people abound and language can be used as a tool to reinforce existing competition

among stakeholders resulting in a power imbalance (either real or perceived) between parties

(Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013). Interestingly, in environmental tensions, science is

regularly portrayed as "the neutral authority within the political fray. Because Western culture

tends to accept scientific fact as immutable, the fact that science also is used as a tool of

persuasion to support and attack positions is masked" (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013, p.

7). Thus, language can be used as a tool for equalizing or manipulating. Yet, as Penman &

Turnbull (2012) explain, "it is not the words themselves that have meaning, but the way in which

we use them in the context of their use" (p. 64). As I explored language, I am not referring to

rules or systems, but rather I am using Stewart's (1995) understanding of language "as

something we inhabit, and something we inhabit jointly" (as cited in Penman & Turnbull, 2012,

p. 64). The emphasis on 'jointly' is rightfully emphasized for the purpose of this research. The

relational and contextual aspect of language and understanding relies heavily on the intent and

relationship that people within the dialogue hold.

Public Discourse and the Navigation of Tension in Conversation

Discourse can be defined as "language used to express a purpose or intent beyond mere

utterance" (Littlejohn, 2009, p. 586). Because discourse intentionally expresses meaning or

action, it always occurs within a social and cultural context (Littlejohn, 2009). In August 2016,

author, activist in ethics and right relationships, and listener, James Hoggan, spoke with my

communications class about his book, *I'm Right, You're an Idiot: The Toxic State of Public*

Discourse and How to Clean It Up (2016). Hoggan emphasized that public discourse, at its best,

involves improving the quality of conversations with people who don't share the same values,

actions and beliefs (J. Hoggan, personal communication, August 2, 2016). Since these

interactions and conversations occur frequently, cleaning up conversations regularly involves

listening more than speaking rather than striving for positive or productive conversations (J.

Hoggan, personal communication, August 5, 2016). Gerald (2007), in reviewing Ratcliffe's

(2006) book *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender and Whiteness*, identifies how Ratcliffe

encourages people to pay attention to dissonance that arises in situations between people, texts,

or discourses that are different, challenging, or hard to hear. She insists it is imperative that

people shift their attention towards and attend to "gaps in understanding, the margins between

things we know, the blurred edges, and the uncomfortable places in cross-cultural discourse and

teaching" (Gerald, 2007, p. 143). I reached out to Krista Ratcliffe to inquire more about her work

with rhetorical listening and discourse to see if this approach could be transferred to

environmental conversations where tension is present. She replied, by email:

> Yes, I absolutely think you could use rhetorical listening as a tactic for researching
> environmental conversations, especially since they are troubled by identifications fraught
> with history and ignorance of one another's assumptions, not to mention competing
> cultural logics. (Personal communication, February 14, 2017)

Rhetorical listening challenges one of the more common forms of listening, that of

listening through a lens of 'critique-and-dismiss' (Stenberg, 2011). Paying attention to

dissonance instead of the argument itself shifts the focus from winning over or one-upping,

towards understanding and empathy.

American philosopher and physicist David Bohm (2013) seems to hold a similar

perspective as Ratcliff when he encourages people to notice heightened emotions that block one

from hearing the other. If listeners can learn to notice their own internal responses and emotions

while also giving attention to what the speaker is saying, then the dialogue shifts away from a

mere transferring of ideas and information towards possibilities for collaboration (Bohm, 2013).

Even further, releasing the grasp on striving for agreement or consensus and focusing instead on

participation in discourse and dialogue even when tension and dissonance arise, is critical to

moving forward with public discourse and conversations wrought with tension (Penman, 2008).

Dissolving all conflict, after all, is not the goal of public discourse or democratic dialogue. There

are certain communication practices that are designed to promote increased quality public

conversation on issues that are divisive, argumentative, and provoking (Broome, 2009).

Bohm (2013) concludes that so much of our thinking, aversions and defenses occur at an

unconscious level; stating, "at times, we may be conscious that we are defending [our opinions],

but mostly we are not. We just feel that something is so true that we can't avoid trying to

convince this stupid person how wrong he is to disagree with us" (p. 12). Peterson and

Feldpausch-Parker (2013) suggest that many people share a vision of the future that includes

sustainability of natural and social systems alike. These visions, while complementary at a

glance, are actually in conflict as a "single, simple answer, nor a single discipline is capable of

adequately addressing the complex problems" (p. 18). I have noticed this theme in my own circle

of friends and family, of who hold differing environmental values. At one level, we wholly long

for health for all living organisms on our planet. Beyond that level of agreement, however, and

as soon as the conversation moves to specifics, heightened emotions that evoke defensiveness or

anger may arise. In particular, topics of political policies, religious beliefs, and the environment,

or the intersection of any combination of the three can cause heightened emotions. Perhaps there

is indeed wisdom in the oft-quoted advice, "never discuss money, politics or religion," as the

natural environment, in its beauty, resources, and opportunity hits on all three of these forbidden

themes. It is no wonder the list of environmental conversation 'triggers' I have encountered can

be seemingly endless: vegetarianism, climate change, consumer patterns, loss of ecosystems,

animal rights, conservation, farming practices, organic produce, extreme weather, ownership,

ethically made products, environmental policy, dams, pipelines, oil, the economy, forestry,

shifting family traditions, and Indigenous rights (to name a few!). According to Peterson and

Feldpausch-Parker (2013), "environmental conflict is among the greatest challenges facing

humanity in the 21st century" (p. 2). Perhaps this is because of the global realities forecasted by

a changing climate; Alternatively, perhaps environmental conflict is so 'triggering' and society

has few norms, spaces, or direction about how to dialogue about and get beneath these triggers.

Corner, Whitmarsh, and Xenias (2012) studied 'skepticism' in public attitudes towards

climate change, a human issue that can be challenging to communicate. The interwoven

scientific and technical information has solid evidence to support the data. However, emerging

new evidence and gaps in the unraveling uncertainties are sometimes presented as 'ignorant',

worthy of caution and questioning. Corner et al. (2012) were not surprised to find that "people

with opposing attitudes often assimilate evidence in a way that is biased towards their existing

attitudinal position" (p. 463). Frewer et al. (2003) identified a common challenge for scientists

who communicate climate uncertainties as well. They found that the general public is unable to

conceptualize and hold scientific uncertainties as they often interpret these 'confessions' as

incomplete and unreliable information. This poses a major challenge to the scientific community

regarding the communication of these uncertainties. Scientific organizations want to be

transparent, but by acknowledging the incompleteness of their knowledge, citizens often become

skeptical of the information (Frewer, et. al., 2003).

Currently, Canadian citizens can read news stories related to the environment, and not far

behind these news stories are the opinions of citizens on social media, arguing for or against

whichever decision, whatever government or organization that person supports or believes in.

Arguably, part of participating in democracy involves forming and speaking one's opinion. The

genre of written and verbal responses that I'm referring to in my research, however, is different

than the conflict that a diverse and dynamic democracy depends on. I am challenging the often-

shocking voices armed with accusations, intolerant of change, and lacking any grace for or

interest in process. These voices, when vocal in the public sphere – which is likely an online

platform of sorts – are awesome and shocking. It is no wonder Hoggan (2016) calls public

discourse, "toxic." He believes that with mention of any environmental or energy theme, simple

inquiries and discussions often escalate rapidly to highly emotional, rhetorical, disproportionate

and extremely polarizing attacks (Hoggan, 2016). He asserts that public discourse has

deteriorated because the traditional debate model, "based on accuracy, evidence and truth" is no

longer happening (Hoggan, 2016, p. 97). The typical reality now in heated conversation is simply

to resort to attacking another person's credibility and reputation.

Hoffman (2011) has studied the relationship between what he calls the "climate change

convinced" and the "climate change skeptical" and offers insight from social movement theory.

He questions whether competing conversations and movements are resulting in people of

differing worldviews actually speaking with each other, or, if they are "talking past each other"

in what amounts to "logic schisms" (p. 5). In a logic schism, a type of contest emerges where

opponents aren't actually listening to one another at all. Instead, parties seek information that,

"confirms their position and disconfirms their opponents' arguments" (p. 9). Hoffman (2011)

questions whether meaningful dialogue and problem solving is available to participants at all

given the sometimes-polarizing lenses that people are coming from when it comes to climate

change. He insists that it is critical that frameworks are sought out as a type of bridge between

differing values and worldviews, and as a method for expanding the solution space in these

critical environmental times (p. 21).

Similar to Hoffman's concept of schisms, Kahane (2007) reviewed Scharmer's work

(2001), *Taxonomy of Four Different Ways of Listening*. The first, *Downloading*, is a type of

listening within our own story. We merely listen with the purpose of confirming our own story or

beliefs. Second, *Debating*, is a mode of listening where the intent is to listen from the outside,

like a judge, waiting to insert our objective thoughts into the narrative. Thirdly, *Reflective*

Dialogue is far more subjective; the listener is engaged with the speaker, reflecting on their own

thoughts and offering empathy to the speaker. Finally, *Generative Dialogue* is when, "we listen

not only from within ourselves or from within others, but *from the whole of the system*" (Kahane,

2004, p. 92). Kahane (2007) believes that if we long to create new social realities, one must enter

into conversation through the latter two, "Reflective Dialogue," or "Generative Dialogue."

In both of these 'different ways of listening,' there is an emphasis once again on listening

with empathy and listening with more than just our ears, to the 'whole of the system.' This,

however, requires the listener to be/come a committed and active participant in the

communication process. Wolvin (2010) insists that developing this level of listening would

require concerted efforts across multi-disciplinary systems to train and engage humans to take

listening seriously. Listening scholars offer important insights into the complexities of listening,

while also urging more "engaged, purposeful behaviors on the part of listeners in both personal and professional settings" (Wolvin, 2010, p. 2).

Ramsey and Miller (2003) insist that people must "strive to communicate in spite of these differences… to work to keep communication from breaking down, from becoming restricted and distorted" (p. 19). Hoggan referenced sage and scholar Rabbi Hillel (n.d.) by citing, "there is argument for the sake of heaven and there is the argument for the sake of defeating your opponent" (personal communication, August 2, 2016). An argument for the sake of defeating your opponent involves trying to put down and conquer the people that don't agree with you. Argument for the sake of heaven, as Hoggan describes it, is a discourse of discovery, awareness and understanding. It demands the ability to listen and "even change your way of thinking or living when someone else's perceptions ring true" (Chernick, para. 4, 2016). There is a level of humility required in arguing for the sake of heaven, accompanied by respect, compassion and empathy (Chernick, 2016). If we want to improve public discourse for the sake of heaven, then we, environmental communicators, must be part of facilitating this reality.

Improving public discourse, however, is not an easy task. A growing number of scholars are researching and writing about why this is so difficult. For example, Joanna Macy (1995) suggests that healthy public discourse is a skill that will require explicit teaching and practice, given the human tendency to move away from uncomfortable feelings. Whereas Macy explores difficult environmental conversations in terms of fear-based dialogues, Hoggan (2015) frames public discourse about the environment as toxic. For Lertzman (2015), environmental conversations are a reflection of psychological grief that people may not even be aware they are feeling. Be it fear, toxicity, or unconscious grief, environmental educators and communicators have a challenging task ahead when it comes to effectively communicating and educating others

around themes of environmental sustainability and climate change. Even more so, we have an important and challenging task ahead in terms of teaching people how to effectively communicate.

This is a good time to re-emphasize that I am writing about and referring to vernacular discourse instead of political discourse. Politicians may be trained to argue in a way that is polarizing, to be highly skeptical of the other, and to talk past their opponent. As I refer to environmental communicators and their own interpretation of spoken and written language, I am referring to the discourse where citizens are interacting about themes and topics of personal interest. Although not the focus of this research, I might argue that there is still room, and critical need, within the political sphere to 'clean-up' the level of discourse and banter as well.

Dialogue

Dialogue, from a communication perspective, is a form of discourse that emphasizes the importance of listening and inquiry in fostering mutual understanding (Broome, 2009, p. 301). Broome (2013) explains how the word dialogue, composed of the prefix *dia* ("through" or "across") and *logos* ("words" or "reason"), refers to "a process of creating meaning through talking and reasoning together" (p. 741), where listening and inquiry are emphasized to foster respect and mutual understanding. Kahane (2007) suggests that dialogue involves "quieting down our internal chatter" so that we can remain open and present to hear anew (p. 107). Martin (2005) calls dialogue an act of being present to one another, holding the space and leaning in. Different than discussion, conversation, or debate, "the intention in dialogue is not to win or force a position but to work toward greater truth through deepened understanding" (p. 84). He expresses that "dialogue is how we interact with the 'unknown'" (p. 89). Broome (2013) emphasizes that meaning is co-constituted from the interaction between people; it is not

something that is already in existence. Some scholars advocate for dialogue as "a constructive way for individuals to navigate their differences in interpersonal, organization, community and public realms" (Broome, 2009, p. 302). Wolvin (2010) summarizes Floyd's (1985) description of dialogic listening by characterizing the listener as someone who "truly engages in the dialogue" with others. He suggests that listening is marked by: "(1) genuineness; (2) accurate empathetic understanding; (3) unconditional positive regard; (4) presentness; (5) spirit of mutual equality; and (6) supportive psychological climate" (p. 17). When this level of engagement is present, a dialogic attitude or approach to communication enables one to capitalize on the commonality of humans' feelings and experiences (including language).

Friedman (2005), in his doctoral dissertation on the life and works of Martin Buber notes "genuine dialogue can be either spoken or silent" (p. 141). He cites Buber, saying:

Its [dialogue's] essence lies in the fact that, "each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them." The essential element of genuine dialogue, therefore, is 'seeing the other' or 'experiencing the other side'. (p. 141)

While the above authors offer a variation on the notion of dialogue, each extends an invitation for people to be present, relational, and hold an intention and commitment to seeking understanding. Dialogue is made possible by "the attitudes with which participants approach each other, the ways they talk and act, and the context within which they meet" (Broome, 2009, p. 301).

Dialogue has the potential for being a transformational tool for human relationships; however, this form of communication is not without its challenges – both relationally as well as within oneself. There is the risk, when one opens to dialogue, that our own perspective might have to be amended. For some, this challenges one's identity, which stirs a tension in and of

itself (Ratcliffe 2005; Broome, 2013). Since dialogue is not linear and there is an undulating fluidity partnered with the process, people entering dialogue must be okay with unpredictability and open process. Broome (2013) argues, "such tension is not only unavoidable but integral to the process of dialogue itself" (p. 742). Dialogue is relationally driven, which implies that people must be at least interested in sitting down with someone else who may, at times, also be "the enemy" (Broome, 2013, p. 743). But how, in a culture that by and large does not explicitly teach tools for navigating conflict in productive and collaborative ways, can we expect leaders, educators, communicators to know how to engage in dialogue if the teaching, modelling, or values are not necessarily there?

Listening in dialogue does not provide a cure for situations of difference, conflict, or violence either. Nor does listening in dialogue try and eliminate conflict in the first place. On the contrary, Peterson and Feldpausch-Parker (2013) remind us that political conflict is a vital part of a strong democracy and that conflict highlights the diversity of participants. More so, a public sphere grounded in a hunger for consensus has "encouraged naïve acceptance of models that promise open and free public deliberation under conditions of equality" (Peterson & Feldpausch-Parker, 2013, p. 11). Boulding (2000) argues that societies built around separateness – power struggles, exclusive policies, imbalances between those 'with' and those 'without', incessant competition, physical violence – tend to be conflict prone. Broome (2013) explains that in order to create more positive conditions within a culture, several conditions should be present:

> …political leadership that advocates peace, a strong economic safety net, education curricula that instill peaceful attitudes from an early age, laws that protect human rights and help prevent discrimination, and community, religious, and corporate institutions that actively promote cooperative practices. (p. 738).

Even though dialogue cannot miraculously shift cultures or instill these values, it remains a vital component of "the culture-building process that is required for societies to develop productive ways to deal with differences and disagreements" (Broome, 2013, p. 751). Incorporating dialogue amongst differences and separateness can offer a possible alternative to some of the damaging communication patterns prevalent in a society that perpetuates conflict. Incorporating dialogue can also set a standard for new norms for effective communication and become, "a method for promoting sustained contact, reducing deep-seated hostility, promoting respect for the other, developing a narrative of hope, and establishing a basis for cooperation" (Broome, 2013, p. 751).

Listening, as both a Skill and an Art

I want to expand on why and how I refer to listening, at times through this document, as an *art*. I do not use the term *art* to refer to a complete listening masterpiece, rather, I use it to emphasize the process of crafting that strong listening exudes and requires. As Rayudu (2009) explains, "art refers to the best way of doing things. It guides how an objective is to be achieved" (p. 5). Listening as an art highlights how strong listening *can* act as a bridge in instances of disagreement or when words do not suffice. And, that the level of listening required in times of disagreement or dissonance necessitates creativity and refinement, similar to an art. Rayudu (2009) said, "art…is due to more practice than learning" (p. 5). While I understand that skills are required to create art, the process of creating (instead of completing) is a form of art in and of itself. This is the type of 'art' I refer to throughout this thesis; not a finished product, but rather a process involving discernment, presence, perseverance, and patience that is also required through the process of 'creating art'.

Orbach (1994) relates the art of listening to a type of emotional responsibility, claiming that individuals who are able to have the emotional space needed to discriminate one's own emotions and needs from those of others, reduces 'contamination' and 'misunderstanding' in their listening (Orbach, as cited by Stickley & Freshwater, 2006, p. 14). Having enough awareness to allow one's emotions and needs to be temporarily set apart in order to be a stronger listener may be an asset to the type of listening for which I am advocating. Barbara (2009) suggests that, as an art, listening requires a level of discipline, effort and understanding "primarily developed through training and practice" (p. 5).

Quaker peace activist Gene Knudsen Hoffman (1997) spoke of a type of listening referred to as compassionate listening, which involves a process of *discerning* more than just a skill of trying *to hear*. "To discern means to perceive something hidden or obscure" (Compassionate Listening, para. 14). She suggests that this caliber of listening requires one to listen with their 'spiritual ear' instead of their 'human ear', meaning, there is patience, grace, and a commitment to understanding the whole picture instead of hearing segments in isolation (para. 14). Similarly, theologian Cynthia Bourgeault (2018) links this level of perception to the heart; "the heart is first and foremost an organ of spiritual perception. Its primary function is to look beyond the obvious, the boundaried surface of things and see into a deeper reality" (as cited in Rohr, 2018, para. 2). Theologian and scholar Parker Palmer (2011) writes about the need for heart-consciousness within politics by asking, "if we cannot talk about politics in the language of the heart…how can we create politics worthy of the human spirit?" (as cited Rohr, 2018, para. 3). He is referring to a level of compassion and empathy as people discuss critical issues in society.

I chose these quotes from Knudsen Hoffman, Bourgeault, and Palmer to highlight the type of listening I am exploring in my study. Using the authors' words of *attentiveness, empathy, space for emotion*, listening with a *'spiritual ear'* and *living with heart-consciousness*, I investigated a conception of listening that requires a slightly different focus than a skill to be acquired like driving, typing or listening for instructions. There is a spiritual and artistic component to listening, rather, that calls for a person to listen from within, to discern and perceive, and not just hear with the 'human ear' for facts and details.

Organizations with initiatives to promote listening.

Associations and organizations have also rallied to support and promote the art and skill of listening. The Global Listening Centre envisions "the future society as a world that listens well before acting" (Global Listening, retrieved April 4, 2018). The International Listening Association (ILA), established in 1979, seeks to "promote the study of listening, exchange information, and pursue research into the ways in which listening can develop understanding in our personal, political, social and working lives" (International Listening, retrieved April 4, 2018). Several institutes and organizations have attempted to highlight the importance of listening by offering variations of public listening engagement opportunities. While each project holds its own slant in vision and implementation, the focus of many of these local and global listening projects is on citizen engagement, by which people are asked to enter into dialogue with a known/unknown 'other' to deeply listen.

A few examples include:

- the British Broadcasting Company's (BBC) *Listening Project*, which seeks to collect "intimate conversations between friends or relatives" by inviting willing citizens to have their conversations recorded, archived, and possibly shared as a

podcast (Listening Project, Retrieved September 17, 2019). The BBC attributes

the idea to a project originating in the United States called *StoryCorps.*

- *StoryCorps* has a mission "to preserve and share humanity's stories in order to

  build connections between people and create a more just and compassionate

  world" (StoryCorps, Retrieved September 17, 2019).

- *The World Listening Project* (WLP), a not-for-profit organization "devoted to

  understanding the world and its natural environment, societies and cultures

  through the practices of listening and field recording," has a very similar approach

  and mandate (World Listening, Retrieved September 17, 2019).

- Krista Tippett, American Radio and Podcast host of *On Being*, has spearheaded a

  project known as *Civil Conversations Project*. The slogan on the webpage reads,

  "Speaking together differently in order to live together differently." This platform

  encourages people to have conversations around topics that evoke controversy

  and tension (On Being, Retrieved September 20, 2019).

In each of these examples, there is no mandate to solve, fix, or settle on a certain path.

Instead, there is a level of vulnerability required on both the listener and the speaker to hear and

be heard with the "spiritual ear" (Knudson Hoffman, 1997). And this type of listening requires

both the cognitive skills as well as the softer nuances of artistic endeavors.

Listening as a Blind Spot in Environmental Communication

It would be an amazing and important shift if environmental communicators spearheaded

a communication overhaul that incorporates a deepened level of listening no matter what level of

tension or misunderstanding is present. Not wanting to leave this observation as a wish was a

large impetus for selecting the research topic that I did. If establishing a basis for respect,

cooperation and understanding is a key ingredient in effective communication and education strategies, then why aren't environmental educators and communicators doing this regularly? Or, are they?

The scholarly literature I read and reviewed suggested that indeed, there are tools and studies that have been established to learn about and empower listening, dialogue, and impactful communication within society. When it comes to navigating environmental tensions however, I was unable to locate clear studies or frameworks. This led me to create a study which focused on environmental communicators from my own graduate program to find out more about their experiences of effective listening practices and being listened to. The hope was for a deepening of my own understanding of this topic, as well as highlighting recommendations for further development and research in this field.

The review of these listening-related terms exposes a level of discrepancy, which highlights the complexity of communication. For environmental communicators, stressing these intricacies of communication and listening will hopefully merit greater engagement with the topic. As I expose in Chapter 4, environmental communicators reported an absence in considering listening as a tool in public engagement.

Chapter 3: Approach to Research and Research Methods

Researching Listening on a Personal Level.

The topic of listening as an integral yet understudied component of communication studies was not an obvious topic of research for me when I initially applied for graduate studies at RRU. Seeing, articulating, and finally landing on this topic was a mountain to climb in and of itself. I took a leave from my full-time job, moved north to the Yukon, sat in silence in nature regularly, kept records of 'things' I was sensing, seeing and questioning without ever really holding a clear sense of what I was doing. I wrote to academics whose work had inspired my thinking and spent ample time on the phone with my supervisor, Dr. Elin Kelsey. Studying listening was challenging, and many people shared what they thought I *should* or *could* do to make this project gain traction. I so badly wanted someone to listen out to my thinking as a tool for helping me clarify my own path for moving forward. Instead, most people (though not all) talked at me, with new ideas, 'shoulds', and 'coulds' at the forefront. I was taken-aback by the number of professors who told me, "you *should* research…". The experience of listening to other people talk at me was indeed challenging. However, these various perspectives did sharpen my thinking and thesis route in that it shed light on patterns of communication that could be helpful or hindering despite the best intentions. I feel proud of the ways I stood true to the process of listening by taking space, grappling with it, hating on it at times, appreciating it more often, and by persistently staying close to my intuits that have made this project my own.

Overview of Approach to Research

Gubrium and Holstein (2002) consider qualitative interviews as a contextually situated and mutually created story that is only reached through collaboration between both the researcher and the interviewee. This concept of reflexivity between researcher and respondent

has been impactful for different researchers (e.g., Bannister, 1999; Polkinghorne, 2005). When

trying to understand another person, researchers may also come to understand themselves –

completing a type of hermeneutic circle (Warren, 2002). I have taken the role of a participant

observer, recording my own thoughts and impressions both beforehand and eventually alongside

others in the research process. I incorporated my own reflections into my findings during and

immediately following each interview.

During my second year of graduate studies, I incorporated consistent listening practices

into my life so that as an environmental steward and communicator, I might know first hand

some of the challenges and opportunities involved in listening. Thus, in addition to the formal

interviews, I have also included excerpts from my personal journal entries as data.

To explore the experiences of listening for environmental communicators, I used a

qualitative methodology that views knowledge as a cultural creation that has many different

forms (Guthrie, 2010). I gathered data through semi-structured, one to one interviews, a

subsequent focus-group interview, and my own personal journal reflections. "The focus of

qualitative inquiries," Polkinghorne (2005) notes, "is on describing, understanding, and

clarifying a human experience" (p. 139). While the term *sampling* is used in both quantitative

and qualitative research to refer to the process of selection, Polkinghorne (2005) argues it must

be used with care in qualitative research. For me, this was true in that I was trying learn about the

experiences of listening across difference for environmental communicators, instead of creating

general findings to be applied to a population.

I chose to use a Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology as well as Appreciative

Inquiry (AI) as an orientation for my research. Thus, the questions, my personal posture, ongoing

observations and memo's, tasks for participants, interview questions and the sequence and

framework through which I analyzed and interpreted the data are all framed through these lenses.

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory methods (GTM) consist of a "systematic approach to inquiry with

several key strategies for conducting inquiry" (Charmaz, 2017, segment 3). It is inductive,

comparative, interactive, iterative and abductive, and stresses the importance of coding, memo

writing, theoretical sampling, and systematically comparing "data with data, data with codes,

codes with codes, and codes with categories" (Charmaz, 2017, segment 4).

Since its beginning in the 1960's, GTM has become a common and comprehensive

method available to qualitative researchers (Haig, 1995). Not only does it support the study and

analysis of data, but as Strauss and Corbin reveal, grounded theory is "…a way of thinking about

and viewing the world that can enrich the research of those who choose to use [it]" (1998, p. 4).

The aim of grounded theory, after all, is to generate or discover a theory (Urquhart, 2013, p. 5).

Traditional grounded theory methods emphasize that emerging theories are grounded in the data

and not by researcher bias or interest. The idea behind GTM is that the data should speak to the

researcher instead of the theories and experiences of others (Urquhart, 2013). GTM opens up

opportunities to truly discover something new! Urquhart (2013) builds on Glaser and Strauss

(1967) by encouraging researchers to ignore any prior information one has gathered about the

topic of study until one has developed their own theories, "…then engage [the] theory with the

existing theories and use them to help with the densification of [the] emergent theory" (p. 8).

There has been criticism of this approach however, as the very idea of a researcher who collects

and analyses data without any preconceptions or theoretical knowledge is "naïve" (Thornberg,

2012, p. 246).

Constructivist grounded theory.

There is a field within qualitative research that acknowledges and incorporates the unavoidable influential role of the researcher. *Constructivist* GTM recognizes that, "to avoid the researcher's influential role in the research process is an unattainable task" (Ramalho, Adams, Huggard, & Hoare, 2015). Charmaz (2014) claimed that the researcher is inextricably connected to the data collection and analysis processes which are both, "created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data" (p. 239). Ramalho et. al., (2015) outlined that "it is not the research methodology that aims to discover a theory despite the researcher, but it is the researcher who aims to construct a theory through the methodology" (para. 15). In contrast to the more classic Grounded Theory traditions, "an informed grounded theorist," Thornberg (2012) explains, "sees the advantage of using pre-existing theories and research findings in the substantive field in a sensitive, creative and flexible way instead of seeing them as obstacles and threats" (p. 249).

There were three main themes within traditional grounded theory processes that I struggled to incorporate in my own approach. First, I conducted a thorough literature review before conducting interviews or analyzing the data. I would not have been able to identify a concise question without it! I felt as though I needed to learn more about the topics, theories, and research available before I could bring creativity, personality, or a specific lens to my research. In fact, it took years of reading, discussing, journaling, and listening in nature to even figure out what my question for research was. This choice goes against the original framework of Glaser and Strauss (1967). At that time, and still for "classic" grounded theorists today, there was and is an argument for "delaying the literature review in researcher's substantive area of inquiry until the analysis is nearly completed" (Thornberg, 2012, p. 244). This delay could support the

researcher in remaining free and open to discover and avoid contamination (Thornberg, 2012). I,

however, was unable to delay the review of literature.

A second 'pillar' of traditional grounded theory study that I failed to apply in my research

process was that of continuing the process of data collection until the researcher "finds no new

concepts…emerging from the data" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 11). I would have liked to interview until

no new codes emerged, however due to financial and time constraints, as well as the nature of

my research, I limited my study to four participants. While I did hear and code overlapping

themes within some of the interviews, the nature of asking about people's personal experiences

automatically introduced new data, themes, and understandings each time I listened to

participants speak. I suspect I could have continued to interview environmental educators and

communicators for months before seeing saturation in the data.

Third, I did not enter my research without bias. Quite the opposite, in fact. Since this

research emerged from my own observations about public discourse, challenges of dialogue in

environmental circles, I approached my topic with distinct curiosity and hope for discovering

new ideas, perspectives, and theories about the skill of listening for environmental educators and

communicators, but not as a 'blank slate' as some grounded theorists promote.

These realities were some of the factors that made the Constructivist Grounded Theory

(CGT) methodology a proper fit for myself as researcher and for this research project. It

supported me to focus on emerging themes instead of on answers or testing theories. I was,

however, committed to the traditional Grounded Theory process of coding, making constant

comparisons between data, engaging emergent theories, staying close to my data, and

maintaining an open mind through the research process.

Appreciative Inquiry

I aligned my research approach with an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) orientation. Developed by Cooperrider in 1980, AI begins by "focusing on the best of what is and using this platform to build future directions" (Centre for Values-Driven Leadership, 2017, para. 6). Watkins and Mohr (2001) describe AI as, "a philosophy and orientation to change that can fundamentally reshape the practice of organizational learning, design, and development" (p. 21). AI shifts the focus from 'fixing' problems, to believing that "organizations move toward what they study" (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003, p. 29). AI also invites people to envision what it might be like if "the best of what is" occurred more often (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsabas, 2003, p. 5). The appreciative mindset, a key component within AI, plays heavily into facilitating positive interactions with others. It posits that, "if people are looking for the worst in others, they will find the worst….the appreciative mindset reminds us to instead actively seek out the best in other people" (Bloom et. al, 2013, pp. 7 – 8).

AI practitioners originally based their methods on Cooperrider and Srivastva's (1987) set of four principals which called for a collaborative process to identify 1) the best of what is, 2) ideals of what might be, 3) consent about what should be, and finally, 4) collective implementation to discover what can be (Bushe, 2011). This process, later called the *4 D Model of AI*, coined four terms to guide practitioners and participants through the AI process: Discovery, Dream, Design, Delivery/Destiny (Bushe, 2011). Over recent years, differing variations of the 4D Model have arisen, such as the 4-I Model (Watkins & Jacobsgaard, 2001) in which the five phases are *Initiate, Inquire, Imagine,* and *Innovate* or the 5-D Model (Coghlan, Preskill, & Catsambas, 2003). These adaptions illustrate how dynamic the AI process, along with

its models and applications, can be. While some criticize the reflexivity of AI, others, regardless of the model used, see its responsiveness as a helpful strength.

Several AI principles aligned with the interview process in this study. The *Simultaneity Principle* purports that the moment a person asks a question, they begin to create change; the *Positive Principle* suggests that by asking positive questions, momentum is generated towards that positive core; the *Wholeness Principle* assumes that by engaging stakeholders and bringing them together, collective capacity is built; and, finally, *Enactment Principle,* which suggests that by using the very process or 'living model' we want to see in the future, positive change is conducted (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Watkins, Mohr, and Kelly (2011) identified additional key principals of AI, some of which also appeared through this project such as the *Constructionist Principle,* which suggests that through interactions with one another, individuals create meaning and socially construct reality.

AI requires individuals to invest time and effort in exploring what promotes life and renewal in their organization (Fifolt & Lander, 2013). Because research participants for this study were connected through past experiences (identity within the same graduate program) and to some degree, still connected through that identity network and a level of presumed environmental values, this approach truly focused on the larger environmental communication system instead of on a specific organizational reality.

Difficulties with appreciative inquiry.

While this orientation and methodology has been a gift to my research and research process, there have, of course, been challenges as well. In many ways, it was learning about Appreciative Inquiry in my first year of graduate studies that has led me to research and affirm the topic of listening in the first place. However, I have noticed my tendencies to want to expose

the problems and focus on what is "wrong" with public discourse and communication, instead of

focusing on the positive alone. Seeking balance between appreciation and critical thinking, I

grappled with the tension between focusing on the 'best of what is' that Appreciative Inquiry

seeks to expose and, focusing on the insufficiencies of our modern western communication

driving my research in the first place. I knew I could interview participants through a lens of

perception and void-- "why don't people listen?"-- or through the lens of "where is listening

already happening?" I chose, as you will read, to open with stories of where listening and being

listened to is or has already been apparent, but in no way did I force participants to only talk

about these positive experiences. I felt affirmed in these reflections after studying some of the

literature on criticisms and speculations of the Appreciative Inquiry process and orientation.

Critiques of appreciative inquiry.

Even though its application, scholarship and visibility has been on the rise since the early

2000's, Appreciative Inquiry does have its criticisms and critics within the world of action

research (Bushe, 2011; Grant & Humphries, 2006). A common critique arises from the concern

that with such a particular focus on positive stories and experiences during initial discovery

conversations between participants and practitioners, negative or 'flat' experiences of

participants may be omitted or repressed, despite the importance of those experiences (Bushe,

2011). In addition, what is positive for some may be felt or interpreted as negative for others.

Bushe uses Oliver's (2005) terminology to help illuminate this concept, describing the habit of

decontextualizing and polarizing emotions surrounding lived experiences as a major issue (as

cited in Bushe, 2011). This sensitive and dualistic exploration of light and darkness, which only

gives focus and energy towards the light, may interfere with the transformational change in

systems that AI seeks to bring about. Bushe (2010) notes, "research suggests transformational

change will not occur from AI unless it addresses problems of real concern to organizational

members" (Bushe, 2011, p. 18).

Bushe (2011) highlights the need for ongoing, longitudinal studies that explore successes

and failures of AI. Due to "proliferation of methods called AI, and the variety of theoretical

levers behind AI practice," carefully detailed records and published reports are also needed to

better study and understand what these loose models of AI (Bushe, 2011, p. 21). This includes a

need for comparative studies that track moderators, participants, organizations, and processes,

and confirm terms and models to be studied and compared, leading to a more "disciplined and

reasoned approach to its use" (Bushe, 2011; Bushe, 2005). Another consideration for

strengthening AI, according to Bushe (2005) is by pairing the "best of" stories with more

grounded practical considerations that will lead to identifiable change to the systems being

studied.

Data Collection & Analysis

Overview.

Data for this study was collected over approximately three years of reading widely and

deeply about listening; note taking and personal journaling; followed by a more formal process

involving three phases of interviews with four volunteer participants from the MAEEC program.

Throughout this entire process, I stayed close to my wonderments about listening, took courses,

read articles, and consistently returned to my note taking, both as a reader and a writer. The three

years of observations, anecdotal records, and deep probing into communication with self, the

natural world, other humans, and difference, helped me formulate my research question and

method.

Of particular importance to this timeframe, was the listening sabbatical I undertook in Whitehorse (September, 2016 – August, 2017). While there, I kept two 'types' of journals; one, a digital journal, which provided a 'dumping ground' for my learning and processing about environmental communication and communicators in the early part of the year. This journal served as both a host for the writers, poets, and personal wonderments I was encountering, as well as a type of filter as I worked towards generating a meaningful question for this thesis. The second, a hand written journal, I kept during the spring and summer of 2017. These second journal entries reflected my attempts to apply contemplative practices of place sitting and deep listening. It was during the days of wondering, reading, writing, and sitting alone in silence – usually in the forest – that I was able to formulate the question that I have pursued through participant interviews. The major question driving my research, which emerged from my time in the north is, *what have been the experiences of environmental educators and communicators of listening and being listened to, and, listening across difference?*

Once this question was formulated, the thesis proposal written and approved, and my research method carefully developed, I moved into phase one of data collection with volunteer participants. While the bulk of my findings have come from the interviews with participants, at times, I offer comparisons and insights from my personal written texts as well.

Data collection.

Formal interviews.

There were three phases to the interview process. Phase one involved a one-to-one interview with four participants (group A), personal record keeping by use of personal journal entries, and written reflections immediately following each interview. Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis (2007) recommended using a diary or journal to record personal reflections about

researchers' experiences. This includes ideas, mistakes, confessions, and fears that arise during the interview period, as well as "metanotes," which both document the process of analysis and reflections on the research process (p. 308). Following each interview, I applied this recommendation by taking time to jot down reflections.

Phase two of data collection involved asking group A participants to then go and individually interview another environmental communicator (group B) using the question(s) and format that I used with them as a guide. Participants summarized their research conversation in a typed emailed reflection, highlighting both what it was like to listen, and what they heard their participants speak about. Data were also harvested from Phase 2 interviews by way of one on-line focus group interview (Phase 3) about what it was like for group A participants to listen to their group B participants. In this focus group interview, I also presented the emerging grounded theory that was being formulated following weeks of analysis of the data. I asked the four research participants to consider "what resonates? And, what is missing from this emerging theory on listening?" I recorded this focus group interview for later analysis.

Participant recruitment process.

Accessing participants posed certain challenges. I was keen on selecting persons who could "…provide substantial contributions to filling out the structure and character of the experience under investigation" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 139). I was not interested in 'how much' or 'how often,' but rather sought to converse with participants with stand-out experiences of listening and being listened to. Thus, random sampling did not make sense for my study.

Participants were accepted based on certain inclusion criteria. First, they needed to be currently studying or have received a graduate level diploma or graduate degree in the MAEEC program. Secondly, they needed to self-identify as someone who continues to pursue a career,

values, and/or lifestyle with environmental sustainability in mind. A critical requirement was to find participants who identified as being able to reflect upon listening across difference, and who were willing to interview one other person based on an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) orientation and an established series of questions to guide their interview.

To find these participants, my committee suggested that I use an online RRU platform that connects alumni to other alumni. This platform serves former students by helping them "connect, learn, share, and grow" (RRU Connect, retrieved October 12, 2018). In order to access this site at the time I was recruiting, one needed to first create a user profile by providing basic information such as name, year of graduation, department, and desired level of involvement with this platform.

I felt uncomfortable using this platform to find participants for my research for a few reasons. First, while I was able to narrow my search to see all 39 registered MAEEC alumni (one of whom was me), contacting them would have meant a personalized email with my own name and profile attached. From the list of 39, there were 6 names that I recognized either from my own graduating class or an adjacent graduating year. I felt hesitant to ask them to consider participating, as my intent as a researcher is to remove any sense of obligation for participants. In discussion with the MAEEC office, it was decided that they would use the RRU Connect platform and reach out to the 39 registered participants on my behalf. It was immediately discovered that this would not be possible due to platform limitations, and so I moved on to another plan for recruitment.

While there was an unofficial list of alumni maintained by the previous head of the MAEEC program, the ethics committee felt I should avoid recruiting through this list and advised me to find alternate means. I crafted an email invitation and requested my Supervisor

and the MAEEC office forward it to potential participants. I also sent a general invitation email to my colleagues requesting they forward my email to other MAEEC alumni or students who came to mind for this project. My initial hope was to reach all MAEEC students and alumni (approximately 300 persons) by email to expand my sample and help reduce any sense of obligation or allegiance from peers from the program, and open up the question to a broader scope of participants. Unfortunately, as no comprehensive list of all MAEEC students and alumni existed at the time, I used the means described above. I believe I was able to reach approximately 65 MAEEC students or alumni through this email process.

Participants were provided with a general overview of the study to assist them in determining whether they met the criteria and if they felt they were a good candidate for the study (Appendix A). I was keen on hearing from people who felt as though they had something to comment on around listening and being listened to. I intended to find 3 – 5 qualified and willing participants to interview.

Participant selection.

I was immediately contacted by three current MAEEC students who were keen to "help out" another graduate student. I appreciated their willingness and immediate response to the invitation. Through an email conversation, it became clear that two of the three respondents had not really considered listening and being listened to as a communicator, and so together, we opted not to move forward with an interview. The third respondent offered enthusiasm and intrigue, but did not have a schedule that allowed for the tight timeline I was working under. Eventually, I was contacted by 2 respondents who responded to my personal email, one participant who responded to a connection through my supervisor, and a fourth participant who responded to an email forwarded from a common acquaintance from the MAEEC program.

These respondents were provided with an overview of the project (Appendix B) and asked to consider whether the topic and the three phases of interviews would work for them.

Each of these four respondents met the participant inclusion criteria: two participants had received their graduate degree and two were still in the process of writing their thesis to obtain their degree in the MAEEC program. In addition, each respondent self-identified as someone who continues to pursue a career, values, and/or lifestyle with environmental sustainability in mind. Thirdly, each respondent agreed that they were able to reflect upon and share insights about listening and being listened to, especially across difference. Finally, each respondent was willing to interview one other environmental communicator based on an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) orientation. These 'once removed' participants received a formal letter of information about the research and a consent form (Appendix C), which they signed and returned to me.

The participants were residents of either British Columbia or Alberta at the time of the interviews and all identified as being of Caucasian decent. There were two people who identified as male and two as female, all at least forty years of age, and all parents to young or grown children. They came from a variety of employment backgrounds and identified as having worked (either currently or previously) in fields related to environmental programming, journalism, environmental activism, communications, consulting, environmental policy, nonprofit, and local government. All four participants identified that they are currently between jobs, self-employed, or transitioning back to work. Two participants also chose to disclose their political views, one participant describing him/herself as "…a lefty with a soft spot for social and environmental issues…", another describing him/herself as "eco-socialist". Each participant expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to participate in this study. As a researcher, this sentiment was

extremely humbling as I felt my own deep gratitude towards each participant for the sharing of their hearts, ideas, and insights.

The interviews: format and context.

Interviews were conducted online, using the secure online platform *GoToMeeting*. All but one participant commented that they felt comfortable using this medium over a face-to-face interview. S/he felt "ok" meeting online, but would have preferred sharing the same space in person. Without sharing the same geographical space, I had wondered if I might miss some of the observational data connected to the participants' behaviors (Polkinghorne, 2005). Indeed, I did notice a level of removal from my participants as three out of four interviews were conducted by phone instead of using a web camera. Phone interviews did not allow me to access visual listening cues such as body language or contact. This said, I felt that by not sharing a space (physically or virtually), I was able to focus on participants' words more than on body language or cultural cues. I found myself, when not taking notes or recording time counts to return to, closing my eyes as participants spoke. This enabled me to eliminate as much external stimuli as possible. I used a separate device to record the audio as a backup. Each interview was transcribed for analysis. All interviews were downloaded to my personal computer, then transferred onto a locked USB key.

Interviews were semi-structured, allowing for consistency of the general questions to promote integrity and fluidity in the comparison between responses (Guthrie, 2010). I referenced a list of established questions and developed an "aide-memoire" to guide conversation, but focused most of my efforts on listening to the experiences of the individuals being interviewed and allowing conversation to unfold (Coleman, 2012, p. 252). Polkinghorne (2005) highlights how qualitative interview data can sometimes be "referred to as a cocreation" between researcher

and participant, with the goal being to produce "a full account of the experience under investigation" (p. 143). This approach provided space to dive deeply into certain comments, pauses, and questions that participants articulated. I gradually became more comfortable and less 'agenda driven' with each interview, so found myself expanding questions more in the last interview compared with the first. I sense this speaks to two traits common in the interview process. First, as a fairly new researcher, my level of comfort deepened as I moved through each interview. This allowed me to 'loosen the grip' on trying to control interviews. I used the same questions in each interview, but provided more space for pauses to occur as well as spontaneous and clarifying questions to arise throughout later interviews. Second, the fluid nature of constructivist research supports a responsive and iterative approach to research interviews. As I got to know the experiences of respondents, I also probed into some of these experiences to both model and learn more about listening and being listened to. Probes, acting as follow-up questions, "such as 'could you tell me more about that'…attain[ed] more specific responses or more information" (Coleman, 2012, p. 251). No matter what points or pauses I leaned into with each respondent, I still shared my overall research question and then asked them to respond to the same five questions (Appendix D).

I suspected that two interviews per participant would suffice; one individual interview and one focus group interview. However, the iterative nature of qualitative research, both GTM and AI processes, suggests follow-up interviews may be requested by either the interviewer or the participant. I found that an additional conversation with one of my participants was required to clarify a specific experience and what s/he had intended to articulate around that experience. Throughout all interviews, participants were positive, exceptionally generous with their time, schedules, and sharing their ideas, and offered invaluable insights into my research question.

Following the first one-to-one interview with participants, I asked each person to then go ahead and interview another environmental communicator about their experiences of listening and being listened to across difference (Appendix E). This practice, asking participants to interview others, is common with AI work (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).

This second interview held three particular objectives: First, I wanted participants to practice listening. After discussing listening and experiences of being listened to, and given the topic of my research, I suspected that participants would conduct their interviews with a particular focus on listening. I planned to hear about what that process of intentional listening was like in the focus group interview during the third phase. Second, I wanted to hear about the experiences of listening and being listened to from other environmental communicators outside my own research scope. I found myself curious about whether the formalities of a recorded research interview elicited particular responses and ideas. I thought that removing myself, as researcher, from this conversation could expose new insights into the topic of listening. Third, AI enlists participants to continue and extend the process of discovery through questioning others in accordance with its philosophy to inspire positive change. AI does not mandate that only a few people hold the answers – or interviews, in this case. Rather, AI asserts that human systems grow towards what they persistently study, ask questions about and focus on (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). And, this propensity is strongest when researched and viewed by focusing on the positive. Thus, by having participants continue the process of asking questions of other environmental communicators within the positive frame from which they were asked, it aligned with the AI lens through which I was viewing my research.

The third and final interview, one focus group with all four participants, occurred on-line once all secondary interviews had completed (Appendix F). This group interview held three particular objectives. First, I wanted to hear from participants about their experiences of listening to their respondents. Second, I wanted to offer and receive feedback on the emerging themes and theory from the initial interviews and data. Third, I wanted to facilitate a discussion about what environmental communication programs could/would be like if listening was more widely accepted and expected. In this, recommendations for environmental communication programs about listening were also elicited.

Warm up question: "what stands out?".

Upon agreement to participate in this study, I sent participants a list of ten questions generated by the International Listening Association to help individuals consider whether they are listening or not (Appendix G). I asked participants to read through the list and notice what resonates with them when it comes to listening, including attractions, aversions, things they have experienced or tend to do themselves when in dialogue with someone else. Upon reflection, I saw my teacher-self shining through with this activity, in that in a teacher's lesson plan, we might call this a 'set' or 'opener' to get students thinking about the topic they are being asked to engage. I saw this activity as a sort of warm-up to discussion as well as a surface level preview into how these communicators have considered listening.

The interview questions: phase 1.

During the one-to-one interviews, I invited participants to recall and share an experience of a time when they found themselves in a conversation of tension or conflict with another person, but somehow instead of arguing, defending, or tuning out, they were able to really, truly listen. The second question, similarly, asked participants to recall and share an experience when

they felt really, deeply listened to – where they felt as though the listener gave them undivided focus through listening. Both of these initial questions are consistent with the goals of AI research, which seek to elicit the "positive core" of an issue and invite participants to recall heightened experiences (Reed, 2006, p. 29). Of course, within these two opening questions, I probed more deeply into certain comments or pauses with follow-up questions, trying to elucidate and understand what was beneath these moments or comments and, as mentioned above, practice the constructivist value of co-creating information. The purpose of beginning the interview with these two questions was to gauge whether participants even had experiences to reflect on, specifically through a positive lens. How participants responded to these initial questions both exposed and provoked deeper conversation around these two themes of listening and being listened to.

The third and fourth questions asked participants, Who are you as a listener? and, Where or from whom have you learned to listen? Knowing that each participant had taken graduate level courses in environmental education and communication and that my overarching question was trying to understand the experience of environmental communicators and educators listening across difference, I was keen to understand how each participant would both describe themselves as well as attribute their listening skills. Charmaz (2006) reiterates the importance of grounded theory research focusing on trying to elicit reflection in participants. Asking about their own listening identity and where or how they learned to listen encouraged participants to consider their life experiences and the major influences of learning to listen.

The concluding question invited participants to consider what it would be like if environmental communication programs had the topic of listening as a more prominent focus in the curricula. Concluding questions, as Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros (2003) suggest, should

encourage participants to envision future possibilities that reflect best possible outcomes. In

some ways, this line of questioning sought to focus attention and intention upon what could be,

and provided participants with the opportunity to both reflect upon as well as critically consider

ways that environmental communication – both through academic programs, as well as personal

vocational endeavors – might continue to flourish. This line of questioning facilitated the

identification of a wide spectrum of responses, from helpful and positive experiences to the more

challenging or critical reflections. The interview timing ranged from one hour and 18 minutes to

two hours and 23 minutes. A list of the consistent and guided questions can be found in

Appendix D.

The interview questions: phase 2.

Once initial interviews had concluded, I stopped the recording and briefed participants on

the format and details of the interview they would be facilitating with an environmental

communicator of their choosing. Two of the four participants asked if it was critical that they

interview someone from within the MAEEC program, as originally proposed. Both participants

felt, in their own way, that they had a colleague who met the criteria of being an environmental

communicator and whom they were genuinely interested to hear from. They were willing to

interview another MAEEC student, but felt far more excited, curious, and engaged around asking

their colleagues instead. Through dialogue, we decided that if they intended to interview

someone who meets the same inclusion criteria, with the exception of being a former or current

MAEEC student that would suffice. The primary focus of these second interviews after all, was

not to harvest data through transcription and coding, but to provide an experience of listening

and highlight listening as "speech's passive subordinate, its unequal partner" in the realm of

environmental communication (Stenberg, 2011, pp. 251-252). Thus, two participants interviewed

MAEEC alumni, one participant interviewed a friend and colleague who is active in the world of

environmental thought and communication, and the fourth participant interviewed a friend and

colleague who has worked in leadership within a national level environmental organization. Each

participant was given the same list of four questions I had asked them, but reminded them that

the major focus was to dialogue about the role of listening and being listened to, to notice

themselves as a listener, and to record a few written, typed, or verbal notes following the

interview about *what you heard* and, *what it was like to listen*.

      I did not transcribe these interviews as each participant sent me a brief summary of their

recorded thoughts and memoirs. I did use these written reflections, however, as a type of

prototype in the initial comparison between the emerging theory and what these environmental

communicators reflected about listening. Participants had their interviewees read an information

write-up and then sign and submit a consent form (Appendix C). They were instructed not to

record their interview.

      Throughout the process of interviewing, then waiting for participants to conduct their

own interviews, I transcribed, coded, categorized and studied the data from the one-to-one

interviews for emerging themes and theories and used these emerging themes as a central point

of dialogue with participants in the final group interview.

      The interview questions: phase 3.

      The final interview was in a focus group between all four participants and myself.

Following introductions, I identified the purpose of our 2 – 3 hour meeting and reviewed their

role, rights, and responsibilities as research participants (Appendix F). I then invited each

member to consider entering a space of dialogue. As Bach (2005) explains, "In the presence of

dialogue, we operate more intuitively, reaching for meaning. It is a more holistic process than

discussion, which leads most often to each person trying to "win" his or her position" (p. 373).

She goes on to explain how dialogue can lead to collective thinking, which builds common

understanding, common learning, and, if "spawned from experiences of unstructured

conversation, could lead to collective action" that reflects core values of a group (p. 373). Thus,

the tone of the focus group interview was collaborative, light, and rich, and despite being in our

own homes spread between two provinces, it also felt intimate.

To begin our group interview I invited participants to dialogue around three foci: The

first was, *Between your conversation with a participant of your choosing and our initial*

interview together, is there something that's arisen and/or lingered that you'd really like to

underscore or emphasize? Something that's pertinent about the experiences of listening or being

listened to? When listening is on the forefront of one's mind, how does that impact your ability to

actually listen?

The second focus for dialogue provided the opportunity for me to share an unpolished

version of the emerging theory and themes coming from the data. Instead of using the term

'initial emerging theories' during the interviews however, I referred to them as "major focuses."

This language was chosen because I wanted to present the data as incomplete and elicit feedback,

and this slight shift from "theory" to "focus" seemed less conclusive and more inviting for

constructive dialogue. For the purpose of this paper, however, I will refer to the list I presented to

the participants as "emerging theory" and will refer to the conclusive list as "theory." I presented

the emerging theory to participants, which involved displaying Table (1) on the screen, reading

the content aloud, and then inviting participants to consider and then identify: *what stands out?*

what resonates or sounds familiar? what is missing? what feels un/true? The majority of the

focus group timeline was allotted to this section.

I also shared the emerging theory with my supervisor. Both the meeting with Dr. Kelsey and the final focus group interview addressed reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of the emerging results and processes.

Finally, as I brought this focus group to a close, I framed my final question with a gaze to envisioning future programs with environmental communicators:

> *What would you like to see for environmental communication programs in regards to listening? What could programs be like if there was a greater emphasis placed on the role of listening in communication?*

In total, the focus group interview lasted one hour and 48 minutes. The three interviews were conducted over the course of approximately eight weeks.

Applying Grounded Theory to Analyze Data

Grounded Theory Method requires an open and iterative process of interviewing participants, conducting an initial analysis of the findings after an interview, and then returning to the field to interview another participant. I used a bottom-up coding scheme to analyze the data, starting with dozens of simple codes and eventually creating higher codes. After my interviews wrapped-up, I took approximately 10 – 15 minutes for each interview to record my initial thoughts in my journal. I asked myself, "what did I just hear?" and then recorded details by hand. Some of these details included what I heard, how I was feeling, and what I sensed from the conversation. After transcribing interviews digitally, I let the words sit on the page for a couple of days. While some GTM scholars advocate for immersing oneself in the data as soon as possible, I found that by letting the words sit for a couple of days, I was able to breathe and liked to imagine the data itself breathing too. When I approached the data a second time, I felt refreshed, open-minded, and ready to conduct line-by-line coding. Holton (2007) says this

approach of leaving time for ideas to sink in minimizes the omittance of important categories (Urquhart, 2013).

Coding text involves "attaching a conceptual label to a piece of data" (Urquhart, 2013, p. 8). Charmaz (2006) explains how line-by-line coding frees a researcher from becoming so immersed in a participant's story that one fails to look at the data through a critical and analytical lens. Analytic coding, explains Urquhart (2013), involves going beyond simply summarizing and stating observations like descriptive codes do, sometimes based on *preconceived* categories or codes (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). Instead, analytic codes help the researcher begin theorizing what might be happening beyond 'the obvious' and allows the researcher to *create* and *construct* the codes by defining "what we see in the data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). In my initial open coding, I did not stop after paragraphs, speakers, or natural breaks. Line-by-line, I tried to apply analytic codes more than descriptive. I tried to let the data speak to me without over thinking it, by preserving actions, maintaining an open mind, and moving fairly quickly through the data. I even posted initial grounded theory wisdom above my workspace: *study my emerging data, stay close to my data.* By coding, then unpacking these terms, I was able to understand implicating meanings, as well as effectively compare terms with other participants and emerging categories.

One predetermined category of codes that I did integrate and apply to my coding scheme was *in vivo* codes. These codes are either "…terms everyone 'knows' that flag condensed but significant meanings; a participant's innovative term that captures meanings or experience; or, insider shorthand terms specific to a particular group that reflect their perspective" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55). I hadn't intended to use in vivo codes to begin, but began to find examples of these terms within the first minutes of the first interview.

Following the open coding, I moved into selective coding by using subcategories to help me. Selective coding is the process by which one synthesizes their codes into major categories that are important to one's research question (Urquhart, 2013). While earlier versions of grounded theory methods suggests that selective coding involves trying to code around a 'core variable', many researchers have found that jump to be too profound given the bottom-up approach to initial open coding. Instead, subcategories, suggested by Urquhart (2013), helped me with the grouping process. In this stage, I found specific themes related to my research question that were emerging, and I was eventually able to see and further construct focused categories. Charmaz (2006) describes this second major phase in coding as *focused* coding. These codes are more selective than the initial codes and require a researcher to make decisions about which initial codes "make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely" (p. 57). I found it challenging however to move through linearly. Instead of moving from initial coding to selective, then focused coding, I found myself returning to earlier transcripts and interviews to explore concepts that had initially been over looked.

Once I had constructed focused categories, I moved into my next major stage, theoretical coding. This phase involved a rather sophisticated level of coding that "uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). "Theoretical codes," explains Charmaz (2006), "specify possible relationships between categories you have developed in your focused coding" (p. 63). This process allowed me to better pinpoint the most prominent categories, later becoming my major themes and theory pertaining to my research question and findings.

Journal Reflections from the Yukon

In September 2016, I moved north to Whitehorse, YK. I felt excited to take my questions and readings about environmental communication to a place that felt quieter than the business of life in Calgary, AB. At that point, I hadn't yet settled on a specific research question or project around listening, but felt compelled to head north as part of the process of figuring 'it' out. I didn't realize the significance of this decision at the forefront of this sabbatical year, but it proved to be a transformative decision in hindsight.

I have had moments throughout my life where learning to listen has been explicitly supported through unique learning experiences, most notably, in 2011 when I participated in a ten-month course being offered by a contemplative community in Calgary. This is where I first learned about the practice of sitting in silence. This involved sitting each day, meditatively, so that my own thoughts might quiet. I naively thought I might audibly hear my own inner wisdom or even the voice of God, as some have claimed. What I heard instead, was nothing. And it was in a year of hearing nothing, but still feeling committed to listening, that I learned the importance of communication both with myself and what/whoever is beyond me.

While this personal daily practice slowly dissipated over the next five years as life's tasks picked up, I found myself reclaiming this practice when I moved up north in 2016. In part, this practice resurfaced as I had time and space again in my life. In part, it surfaced as I was uncomfortable with the level of public discourse around environmental issues, and felt curious about what it would mean to orchestrate communication so that listening held a more prominent role. From this decision came two sets of records that I have used in this thesis. The first, my digital journal entries from September, 2016 – February, 2017, reflect steep learning about academic and contemplative approaches to listening. The second, my hand written journal entries

from spring and summer, 2017, reveal my own reflections on what it is like to sit and listen as a

contemplative practice. While these two journals offered insights for the emerging grounded

theory, I did not code, analyze or read the journal entries until after the group interview had

closed. I selected this route that I might use my own autoethnographic reflections as a type of

confirmation of what I was hearing (or not!) from the participants instead of original content for

the emerging theory.

          Journal entries, part 1: fall and winter.

          Most days, I would sit for a couple of hours by our wood burning stove with a cup of tea,

read someone's work on contemplative living, environmental challenges, communication,

philosophy, or sift through the theses of other MAEEC students. Then, I would log onto my

computer and type. Often, segments or captions from what I'd just read would be the fuel for my

entry. I would regularly include a quotation, a new term or concept, and then write my reflection

about what that author was saying. These journal entries, from September 2016 through February

2017 supported the refinement and later emergence of my thesis question. They also helped me

get closer to the topic I was studying. As author of the foreword, Parker Palmer writes, "At the

heart of contemplation is the same quality that is at the heart of all great scholarship: profound

attentiveness to the phenomena that one is trying to understand" (Barbezat and Bush, 2013, p.

10). I did not have Palmer's words at the time, but through these initial journal entries, I began to

realize that instead of reading and reflecting on the words of others about communication,

discourse, and listening, that I would benefit from practicing listening and place-sitting on my

own; another way of getting closer to the topic I was studying.

Journal entries, part 2: spring and summer.

As spring arrived and the daylight began to grow longer, I would head out my backdoor several times each week and I would walk in the forest. It wasn't until I started sitting and writing, as part of these walks, that I started to reengage the skill and art of listening. In trying to understand listening from an academic perspective, I practiced listening to an intuitive pull that lead me to sit each time on the same sunny slope, about a nine minute walk from my home. The slope was gentle and exposed, although aspen trees, pines, and a variety of native shrubs lined the escarpment around me. An old pine tree, who I named Crooked Tree, quickly became my resting spot, and for weeks I perched at the base of their trunk, listening, writing, sleeping, speaking.

The journal entries that emerged from my time in the forest became my third data set. They reveal less about reflecting on the work of others, and more about the challenges and realities of learning to listen. In a journal entry from April 9th, 2017 I wrote: "Listen. Listen. Listen….to whatever you can out here: wind, crows, ravens, song birds, drips of melting snow….". I was highly driven to listen even though I didn't really know what/who/why I was listening beyond feeling a conviction that environmental communicators, like myself, had something to learn from this skill and art.

Barbezat and Bush (2013) write about placing:

…the student in the center of his or her learning so that the student can connect his or her inner world to the outer world. Through this connection, teaching and learning is transformed into something personally meaningful yet connected to the world. (p. 32)

While I didn't realize, at the time, how important my personal journal entries would be to this project, I can see now how critical those quiet days of wandering, listening, and writing were to my findings, outlined in the following chapter.

Trustworthiness and Integrity

      Credibility.

Trustworthiness and integrity of this study was built upon the framework suggested by

Shenton (2004), based on Guba's Four Aspects of Trustworthiness. *Credibility* is a major factor

in ensuring trustworthiness as it seeks to illuminate whether the researcher has actually addressed

what was intended. Shenton (2004) offers fourteen considerations to ensure credibility is met. I

touch on most of these considerations by taking the actions described in the following

paragraphs, where I have italicized Shenton's terminology.

      I worked closely with my thesis supervisor to ensure my *qualitative research methods*

were specific and appropriate for the nature and selection of my research. *Regular meetings* with

my supervisor following participant interviews supported the refining of my course of actions, as

well as promoted detection of personal bias I was not aware of. As I was familiar with the culture

I studied – researching peers who have gone through the same graduate program I have – there

was an established *level of trust* prior to interviews. Recruitment methods also provided a level

of trust for participants as I shared who I am, how I intended to conduct this research, and what I

was seeking to study. I applied *tact to promote honesty* in participants by emphasizing there was

no 'right or wrong' answer and that frankness was encouraged. I reminded participants that all

information would remain confidential and they were free to withdraw their interview and

participation from the study. *Iterative questioning* led me to rephrase questions and return to

contradictory messages that helped me probe for greater articulation of details as well as detect

discrepancies in participant responses. Finally, I returned to the literature on listening as a means

for conducting an even deeper *examination of research findings* to check either for congruency,

or a void of congruency. While I was unable to find a similar study, I confirmed themes between

the literature and what participants had shared about experiences of listening, where I could. I

also presented emerging theories to participants in a focus group interview to listen to how the

emerging theories 'measured up' to their own experiences of listening and being listened to. I

used this focus group interview as a type of "check-in" to confirm and clarify if I was indeed

reflecting back to participants what they had shared with me during interviews. There were

challenges involved in this process due to the particularities of studying the components of

specific participant experiences. However, the four participants, in a way, became a credibility

check to ensure the data reflected their experiences.

Transferability.

Shenton (2004) emphasizes the importance of clearly identifying the boundaries of the

study, given the unique contextual factors of qualitative research. These boundaries include

detailed accounts of who is participating (organizations), participant inclusion criteria, the

number of participants involved in the study, and a clear overview of data collection methods,

particularly "number and length of the data collection sessions" and "the time period over which

the data were collected" (p. 70). Including these details would provide different research projects

with information to conduct similar research in different settings.

Dependability.

The choice to employ individual interviews (phase 1) followed by a focus group

interview (phase 3) with the same research participants is considered an "overlapping method"

that supports dependability (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). The process of these interviews (including a

second phase of interviews as well) was clearly documented in detail. Should a different

researcher wish to replicate this study, I believe the in-depth coverage of my process would make

that possible. I also include a section towards the end of my thesis where I reflect on the

effectiveness of the project and the process or, "process of inquiry undertaken" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). This further enables readers to understand the effectiveness of my chosen methods.

Confirmability.

One way I ensured confirmability was through my open and ongoing recognition of my unique role as researcher and participant. I admitted my predispositions as researcher and used personal reflections to frame my research questions. I thoroughly explain my choice to approach the research using Constructivist Grounded Theory methodologies and an Appreciative Inquiry lens. In addition, I guided readers through my detailed process by providing an evolution of the emerging grounded theory, supported by participant quotations.

Being both an insider and an outsider.

I acknowledge I am connected to my research through a few lenses and that there are both limitations and benefits of studying a program of which I am part of. Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, and Mattis (2007) note that in qualitative research, "One need not be either an insider or an outsider; one may be both an insider and an outsider" (p. 300). I see myself in this way, both an insider – a MAEEC student, an environmental communicator, someone who cares about listening – as well as an outsider – a researcher, a facilitator of dialogue, an administrator. I hope that my efforts to communicate my findings in a way that is relatable for environmental educators and communicators, as well as to environmental education and communication programs, are *transferable* and support the *confirmability* of this project. I demonstrate that my findings have applicability in contexts beyond the sample of participants I interviewed.

Limitations

The breadth and size of the study sample is a limitation of this work. I interviewed four graduate students from the program, but suspect that a larger sample could have filled in the data

more wholly. A larger sample could have also reached across more cohorts in the program than the three I represent with my participants.

Ethical Considerations

This study obtained permission and approval from the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Boards. I outlined potential conflicts of interest, inclusion and exclusion criteria, assessment of risks and benefits, privacy protection, recruitment and consent procedures, comments on data management and data dissemination, and a clear description of how participants can indicate their withdrawal from the study (TCPS 2: *Panel on Research Ethics*). I was not working with or seeking vulnerable persons as participants. The risks associated to working with human participants were minimal, however, I included emotional grievances as a result of in-depth discussions about topics of passion, interest, concern and motivation as potential, though slight, risks. Of course, the welfare of participants was the major concern in the production of data and remained on the forefront of priorities throughout interviews, data analysis, and writing this document. Participants indicated in writing that they understood the purpose of the research I was conducting, and were reminded of their freedom to withdraw from the study.

Chapter 4: Findings and Initial Discussion

Sometimes, people just need to be listened to before they can experience a change of heart.

(Participant RR, February 2019)

*When we talk about communication, we think about **talking** [emphasized], we don't think about listening* [audible laughter]*...we think about getting our message across.*

(Participant SS, February 2019)

I would like to know that, [pause] that communication is able to create social change.

(Participant TT, February 2019)

That's the challenging piece: we need an education around helping us be better listeners.

(Participant QQ, February 2019)

Overview

I discovered several important themes about the role of listening in environmental communication by virtue of listening. This chapter explores the findings from the interviews with the four MAEEC participants, supported by themes that emerged from my own autoethnographic journal reflections.

I struggled to sew the findings into a cohesive chapter because of the circuitous nature of the process; a winding journey of constant comparison between data sets, literature, and my own personal journals and observations over three years. Some of my discussion is presented in this chapter given this winding process. I needed to intersperse findings with discussion to support readers in understanding my process and how initial discussions lead to subsequent stages of

research. I use Chapter 5 to discuss final contributions of 'what matters most' from this entire study.

I have structured this chapter in a way that allows the reader to see the progression of how my grounded theory emerged. To do this, I have organized my findings in the following sequence: In section (1), I present *draft 1 of the theory*, followed by a discussion about how I arrived at these findings. The first draft was the original 'early-on' theory that emerged from one-to-one interviews with the four participants. In section (2), I present the *second draft of the theory*, which reflects changes that emerged from the focus-group interview dialogue, where participants evaluated and conversed over the first draft of the original theory. Then, in section (3), I discuss the parallels and further concepts that developed through reviewing my own journal entries during my listening sabbatical in the Yukon. Finally, in section (4), I present a final, synthesized grounded theory that reflects my learning over the past three years, followed by a discussion in chapter 5.

The findings include lengthy participant quotations, lingering questions, gentle nuances and realizations about environmental communicators and listening grounded in the data. I hope that by painting a picture of the evolution of this grounded theory, readers can both understand my findings, as well as draw some of their own conclusions about listening experiences of environmental communicators.

Invitation to the Reader

There are two approaches a reader can take to interpret the findings in this chapter. On one level, you can gain insight into the listening experiences of four environmental communicators by evaluating what was presented, and attaching to or detaching from whatever seems important or applicable to your own story and current understandings. This is an approach

to listening that Stenberg (2011) considers 'hunting', where the reader or listener is searching for particular ideas that are "seized, appropriated, and discarded according to a predetermined agenda" (p. 252).

Alternatively, on another, perhaps deeper level, one can authentically listen to the findings and discussion that follows. To do this, you might begin by taking a step back from the lengthy quotations, the grounded theory, my wordy explanations, and perhaps even your academic hat to make space for the words just to be. This will require awareness, presence, and self-reflexivity, especially as ideas or perspectives brush up against your own habits of thought and silos of experience. Notice when this happens, but not as a tool for dismissing the evidence, theory or discussion. Rather, this is an invitation to practice that *deep* kind of *profound* and *authentic* listening that participants spoke of when they referred to listening as "a gift" (Participants QQ, RR, SS, & TT). Stenberg (2011) refers to this type of listening as 'cultivating', which "requires us to nurture, tend to, and safely keep that which we engage" (p. 252). It is this second tier of understanding, placing ourselves as authentic listeners and readers, that I humbly invite you to engage in the following text.

Interviews with Environmental Communicators

The interviews provided rich descriptions, articulate narratives, and ample opportunity to observe *listening* in context. Each participant, in valuable and unique ways, offered insights into my primary research question, which sought to hear from environmental educators and communicators from the MAEEC program. I desired to learn about their experiences of listening and being listened to, particularly within situations when difference, dissonance, or instances of conflict were present.

To protect the confidentiality of participants and honor my word, I have assigned

pseudonyms to each participant: QQ, TT, RR, and SS. I also use non-gendered pronouns when

referring to participants, as I believe neither sex nor gender is of critical importance to my

findings, and using specific pronouns such as he or she, his or hers could compromise

confidentiality. These pronouns include: s/he, them, theirs, and they (even when referring to a

singular person). Following the interview process, I reached out to each participant to inquire

about how they would like to be referred to in the data. These details noted above, such as age

range, gender, political views, while still fairly open, have been included with participant

permission.

As mentioned, I have used several illustrative quotes to support the theory, allowing the

data to offer insights into the major foci and tones of the theory. Several of the quotations are

lengthy, and I grappled with whether I should synthesize the data into categorized tables and

charts. However, true to the constructivist and co-creative lens through which I worked, with a

specific focus on language, discourse, and trying to understand, I chose to include these selected

quotes that both are the data, while also filling out the data – light is shed on my research

question through the actual language of those to whom I listened. I invite readers to let these

quotations offer insight into the research.

Section One: Findings and Theory Constructed from One-to-one Interviews

      Getting there: the process of generating a first draft of the theory.

To arrive at the first draft of my grounded theory, presented below, I grouped the codes I

had generated from my one-to-one interviews into categories, which allowed me to eventually

see theoretical connections between categories. I used these connections to create an initial

emerging theory. I eventually offered this emerging theory to participants in a focus group

interview to elicit feedback.

Grounded theory, draft one.

Table 1. Draft 1, Grounded Theory based on One-to-One Interviews

(1) Being a strong listener involves:
   i.   A level of self-awareness
  ii.   Having had the opportunity to learn to listen
 iii.   Holding a respect for the person before the outcome and knowing that the person you are listening to must go through their own process
 iv.   Having a purpose for listening

(2) Listening is not part of the mandate for environmental communicators or communication *in general*.
(3) The experience of being listened to is profound.

Arriving at each of the major foci.

I will now illuminate each of the findings, or foci from my above theory. I begin each

subsection by sharing the focus, and then outlining some of the pertinent data that led me to this

realization. I include participant quotations along with my analysis. Dwelling deeply and

lingering in the words of my participants was the only way I was able to truly illuminate each of

the following foci, which became the first draft of my grounded theory. As I will outline later, it

was through a focus group conversation with these same participants, which helped me to

refocus and revise the initial theory noted above (Table 1).

Major focus (1i): Being a strong listener involves a level of self-awareness.

Taking a step back, checking-in with oneself, returning to the conversation.

In the four one-to-one interviews, each participant – in their own way – spoke of the

hypothetical importance of being able to take a step back from dissonance discourse to check-in

with him or herself. I found *hypothetical* to be an important component of this behavior, as each

participant reflected on the challenge of actually taking that step, especially when the

conversation is tense, or when the conversation is "boring," or the person has been "talking and

talking and talking." As my first question invited participants to share accounts of when they felt

they were exceptional listeners and able to stay in the conversation despite tension, each member

contrarily yet naturally reflected on experiences when listening was extremely difficult or absent.

Checking-in with themselves, however, if they had the awareness and energy to do so, seemed to

be one emerging strategy for "staying with" the conversation when it gets difficult. QQ, for

example, painted a picture of how s/he struggles as a listener, and yet, demonstrates great

awareness around this perception:

> I think where I fall down as a listener is...I think I can get distracted sometimes. Either
> by something that I'm thinking about, like a certain whatever, maybe it's a certain theory
> or maybe it's something someone else said. So, I'm not listening but maybe I'm just half
> listening at times. And then you kind of catch yourself like "oh my train of thought
> started to go off on a different tangent." And then sort of, it's almost like meditation like
> bringing yourself back, constantly bringing yourself back to the present and what they are
> saying and not trying to analyze while you are listening.

Checking-in with oneself and bringing oneself back to the conversation when thoughts

drift or tangents arise is an important, yet elusive, contribution to understanding listening. I say

elusive because understanding consciousness and conscious experiences including awareness of

self is ambiguous and can be difficult to understand (Chalmers, 1996). However, for the

purposes of this paper and because each participant spoke, in their own way, about having the

skills to know that reflection, introspection, and awareness of self holds an important role in

listening, I include it in my findings.

The skill of self-awareness requires mentorship and modeling to understand the how, what and why it is indeed so important (Barbezat and Bush, 2013). "Not trying to analyze while you are listening," as participant QQ spoke of, could be a skill sharpened through practices, which develop awareness.

Self-awareness includes knowing who you are as a listener.

Each participant intuitively made a comparison between their own capacity to listen and the ability that was demonstrated by the person they felt epitomized excellent listening. This was demonstrated by the fact that three participants paired what they thought of themselves as listeners, with what they perceived they 'need to' work on in order to become effective listeners. TT expressed:

> I would say my quality of listening varies…I'm a slow processor of information that I'm listening to so sometimes it's not until after a conversation that I'm like oh, okay this is what they meant…like, sometimes I'm busy just gathering the information and not necessarily processing in the moment. But, if I am processing in the moment and the amount of information I'm gathering is reduced…it's more knee jerk right like my reactions and my processing and my understanding of what I'm hearing. Yeah and a lot of that depends on the relationships that I have and the time constraints you know of what's going on, how confident I am and you know if you go back to those questions like am I willing to change my opinion.

SS shared their listening style by synthesizing their thoughts into a list, stating:

> When I listen, I tend to do one or more of a couple of things:
> - I wait to talk
> - I wait to help
> - I wait for bias confirmation of my own ideas
> - I listen to make sense of something
> - I listen so that the speaker can be heard, but it doesn't always influence me
> - I listen for a story [makes a reference to their profession]

Listening is a generous gesture. I'm not that good at it.

QQ was similarly reflective of his/her own practice when s/he shared:

Well, I think I'm a pretty good listener. I am pretty empathetic to other people. I am quite accepting of a lot of different types of people. And I think that helps me be a good listener because I think it's so easy to get caught up in stereotypes about, oh this kind of person is that way and that kind of person is this other way. And I have this part of myself that's kind of like well, you know what, people are just people. Like we have these different sorts of overlays, I guess, cultural or gender or whatever they are. But, yeah, the older I get I'm kind of like oh people are more the same than they are different. So, I think that that helps me be a good listener. I think I can put people at ease because I don't come across as really kind of aggressive or affrontive. I don't always challenge people on their opinions. If I do want to challenge them I think I'll, which maybe isn't always a good thing…but it probably leads to being a good listener, I will go about challenging them in kind of like a circuitous, more laid-back, questioning way. So, if I feel like there's gap and their opinions or understanding on something that differ from mine, I think I would be more likely to ask more questions than I would be to interrupt or force my ideas onto them.

QQ's reflection offered important insight into being a listener. They reflected on interpersonal traits which lead them to be "empathetic", "accepting", "more likely to ask questions than…interrupt or…force ideas" and understanding that "people are more the same than they are different." Their way of relating to others made them "a pretty good listener." I recall hearing him/her share this, and then again as I reviewed their transcripts, I felt appreciative of their posture towards others. Instead of fixating on the words leaving people's mouths, participant QQ reported holding a view of people as people, and allowed disagreements to be a place for questioning more than being "aggressive" or "affrontive."

Listening is a complex, metacognitive skill.

The above responses highlight another interesting finding in the data; listening is an extremely complex skill. There are physiological, sociological, emotional, relational and psychological factors present during a listening interaction. Listening is not a switch that can be turned on or off. Instead, listening requires opportunities to learn, try, practice, and reflect upon one's own strengths as a listener. This finding highlights the value of meta-listening; that is, listening to one's own listening. This skill seemed to enable participants to be aware of times when they were 'zoning' or 'tuning' out or having a 'knee jerk reaction' to what was being spoken. QQ called for "bringing yourself back to the present" when this happens. Knowing oneself as a listener, and knowing how to listen to one's listening, seemed to be important aspect of developing skills of listening.

Major focus (1ii): Strong listeners have had opportunities to learn to listen.

Learning to listen at various stages.

One of the questions that I asked participants was where or from whom had they learned to listen. In attempts to understand the listening experiences of these participants, I was curious to hear about how or from whom they attributed their skills and awareness of listening. SS and QQ attributed their learning to listen from family. RR also attributed their learning to family, as well as to early adult learning experiences. Only participant TT attributed their learning to listen from their graduate studies in communication.

Responding to this question seemed to invite participants to return to a place of memory. For two participants, there was audible emotion in their voice as they reflected. One of these participants apologized for the tears, saying, "that question really caught me off guard…I like it,

but didn't see it coming. It takes me back to my childhood…I haven't really thought about it."

Participant SS went on to articulate:

> I learned from my mother…[pause….discernable emotion]. I think because at some point
> early in my life, I got to be heard and this instilled an awareness of listening. I also
> process auditorily, which has been both a blessing and a curse. I am, as I mentioned,
> often listening to make sense or confirm bias or listening for a story, but sometimes
> missing things as well. I also think I learned to listen because I inherited it, genetics….or
> maybe just luck! [laughs]. But again, my mother and family of origin showed empathy,
> open-mindedness, and the value and importance of honesty and so this somehow
> transferred in my young mind to listening.

Participant RR also identified their parent's role in learning to listen:

> I think from my parents. I was going to say my Mom, but I think my Dad is a listener too.
> He is probably more. There's something different. My Mom listens and asks a lot of
> questions that bring out more of what you're trying to say, which really results in me
> feeling heard. My Dad listens and doesn't say as much but it's kind of like with my
> partner that I, you know, he'll say a few things sometimes later on that all that will make
> me realize oh, he really was listening or he's thinking about this.

Participant QQ compared memories of each of their parents:

> Well…let me say…it probably feels like my mom and my grandma were both really
> good listeners. And so having those people in my life, I think I probably immediately
> picked it up from them as a child. So, and strangely enough, my father was not, I should
> say *is* [emphasized] not a good listener at all. Like he's definitely not skilled in that area.
> So, I know what it's like not to be listened to, not in any kind of like…negative intentions
> or anything. But he just has a difficult time listening and he can be pretty assertive and
> aggressive and, yeah, he can put you on edge. So, yeah, I've kind of had both sides.

The participants who connected their listening skills to childhood didn't speak of overt

educational moments, but rather reflected on the significance of "being listened to," "[getting]

heard," having a parent who "didn't listen" or one who "listens and asks a lot of questions that

bring out more of what you're trying to say, which really results in…feeling heard." While this topic could be another research project in and of itself, the suggested impact of feeling heard (or not!) and the importance of having someone who models empathy, asks questions, and listens beyond words is noteworthy.

Attributing early childhood experiences to the shaping of ones own approach to and understanding of listening is in-line with some of the research of Louise Chawla, who studied the significance of early life experiences. Chawla (1998) conducted a review of the research on sources of environmental sensitivity in adults by revisiting and summarizing the findings of several scholars who studied significant sources of environmental concern and action in adults. While the comparative and summative review does not explore listening or communication per se, several of the studies Chawla reviews were based on interviews with post-secondary students in environmental programs. In terms of attributable sources for interest in environmental issues, each survey, questionnaire and in-depth interview highlighted the significant influence of family and role models on research participants as children in developing a deep sense of care, concern and action for the environment. While this does not equate to skills of listening, it does highlight how influential family and role models for children can be in shaping particular skills and areas for action later in life.

Understanding the value of listening through explicit instruction.

Not all of the important listening experiences happened for participants during childhood. RR shared:

> …I did some peer coaching training or something when I was in high school. And I
> remember learning a bit more about [listening]. And then we did some work within a
> workshop on nonviolent communication. And I think that was helpful in learning about

how to listen beyond what the people were saying like asking those questions that sometimes you have to get that what's going on.

Participant TT identified where they learned to listen without the same level of nostalgic pause that the other participants had taken. This is a lengthy excerpt, but the quality of their reflection speaks to several dimensions of listening and learning to listen. Their response also offers a different perspective of how and where an environmental communicator might acquire and attribute their skills as a listener:

> I think my course work in the main [MAEEC] program is, is what I really attribute that to. Before I started there [RRU], I kind of came like came to this self mantra like no matter what I believe it wouldn't be hard to find a majority somewhere…then I went into Bob's worldview class of course and like, and someone from the other cohort said "Bob's going to come into your world and fuck it up and then he's going to leave." And…I thought that was a bad thing, but as I sat through his stuff I started to realize that the world is so much more complex you know than my worldview and my understanding of things.

> Then I started to really feel the need to listen and to be more open to change. I remember having a debate in one of Bob's classes and it was about being open to other ideas and really listen to other ideas and we were talking about how, no matter what other idea is presented, how we should be open to that and he came like down to a level like racism, right like if you want to have a conversation with someone, you need to be like willing to listen and learn from them you know and understand them. Even though I'm in my mind, like there's no way from crossing over that line, right.

> Just there's an importance and just like listening for valid points and asking, like why are they valid? And maybe judge that stuff later but…so that stands out to me as a time and that the idea of listening really became important and listening to everyone. Putting that in practice is really difficult for me and I try and I'm more deliberate about it than I was before…And…that whole period of my life is really where listening kind of really started standing apart. But, it's kind of sad like don't really learn the importance of listening until I'm in my late 30's…

Listening requires a willingness and openness to hearing.

In the previous excerpt from participant TT, a professor instructed, modeled, and supported the student's capacity to listen to radically different perspectives. This notable learning was also paired with the participant's *willingness* to be challenged in this way. This is a difference between learning to listen through implicit, intentional or passive modeling in childhood, and that of more direct listening instruction, often as a youth or adult. Learning to listen as an adult requires a conscious willingness and an openness to be challenged around listening, especially to people of differing worldviews.

The benefits of learning to listen are twofold.

Though some of the shared experiences were from childhood and others were from later in participant's lives, a common thread amongst significant moments of being listened to was the shift which occurred in the person as they were being listened to. Although seemingly difficult to articulate, participants described an emotion of 'softening' or 'opening', described as "putting down my guard," "opening up," "creating openness within me," or "feeling at ease" which occurred when they felt genuinely listened to. The listener was either someone whom they already greatly valued, like a parent, or someone who gained their respect through listening, as expressed by participant TT in his/her adult learning experience. It seems to me that learning to listen opens one to listening and to understanding the openness that comes through the safety and significance of being listened to.

Listening skills learned through the MAEEC program.

The interview processes illuminated some of the preparatory skills that equipped participants to be listeners in the environmental communication field that were directly attributed to studying within the MAEEC program. Participant QQ spoke of learning about "an

environmental spectrum that everyone is on." They suggested that this understanding, credited to

the work of former MAEEC professor Mitchell Thomashow (1995; 2001), helped them develop

the skill of "taking a step back" instead of a former strategy aimed at changing one's behavior –

a communication tool the participant no longer identified with. Participant TT spoke of a specific

MAEEC class that helped them question their worldviews and learn to listen to the worldviews

of others, including those with radically different perspectives. Three participants spoke about

the learning that occurred directly as a result of using interviews as their qualitative research

method. The mandate of being a listener without any agenda except to hear what their

respondents were saying provided "life skills," in terms of learning "the power of listening," as

participant RR phrased it.

> ***Major focus (1iii): Being a strong listener involves holding a level of respect for the***
> ***person before the outcome and knowing that the person you are listening to must go through***
> ***his or her own process.***

> *Recognizing the person and the process matter and supports strong listening.*

Participants offered reflections from experiences when they demonstrated exceptional

listening, even when difference or conflict was present. The interviews illuminated experiences

where participants recognized the 'person' and 'process' as they were instead of racing to focus

on small details within the dialogue. Holding respect for the person and their process contributed

to being an "authentic" listener, an attribute spoken of with high regard by three different

participants. Jenlink and Banathy (2005) explain:

> each participant regards the "other" as the person he is, becoming aware of the "other"
> and that s/he is different from the person. In such relation through dialogue, one accepts
> the "other" setting aside the need to sway by opinion or judge the "other" so as to form a
> reciprocal relation that is genuine on both an individual and collective level." (p. 6)

When listening becomes solely about hunting for ideas, it is as if one is listening with blinders on, simply seeking to confirm their own ideas or bias instead of seeing the person or the collective.

There are times, however, where the approach of listening for specific details *is* helpful. For example, in a dialogue where people are coming together to intentionally collaborate or problem solve around an issue they both/all care about. Participant TT spoke about listening "intentionally for the conflict" as a way of being able to finally address the conflict that s/he could sense was there, but had yet to be articulated. In this example, however, TT was not listening so that s/he could inflate or cling to his/her own views. Instead, s/he was listening for specific information in order to clarify an important point, a conflict about multi-user trail use. This example supports the idea of respecting the person and their process, while also listening for specific information. This is an important point as it reveals ones ability to remain a strong listener, while also noticing key points to focus on.

The frame of holding respect for the person and their process, no matter what, facilitates space for listeners to appreciate, build upon or demonstrate compassion and understanding for speakers with whom they don't see eye-to-eye with. TT reflected on their experience as a graduate student conducting their own interviews with a participant of differing worldviews. TT said:

> Yeah I would say specifically there was one man that I was interviewing… and like in every way a different person than me, right. But it was probably one of my favorite interviews listening to him and understanding him and coming to realize like that my assumptions about him were wrong you know and that he actually did care about environmental things….And so that was a valuable experience for me because I learned so much about myself. I had my opinions changed…his worldviews…were completely different than mine. But at the same time there were threads that did tie us together and

he was one that I felt like was very honest in his responses and that he wasn't trying to please me with his answers which I appreciated…

TT was lighthearted as they reflected on this interview experience. S/He emphasized how differently their respondent saw the world than they did, but how the desire to listen and hear, given their role as researcher, enabled TT to be present and truly listen.

Similarly, QQ reflected on the importance of withholding personal recommendations in order to allow each person to venture on their own process of learning:

> …recently I was doing some work with a local climate action group…sort of a group of retirees with varying amounts of skill and experience in environmental issues. And one of the board members was talking about [having] people in the community sign an [environmental] pledge…And, for me, just based on my experience and my education, I really had a strong reaction like, I feel like this is not a good way to go about it. Like not a good use of their time. And I didn't feel like they were going to engage very many people in the community by having them sign a pledge… but, I kind of like just checked myself from being like, "oh well that's not going to work at all. That's a terrible idea." But, yeah, I feel like that was kind of difficult. But I knew that it wasn't the right time for me to say, "oh this is what *you should* do instead." And so I sort of used it as an opportunity to listen...So, yeah, I really had to sort of step back and check myself and allow them to go through their process. And just sort of realize that, you know, again kind of coming back to the environmentalism is a spectrum of change and we are all at different places of understanding. And I think that that helped me sort of just listen to him in his, the stage that he's on and the stage of awareness that he has and where he's coming from. And that he, you know, he'll have to go through his own process of whatever, I guess, environmental decision-making and environmental identity.

QQ spoke about an experience where s/he caught her/himself tempted to speak up or speak over a proposed idea that the local climate action group proposed. While QQ did not agree with the incentivized approach that sought to change the behaviors of local citizens by inviting

them to sign a pledge – QQ chose to rely on what s/he knew about each person needing to go

through his or her own process of learning, and remained quiet. They reminded themselves to

withhold advice or the temptation to "tell the person how best to do it." "In some ways," s/he

reflected, "I chose to remain silent as a form of trying to listen and respect the man proposing

this idea…that I didn't agree with."

     Major focus (1iv): Being a strong listener involves having a purpose for listening.

     Listening with a clear purpose, for the whole message.

     Several participant responses articulated that authentic or genuine listening occurs more

naturally or easily when there is a clear reason or context for listening. This means understanding

one's role as listener and being clear on the reason one is listening. TT provided an example of

how, despite vast differences in worldviews between him/herself and their own research

participant, TT was able to remain an open listener because s/he "was a researcher and it was

[their] job to listen." TT noted, "…But I guess the big thing there was I wasn't there to convince

him because I was a researcher and it was my job to listen and I knew that and totally knowing

and understanding that made that [conversation] work." S/He highlighted the importance of

having a clear mandate to listen as a researcher, without needing to interject, oppose, or 'get

onto' the work of changing thought patterns or behaviors, as environmental educators and

communicators often do.

     The theme of having a reason for listening – as a parent, a researcher, or within a job –

was spoken about across all four interviews. Participants spoke about how rare this overt

mandate is within the workplace, unless specifically involved in environmental consulting or

hearings. Two participants articulated that it would be helpful to provide space, time, and

objectives for listening to take priority, especially listening to people with opposing

environmental views.

Listening without a clear purpose.

RR had a "hard time drumming up an example," of a time when s/he felt s/he remained

the listener with exceptional attentiveness. After thinking for a few moments, s/he offered a

memory that I feel exemplifies how challenging it can be to remain the listener when there is no

clear mandate or context for listening. S/He shared:

> I feel like if something that I believe in or that is really helping me is being attacked, then
> I tend to have a harder time actually really listening to the perspective of that person. I
> think I sort of shut down and go into like this place of…putting my shell on and trying to
> not, almost trying to not be influenced by the other side…like rather than really being
> open to hear what they have to say, just like I, you know, you don't believe or agree with
> me and you're trying to tell me that it's wrong and therefore I'm just going to kind of
> hold my own.

This excerpt highlights a listening experience where RR was listening to a family

member "speak at [them]" without a frame, context, or purpose for the conversation happening.

"It was his opinion…coming at me," RR reflected. I suppose the context for the dialogue was

family relationship, but the boundaries and mutual understanding for the conversation was

vague, which made it difficult to remain open and listen.

Listening with a clear purpose, for specific details.

Participant SS spoke about their job as a "professional listener….at times." Despite the

very clear context for being a listener in his/her employment, SS reported having many times

where s/he caught him/herself not listening to "the whole of the message," but listening instead

for key points. This is an important finding as it highlights how one can have a purpose for

listening, but it doesn't necessarily equate to hearing everything or applying genuine listening.

This example offers even greater insight into what I spoke about above (Major Focus 1iii), where listening for specific details is needed and helpful at times, but can also compromise the level of engagement and listening.

> ### *Major focus (2): Listening is not part of the mandate for environmental communicators or communication in general.*

All four participants were quick to affirm the need for a greater focus on listening within environmental communication circles and programs, such as the MAEEC program, as each participant vocalized a void of 'listening culture'. When asked what more focused listening could look like, I heard a variety of responses. For example, RR offered practical feedback for enhancing communication through technology, referring to technology as an often-compromising force in being present listeners.

> …I think it is really important as environmental communicators to like show up [to conversations] and show that we're present in how we use technology… And so, just putting [cell phones], you know, in your purse or your pocket or your jacket or something that gets it out of that space where suddenly the person across the table from you feels like they are the most important thing right now. And I think there's so much… messaging in how we carry our technology and where we place it in relationship for the people that we are with and how much we look at it. So, teaching and learning around a technologically distracted society could be really beneficial.

SS reflected on providing skills for learners to listen more generatively instead of selectively, stating:

> If I was running the MAEEC program, I'd like to see students with skills to drink in the whole of the message, not just select what they prefer to hear. I'd also try and emphasize that listening is a generous gesture, and perhaps that could be part of the messaging.

TT spoke about two differed themes, suggesting the importance of environmental

communicators learning to listen to people of differing worldviews, and also providing insight

into how to engage others as an equal:

> I feel like environmental communicators need to deliver acts of listening to others, like to
> people outside of their own worldview on a very personal level like on a relationship
> level.

> TT also reflected:
> I would like to see environmental communicators step out from behind their desk and
> become a real person in society – not that they aren't real, but like society can see them
> as a real person who will actually listen.

TT shared a memory of working in a professional position where s/he managed the social

media account of an environmental not-for-profit. There was a person who used the online

platform to "repeatedly bash" and "threaten" an environmental initiative the organization was

trying to promote and inform people about. TT shared:

> I would love to have sat down and just had coffee with him and listened to him. When
> it's scary, like it's super scary because some of the stuff, he is threatening definitely, but I
> would have liked to take him for a coffee and asked him questions about his views. I was
> genuinely curious. Right, like there was a piece of me that really just wanted to like sit
> down and like say to him, "tell me all about this." Like, "tell me like, like why and how,
> how you are frustrated in these things?" and I believe that the real growth can come from
> the communicator side in these conversations.

TT's desire to take this person out for coffee and listen to what was behind the on-line

threats did not just come from a place of curiosity, nor a desire to invest in a new relationship.

Instead, TT articulated a desire to understand where the person was coming from as an act of

communication in hopes of seeing change in this field. S/He went on to say, "I hate that [this

person] is poo-pooing repeatedly on what our grassroots organization is trying to do, but I also

hate that there is no public sphere for [this person] to come together and actually have a

conversation." While TT may have been speaking to a cultural reality-the loss of the public

sphere- on a micro-level, TT felt limited in options for how to dialogue with the person, stating,

"I guess one can either politely write back to this guy on Facebook, 'thanks for your thoughts,'

or just ignore him. This feels like a narrow scope of communication."

It became clear to me during the one-to-one interviews, and again during the focus group

dialogue later on, that participants can identify there is room to incorporate greater learning and

emphasis on listening in environmental communication, although *how* this should happen

remains vague. The discussion, and equally the lack of discussion, helped shed a light on the

ways that listening is often a missing component of environmental communication.

Major focus (3): The experience of being listened to is profound.

Being listened to is a gift.

Throughout each of the one-to-one interviews, participants emphasized the significance

of being listened to. While the contexts of listening and the 'type' of listener varied widely, the

feeling of being listened to held a steadfast quality across participant experiences. It was not

difficult for participants to conjure up an example of when they had been listened to, and they

relished in the ability to share these experiences.

TT reflected on the qualities of the conversation and person that made them feel listened to:

> …he [referring to the listener] works in oil and gas and like you know we're just very
>
> different people but I've gone out to lunch and breakfast with him a couple of times over
>
> the past little while…And it's been interesting as I sat and talked to him, he is someone
>
> that I feel like he's a deliberate listener. Not with an agenda, you know, and he asks me
>
> about so much of my life that yeah, I feel like, like I can be honest and open with this
>
> person…especially like with a religious divide…there is sometimes a breakdown in
>
> communication in interest and in all of that type of stuff, but not with him. Yeah when I

sit and talk with him, I can be honest and I can feel listened to…he asks lots of questions

and doesn't really seem to shut down or even censor who he is or his thoughts

and…that's been, that's been a meaningful example to me…he will hear what I have to

say but he also will call me out and I'm okay with that. And I think it's because I do feel

like he has really listened to me first.

TT described this reflection by framing their listener as a "very different" person, while

still being "deliberate" and "not [having] an agenda." TT also highlighted how this person,

despite such differing worldviews, makes TT feel like they can be "honest" and "open." Some of

the qualities of TT's listener prioritized included making time for TT, remaining open, not

censoring who he is, and being engaged in the conversation by holding TT accountable by

challenging and asking him/her questions.

QQ reflected on a conversation with a person trained as a listener:

…we had a phone call…I guess I mean maybe it's partly that she's a coach and she's

been trained in good listening. But as soon as we had the call I don't think I've been

listened to that deeply in a long time…and I didn't feel like there was something that she

needed from me. There was just a real sincere interest in what I had to say. And it created

this open and easy feeling for me to express myself. And it felt like very safe, like a very

safe environment to talk.

This led to the follow-up question: *And if there was dissonance?*

I feel like she would be really kind of [pause…] probably quite authentic. I think that she

would try to connect to the person…And listen and hear them out and listen to the person

instead of kind of jumping in and trying to force her, force her own opinion.

This experience seemed to come to mind easily for QQ. S/He described his/her listener as

taking a "real sincere interest in what [QQ] had to say," creating feelings of openness, easiness,

safety and deeply being listening to.

SS reflected on the significance of being listened to by their mother in-law, spouse, and therapist, noting that with all three, it was as if "they weren't invested in anything other than me telling my story…it has always felt like a real gift." S/He noted how "questions asked out of interest and care versus obligation really generates or evokes good conversation."

RR offered an account of a date with his/her now partner, saying, "I just remember feeling so great like oh this is what I've been looking for, like someone who's really hearing me and there's really listening and he's wanting to know more about me and he's interested in what I'm saying and like I feel so good being heard."

These excerpts illuminate how impactful being listened to can be. The tone and word choice from participants provide insight into how being listened to can be a type of gift to the speaker. The conversation becomes a 'space holder' where assumptions can be disarmed and sifted through, guards or shallow responses are not needed, and where space for open and honest dialogue is held.

Being listened to is not the norm.

There was also a tone of surprise amongst my informants as they recounted stories of being listened to. The surprise seemed to arise from the fact that other people would listen to them with authentic curiosity. Participants spoke about being listened to as one of the markers of knowing they could trust the person, be it family, friend, or professional.

Participants also identified the gift in knowing that a listener is there to 'just' listen versus imposing their own agenda. This was described as "not the norm" (TT), "refreshing" (RR), "so helpful in feeling heard" (QQ), and "profound" (SS). TT and SS shared how being listened to without an agenda freed them to feel more open to receiving feedback.

With significant accounts of being authentically and respectfully listened to, informants reported a sense of deep appreciation for the person who listened to them in such genuine ways.

Being listened to evokes mostly positive feelings.

Throughout each one-to-one interview, a reoccurring theme was the role that listening played in creating positive emotions for both listener and those feeling listened to.

RR reflected that being listened to:

feels, literally, like, a fulfilling feeling around my heart, like it's just a very validating and warm feeling…like it feels really good to be understood to have somebody who cares enough to listen and who wants to know about you…and is actually listening to what you have to say.

…And I think it feels really like, feels really good to be understood to have somebody who cares enough to listen and who wants to know not just about you but actually listen to hear what you have to say.

The amount of 'feeling' identified throughout the interviews was a notable finding. It became clear that being listened to, deeply and authentically, provided almost a type of sanctuary for participants from the normal drive and rush of busy life:

"I feel like I can be honest and open."

"I feel listened to."

"I didn't feel like she needed anything from me…"

"It created an open and easy feeling…"

"It felt very safe…"

"It's a warm feeling…"

"It feels really good to be understood…."

"…it feels like a real gift."

"it [being authentically listened to] is one of the best feelings there is…"

In addition to these quotations, I coded a variety of feelings that are present when listening or being listened to, as noted in Table 2.

Table 2. *Participant Feelings from Listening and being Listened to.*

Participant Feelings when Listening Experiences feel Open	Participant Feelings when Listening Experiences feel Closed
Feeling authentic	Feeling shut down
Feeling known, as though I'm seen	Feeling triggered
Feeling connected to another human	Feeling unsure
Feeling relieved by being listened to	Feeling timid or lacking confidence
Feeling vulnerable	Feeling like putting on a shell of defense
Feeling grateful for the interaction	
Feeling validated	
Feeling spacious, open, like there's time	

Challenges to Listening

Context.

Each participant reported challenges that made being a committed and genuine listener difficult. This was not a specific research question, *per se*, but themes, stories, and references to why listening is challenging naturally emerged in each of the one-to-one interviews. Interestingly, while I constructed codes that identified these connections during the data analysis stage, the challenges and barriers to listening that were reported and coded were not clearly reflected in the first draft of the grounded theory. I suspect this happened, in part, because Appreciative Inquiry focuses on the best of what is. With my own lens of wanting to elicit stories of strength, I omitted an important finding from the theory that focused on how listening is difficult and why it is regularly neglected. It wasn't until I revisited the data through summarizing my findings that I noticed this gap. I returned to my memos, the recorded

interviews and transcripts, my codes and 'sticky note trees', which I had documented through

photographing, to generate and revise my findings.

Despite its absence in Draft 1 of the grounded theory, I believe this contribution is

significant. Thus, while not attached to a major focus or presented to participants in the focus

group interview discussed in Section 2, I include these findings in this section.

Barriers to listening.

I used the term 'barriers' to describe the challenges encountered by listeners (Table 3).

Participants reported either stopping listening when these barriers arose or noticed discomforts

that caused the quality of their listening to be compromised. Participants spoke of barriers to

listening that were imposed by speakers, or barriers that 'just are'. Table 3 reflects this

distinction.

Table 3: *Barriers to Listening*

Factors Imposed by the Person Talking that Cause Listening to feel Challenging	Factors that 'Just Are', that Cause Listening to feel Challenging
The speaker is assertive or aggressive	Trying to listen from an empty place – no capacity for hearing
The speaker is over confident	Having completely different worldviews
The speaker makes the listener feel attacked, which causes the listener to shut down	Feeling distracted
The speaker has an agenda that the listener doesn't care about or relate to	Educational differences – talking and seeing topics at very different levels
The speaker is talking just to fill up the space	Tuning out – boredom, repetition, other thoughts on the mind, fatigue
The speaker isn't listening; they are clinging to their own ideas	Intimate relationships – it can be hard to listen to your partner or spouse
The speaker is making the conversation all about themselves	Jumping ahead – assuming you know where the speaker is going with their words or thoughts
The speaker is overtly confrontational	Power imbalance
	Processing rates
	Listening isn't within the job scope
	Listening to diffuse a situation
	Putting on a shield of defense
	Technology can be a distraction

The challenges that environmental communicators encountered are diverse. Whether imposed, stumbled upon or inherent, the barriers outline above draw attention to some of the complexities involved in being a listener.

Closing section one.

The major themes that were constructed from the data reflect key points about listening in environmental communication. While I used the data to inform these themes and the first draft of the theory, I acknowledge how much insight I have discovered and received since first applying these codes and drafting the theory. Each time I revisit the transcripts, I am again enlightened by the connections between what participants shared. Thus, I was pleased to offer the first draft of my findings for participants to evaluate in the focus group interview. This decision was one way of ensuring the theory was indeed grounded in the experiences of my participants and was dependable (Shenton, 2004).

Section Two: Revised Theory, Constructed from the Focus Group Interview

Overview.

Approximately eight weeks following the first one-to-one interview, I had transcribed, analyzed, coded, and categorized the data form phase 1 of the interviews into a grounded theory. I gathered participants together again online for a focus group interview, at which all four participants were present.

The focus group interview provided two 'levels' of data, each important in their own ways. On one level, I received new insight into listening through asking questions and pausing to listen to the responses from participants. I asked the following three questions in our 80-minute focus group interview:

(1) You were asked to converse with another Environmental Educator and Communicator (EEC). This was part of the Appreciative Inquiry orientation from which I'm trying to

look through. This was also to harvest your ideas/noticings about listening with deep

intention.

Between that conversation and our initial interview, is there something that has arisen

and/or lingered that you'd really like to underscore or emphasize. Something that's

pertinent about the experiences of listening or being listened to?

(2) Through your initial, one-to-one interview, I was able to code transcripts and analyze

data and reorganize it into a first draft of a grounded theory. I'd like to show you what I

have discovered and open the conversation to feedback.

(3) What would you like to see for environmental communication programs in regards to

listening? What could programs be like if there was a greater emphasis placed on the role

of listening in communication?

Of great value to me was hearing participants speak about the first draft of the emerging

theory. This theory, after all, was based on data from participant's one-to-one interviews.

On a second level, I was able to authentically observe the dialogue between participants,

which was beneficial to my research in two distinct ways. First, I was able to observe

participants listening to one another in dialogue. While this may seem obvious, I was able to gain

further insight into listening by virtue of observing listeners interact. Second, by bringing

participants together in one dialogue to focus on listening, I was applying two Appreciative

Inquiry principles, the *Wholeness Principle* and the *Constructionist Principle*. These two AI

principles identify the power and value of bringing this type of forward-thinking conversation to

a group. The *Wholeness Principle* assumes that by engaging stakeholders and bringing them

together, collective capacity is built (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010), and The *Constructionist*

Principle, which suggests that through interactions with one another, individuals create meaning

and socially construct reality (Watkins, Mohr, and Kelly, 2011).

Findings from the focus group interview.

I format this section by using each of the three focus group questions as a heading to present themes that arose from the focus group interview dialogue. In total, thirteen themes were assembled from the data and these themes informed the revisions I applied to draft one of my grounded theory. I present draft two of my theory at the end of this section.

Question #1: Lingering thoughts.

In opening with this question, I invited participants to share thoughts that had lingered from either their one-to-one interviews (phase 1), or the interviews they facilitated with a third-party environmental communicator (phase 2). There were two main themes that were constructed from the dialogue in response to question (1).

Theme 1: Listening is a complex skill. Physical, mental and cultural influences can support or deter listening or being listened to.

Understanding cultural factors, and physical and mental realities that influence one's ability to listen and feel listened to was raised in response to the initial question. Participant RR was the first to respond by stating, "I found body language to be so important to feeling heard…". S/He recalled interviewing an environmental communicator who sat with their arms crossed and didn't consistently offer eye contact. This made it challenging to feel connected to the person s/he was speaking with. TT built upon their idea, saying:

> Yeah…body language is a very important part of the conversation. There can also be a disconnect based on the medium….an online conversation, versus a group format like this interview, versus face to face. Even where you are located – on my couch, in an office, a coffee shop – it influences my ability to listen.

SS stated:

> …you make assumptions about what you're hearing by virtue of how you think people should communicate with their body language as well as their mouth…um…so the trick

in listening and processing and being open to understanding is that people may not be saying what you think they're saying by how they are physically. There's a lot of room for misinterpretation.

TT highlighted that s/he:

…was involved in [a project]….interviewing all sorts of diverse people across Alberta, talking about climate change….we had a script to work through. I was given the task of interviewing two group: newcomers and First Nations. There was a language barrier with the newcomers, and there was a cultural barrier with the Indigenous participants. Following the script was really hard. It just didn't work.

QQ reflected:

…sometimes, if you're trying to gather specific information, you can get distracted by that fact…you know, that I have to….carry the conversation in a certain direction…but the more I relax into the conversation, the better listener I am. So, if I'm late, or there's something on my mind, or I feel anxious, I'm not as good of a listener. But if I relax into it, I'm a stronger listener.

These comments indirectly touched-on one of the existing themes in draft (1) of the theory: *"Being a strong listener involves:* (i) *A level of self-awareness."* Participant reflections contributed new insights to this theme. Strong listeners do not just have self-awareness in times of tension or conflict, but rather, strong listeners are aware of how physical, mental and cultural realities complicate the ease of listening. "Body language," "medium," "location," "language barriers," "cultural barriers," "anxiety," "feeling late…" can either impede or enhance a person's ability to listen with openness, understanding, and focus. These comments support revisions made to Draft 2 of the theory. These comments also offer a natural transition to a second theme, where participants discussed the challenges of working from a script when interviewing their environmental communication colleagues.

Theme 2: An imposed agenda or script can compromise the quality of listening.

Three of the four participants emphasized how difficult it had been to be a listener, carry the interview, and focus on listening all at the same time. TT aptly put it, "As I was listening, I found myself distracted by being a listener…"

RR noted:

> …in my interview [with their third-party], I would get distracted. My thoughts would be all over the place and I'd have a hard time…um… figuring out what it was I wanted to ask. And I'd kind of get panicked in that moment when they were finishing up what they were saying, because I'd think I have to think of another question to keep the conversation going, and then I kind of zone out and my brain couldn't keep up with what they were saying….and I'd try and wait for a pause….but then forget what I was going to ask…and yeah, it gets complicated."

Upon which TT questioned, "and if you're formulating the thoughts in your head, are you really present and listening to what they are saying? I can't do both, I can't multi-function like that." This is a key contribution. If the listener is already moving on to the next question or point as a means of 'carrying' the dialogue, "are you really present?", as TT asked.

S/He continued speaking:

> It's difficult to shut off the brain, I found. If I'm listening across difference, I often am formulating what I want to say next. When I was doing my interview for this project, I was really interested to hear what my participant had to say. But, I couldn't tell if I was listening well enough, or if I was guiding the conversation too much.

> QQ found their formal interviews hard because:

> We were given an agenda…and so I wanted to listen, but I also didn't want to focus on that….I found this in my thesis research too, my first interview…I had so much anxiety about it. I was so triggered by feeling intimidated by who I was interviewing, that I just babbled, interrupted, etc. I wish I'd just shut up and listened!

TT said, "…an agenda inhibits listening, I found. If I'm listening with a desired outcome, or leading the conversation in a certain way, it makes it difficult to listen sometimes….it seems to be in conflict."

In the one-to-one interviews, two participants had originally spoken about the desire for "a mandate" or "a purpose" to listen. They felt as though space to listen, professionally, had not been part of their job as an environmental communicator, but hoped it could be. Draft (1) of the theory reflects this; *Being a strong listener involves* (iv) *having a purpose for listening.* To resolve the discrepancy of wanting a mandate but no formal agenda, I returned, once again, to the data.

Participants identified that listening felt the easiest when they held a level of autonomy in the format for dialogue, when they felt equipped to navigate tension, and when they held genuine curiosity about the person or the topic they were inquiring about. These factors contributed to listeners feeling "more present" and "authentic" in conversations.

Thus, mandates might feel lighter than an agenda because a mandate means, "to give official permission for something to happen" (Mandate, 2020), whereas an agenda is "a secret aim or reason for doing something" (Agenda, 2020). If permission to listen is part of ones task, then a person can use their own discrepancy to inquire, set aside time, and ask questions without feeling as though they are acting on behalf of someone. If an agenda is given, it implies there is a motive beyond just listening. While this isn't negative, per se, participants grappled with having a script and an imposed agenda (my research!) that they were instructed to pursue.

Interestingly, SS wrote in their phase 2 summary email, "I must apologize that I didn't actually work through the formal questions. [My interviewee] and I both have too much to say

and the conversation roared along through a long lunch and a big pot of tea." This participant

spoke later about not being able to engage in a conversation about listening with a "rigid script."

SS commented that, "…questions asked out of interest and care versus obligation really

generate or evoke good conversation." S/He was saying this to highlight an alternative to asking

prescribed questions that can feel awkward or forced. They went on to say, "The best work

happens in the bar….after the work day is over and everyone stops being their best selves in

conference or work mode and just starts chatting with one another, that's when the best

information gets passed. That's where honesty lives." Similarly, RR spoke, "It feels like I can be

a lot more present when there's not a list of questions in front of me….we didn't learn very much

in grad school about how to ask questions not from a list." QQ reflected, "Having an agenda

made listening really challenging," and TT spoke about how "…agendas can really limit

outcomes." In listening to the interview again, I heard myself, the focus group facilitator,

comment on how I might have done a "disservice" to participants by giving them a script to

work from.

This dialogue, a collaborative conversation about question (1), offered indirect insights

that contributed to the reconfiguring of the theory. The next question, however, asked for more

explicit reflections about the draft.

Question #2: Feedback about draft one of the emerging theory.

I allotted most of the interview time for dialogue around this prompt, as I was keen to

elicit feedback about the first draft of the emerging theory. I wanted to know if what I had

analyzed, synthesized, and coded was accurately grounded in participant's experiences of

listening and being listened to.

Presenting the emerging theory involved recounting the process I had gone through to construct the theory, displaying the theory as a list on the screen, reading the content aloud, and then inviting participants to consider and then identify: *What stands out? What resonates or sounds familiar? What is missing? What feels un/true?*

The dialogue was rich. Participants carried the conversation, with minimal interruptions or prompts from me, the facilitator. Participants did not move through the first draft of the theory in chronological order or linearly. Instead, the conversation naturally unfolded, with different people casually referring back to the theory shared on the screen. Participants offered personal examples of how the various items within the theory related to their own lived experiences. Some of these examples had been shared in the one-to-one interviews, other examples were new. Some points within the theory were affirmed more prominently than others, and new themes were assembled as a result of the dialogue.

To articulate the findings from question (2), I highlight the main discussion points, again termed 'themes', and use participant quotations to support these findings.

Theme 3: Self-awareness is a necessary component of listening when 'triggers' arise.

Three of four participants emphasized the importance of being self-aware. Interestingly, similar comments had been shared earlier in the interview as participants spoke about awareness as a support for the physical, cultural, and mental complexities involved in being a listener. In particular, participants talked about how important it is to be aware of 'triggers'. RR shared, "that the self-awareness piece is big, especially understanding your own triggers. You can't actually hear when you're in that [triggered] space." QQ spoke, "Self-awareness really stands out for me too …because if you don't have that [awareness], you're constantly falling into various things that trigger you." TT added:

Self-awareness is something I've really taken away from the MAEEC program. Being self-aware, I'm totally ok to take your criticisms. But, at the same time, it's easy to flip out of that. I either become defensive or I completely shut off as a listener when I get caught up in what's being said, instead of being aware of how what's being said is affecting me.

The conversation eventually shifted away from how important self-awareness is, towards exploring how to navigate 'being triggered.' RR shared, "Getting triggered is unavoidable, but the objective should be to try and move out of that place as soon as possible….for me, that's a goal." TT built upon their words, saying,

If you can keep that self-awareness and not move to a triggered state, that's a golden opportunity to listen…people totally get fired up on social media. But what if you read through those comments….with a self-awareness. You can take a step back, if you can get there.

QQ shared, "I wish there was more training in self-awareness….on how to stay present as a listener and not constantly feel triggered, shutting down and reacting."

For participants, internal dissonance, or triggers, impeded one's ability to remain present as a listener. However, they reported that if there was an awareness of this 'being triggered', a person can remain "present", "open" and "take a step back." TT commented how important it is to, "Understand our 'raw spots' and even know that those triggers are there – and this takes self-awareness."

Theme 4: Being listened to is profound.

This original theme was affirmed. Participants nodded their heads in agreement. The only addition was a comment from RR:

Being listened to is really profound. I definitely found that. Listening is such an important skill that goes across…or beyond…work and relationships and our work with

environmental communication. However, we are so under-resourced in our skills as listeners.

TT's response prompted a shift into dialogue about another theme. S/He replied, "Yeah, I would say under resourced in our skills [as listeners] and opportunities. When you get into environmental communication on a professional side, you don't have time or opportunities to just sit and listen."

TT's comment of being an environmental communicator but not having the time or opportunities to "just sit and listen" evoked lots of discussion between participants. It had also been one of the conversation topics that emerged from question (1), above. I heard participants talk honestly about two big ideas. First, they spoke about a communication tension that comes from navigating skills of talking, listening, managing timelines and remaining authentic, which I outline below in Theme 5(a). And second, they spoke about the shift that's happening within environmental communication circles, which reflects a growing awareness of the importance of supporting people in feeling heard, which I outline below in Theme 5(b). I tuck Theme 6 alongside Theme 5(b) as well, as participants paired the 'good' with the 'bad'. Participants also acknowledged the desire to feel better equipped as listeners.

Theme 5(a): Being a professional communicator is complicated. The desire to listen authentically is often in competition with agendas to keep work moving along.

SS responded initially, "When we talk about communication, we think about *talking* [emphasized], we don't think about listening [audible laughter]…we think about getting our message across." RR spoke, "The further we get into talking about listening, the more I'm realizing that listening is central to communication. In our program, we were taught how to tell people and send messages, but we weren't really taught to listen." SS and RR both referred to an omission of either thinking about or learning how to listen as a student. I suspect this is the result

of the number of competing variables in communication. Feelings of environmental urgency

counters listening, cultural influences that see listening as the subordinate to speaking impacts

listening, and knowing that output (speaking, 'getting heard', motivating, telling, etc.) gets more

attention than input techniques (listening, holding space, taking time, not responding in the

moment) impacts listening. QQ contributed to this concept by sharing:

> Environmental work, especially in earlier years, has been about rushing to policy and
> rushing to action and we need to motivate people and push them to get involved….and
> we do! But [Dr.] Renee Lertzman has shifted this frame for me…she invites people to
> participate in dialogue and to give people in an authentic way, the space to feel listened to
> about environmental topics. She has a good point, that there's not enough of those spaces.

> …I guess I have empathy for people in government and people in institutions because
> they're balancing these two priorities of listening authentically and also they do have a
> mandate to implement policies. And I think as environmental communicators, we find
> ourselves here too. That's the challenging piece: we need an education around helping us
> be better listeners.

SS's comment about navigating competing priorities – listening authentically while also

moving work along – leads me to Themes 5(b) and 6.

> *Theme 5(b): Including authentic listening as part of the job description, culture, or task*
> *of environmental communicators would enrich interactions with others.*

> *Theme 6: Poor listening can do more harm than good.*

SS stated, referring to public consultation processes, "best case scenario is that people are

heard, feel heard, and then there's actual action or follow-up." This 'best case scenario' seemed

so progressive and important when it was being spoken aloud, and yet, I now see that the

comment reflects a very basic expectation of what it means to listen. One major role of listening,

after all, is to hear people and then allow their ideas and words to impact action or response.

Imagine including SS's words as a key expectation in a communication job or initiative: 'go and

listen, help people feel heard, and then allow their words to prompt action.' When there isn't this

much thought into the mandates and job descriptions of communicators however, "more

damage" can sometimes be done than good. SS shared:

> There's a frayed level of public trust in public institutions, understandably. If people
> listen with apparent sincerity but have no intention to take what you're saying seriously
> in any way, this is where damage is done. This said, both parties have to be sincere too.
> You can't show up and just rail on the other and then if they don't get there way
> afterwards, they complain that they weren't heard. No, both parties have to be sincere.
> But, if one party is being insincere in a world where public trust is already badly frayed,
> we can't afford to be undermining public trust further and that's what an insincere
> listening process tends to do.

SS spoke about the damage that comes when listening is not genuine. They highlight

how:

> When intentional listening is more ceremonial than it is sincere… there is way more
> damage done than when there's no listening at all. And there's also the element of
> listening that is about hearing and responding….not just with an "uh-huh" but with an
> actual change of heart or understanding.

SS suspected that, at its best, institutional or legislated mandates to go out and listen to

people would have, "someone in the listening process present, taking notes, and then responding,

reacting, or updating the policy or plan." When I asked them to explain this further, s/he replied,

" …the responding to what is being said requires an actual change of heart." Without a change of

heart or shift in understanding, or when dialogue is lacking mutual sincerity or positive intention,

"greater damage can result."

All four participants spoke about authenticity as a trait with high moral currency that

could boost the quality of conversation by deepening the level of engagement. To approach

dialogue as "an authentic listener" requires skills of self-awareness, curiosity, honesty, and a desire for connection. This speaks to the following themes:

Theme 7: Listening may require or elicit a change of heart.

Theme 8: Authentic, deliberate, sincere listeners facilitate openness.

These two themes were constructed from the following quotations. I grappled with whether I should combine them or speak to them separately, but I found that there is enough difference between the two themes to keep them separate, but also a notable correlation between authenticity and an open-heart. Participants often lumped these concepts together. RR agreed with what SS had commented about the potential for "greater damage" when listening without sincerity or a willingness to have a change of heart, saying:

> I really like that, SS. Maybe another point even could be about being influenced or changing your perspective based on what you're hearing...And that you're open and receptive to changing your heart or your views or perspective based on what you're hearing. Because you can listen and be closed off from what the person is saying. And I've done this, where I've had my view and I'm holding it tight and I don't want to be swayed. But I don't think that's really listening. I think listening is allowing yourself that openness to really hear and feel what that person is saying and kind of fall into or be swayed by it…and you can come out of it again and reevaluate it.

TT built upon this, but commented on how the change of heart can occur for both parties, "I'd say there's a change of heart that can happen from being listened to as well. People sometimes just need to feel listened to by the overarching structure that is imposing their freedoms."

These comments highlight the vulnerable and challenging factors involved in listening and being listened to. For these participants, they reported that (1) a change of heart through

dialogue is possible, (2) a change of heart is evidence of openness, (3) being listened to can change one's heart. I further discuss these points in Chapter 5: Discussion.

There was agreement from all four participants that talking, telling, and motivating has traditionally been a priority for environmental communicators, but that 'authentic' listening should have more prominence, suggesting that authenticity requires a more humble approach to dialogue. In addition, there were requests for more training and support for how to listen in these authentic ways.

Closing the focus group interview.

As the dialogue around question #2 began to naturally wrap-up, I asked participants to consider whether any of the points within the theory were moot, redundant, missing or foreign. Participants felt that, overall, the emerging theory reflected accurate points about their own listening experiences and – with the exception of two points (noted below), there were no revisions needed. Interestingly, I found that the focus group interview had indeed expanded the theory, and substantially. As I transcribed and listened to the interviews again, making comparisons between data, I found several ways to revise the first draft.

Missing from draft one.

Two different participants identified something missing from the first draft of the theory. The first, identified by RR, was already spoken above. RR said, "Maybe another point even could be about being influenced or changing your perspective based on what you're hearing... And that you're open and receptive to changing your heart or your views or perspective based on what you're hearing."

SS identified the second discrepancy between what I had initially coded theoretically and where the focus group conversation landed. They suggested that knowing "when to stop listening

authentically" reflected another quality of a strong listener. Early in the focus group interview,

SS had also mentioned that, "not listening, at times, is perfectly appropriate." This reflection led

me to return to my codes to question the ways I had originally assembled the data. I grappled

with the suggestion that environmental communicators should know when to stop listening. I

also spoke with my supervisor about this point to gain direction. I unpack what I discovered later

in Chapter 5: Discussion.

Question #3: What environmental communication programs – MAEEC or other – could be like if listening was emphasized.

This section reveals both the explicit responses to this question as well as the comments

that were spoken casually throughout the focus-group interview. What emerged in the data were

a blend of "best of" experiences and stories that fueled collaborative dialogue, paired with

critical contributions of how the MAEEC program and environmental communication

professions 'could' and 'should' be different. Because some of the quotations have already been

used due to their placement in comments that were focused on a different question, there is

repetition. I attempt to 'zoom in' however, on these specific comments as to illuminate specific

responses.

Theme 9: Environmental communicators need opportunities to listen, places and contexts to listen in, and explicit instruction on how to listen.

There was a recommendation for the MAEEC program to bolster their instruction on

listening. "Yeah, as environmental communicators, we are so under-resourced in our skills as

listeners" (RR), upon which TT responded, "Yeah, both in our skills and in our opportunities to

even listen…listening isn't really part of the job." TT also identified how valuable it could be to

"learn to sit down and listen to people who are really different than me." SS reflected that, "in

our MAEEC program, we were taught how to send messages and how to tell people things, but we weren't taught how to listen…and yeah, it is very central to gaining public trust."

SS also spoke of a related concept that builds on a larger societal dilemma: hyper-compartmentalized media, largely through social media. SS acknowledged how difficult it is to keep a conversation open, when closing a conversation happens with the simple click of a button. S/He aptly articulated:

> The public square tends to be a compartmentalized place right now… where can you even go to hear people with whom you disagree with, especially in a civil fashion….it's a huge challenge of our time and something that we urgently need to figure out. Where do people come together to talk?

This is a major dilemma of our time and one that is driving this research. If the public square is no longer made up of differing views and voices that can debate and still shake hands after the conversation, how, where and in what context does difference come together to collaborate and learn from one another?

Theme 10: Skills in becoming aware would support environmental communicators in navigating conversational tensions and triggers.

QQ remembered the importance of becoming "self-aware" and how, if one doesn't learn self-awareness, "listening is almost impossible." S/he identified how s/he wished, "…there was more training on how to be self-aware as a listener," recognizing the high level of active reflection that is needed to stay present to the listening process. RR requested skills "to work through triggers effectively… instead of avoiding issues that trigger [a person]." RR also identified a desire to learn "how to listen and how to ask questions in a way that flow naturally and allows people to continue talking rather than feeling like they've been cut off."

Theme 11: Shifting the communication culture from motivating change to cultivating understanding.

One participant spoke about looking for employment outside the environmental communication sector, expressing personal frustration with the job descriptions of many environmental communication positions:

> I want to see an impact based on the communication and I don't want to impact just as far as like signatures on a petition or you know 'likes' on – you know – different social media [platforms]. I would like to know that, [pause] that communication is able to create social change.

QQ spoke of what could be if environmental communicators "move beyond telling people what to do," suggesting there might be "space" created for more process and learning. SS envisioned an environmental communication program that taught students how to "take in the whole message instead of just hearing selectively."

Theme 12: Learning how to navigate content that is triggering.

A comment made minutes later revealed a contradiction to the vision of taking in the "whole message." SS raised an interesting point, which also emphasized the need to, "Learn and then teach environmental communicators to know when to stop listening to other people who are full of shit, as it undermines communication." When this comment was raised, conversation erupted between participants. SS further indicated that it is important to teach communicators to:

> know when to walk away from a conversation….as we live in a culture with a journalistic and social and generally polite tendencies to want to hear from one side and then the other and it's done us a tremendous amount of damage. It's toxic...listening authentically should also involve walking away authentically.

Participant TT responded to SS with an image from writer and climate communicator George Marshall's metaphor of a "communication sandwich," explaining that environmental communication indeed has a target audience:

> …you don't want to preach to the converted, and then you've got the people you need to walk away from. But it's the people in the middle of the sandwich…that you need to talk to. And even in those cases, those people are hard to listen to, but that's what we should be teaching and focusing environmental communication on.

The group seemed to appreciate this image, that environmental public engagement has extremes, and one must learn to identify their appropriate audience and attune their communication strategy accordingly. These comments once again highlighted the complexity and vulnerability of listening to another, especially when the 'other' holds vastly different, even highly offensive, views. This conversation was so juicy and important that I expand on the query, is there a time to "stop listening authentically?" in Chapter 5: Discussion.

Listening in on listening: Observations.

Theme 13: Gathering in dialogue is valuable for the exchange of ideas, for the opportunity to practice listening, and for the reminder that it is good to make time to listen and be listened to.

As participants dialogued, I found myself listening for ideas related to the first draft of the theory. I was also listening and watching participants interact, take notes, and build upon the ideas of one another. It was lovely to observe four people who care for the environment but with differing views and life experiences, approach one topic in dialogue. The conversation was rich, respectful, and collaborative.

The interview was also polite. I could visually see participants wanting to cut-in, disagree, or challenge, but participants chose to mostly refrain. I saw a few strong affirmations

(head nods, all participants trying to speak at the same time, someone writing down a note as someone was speaking and then referencing their notes later), and comments that reflected agreement or new learning. RR had mentioned, "I'm just realizing now…," QQ said, "what you said about…I know I need to work on….", and SS commented that "it could be really cool if…".

I saw each participate fumble through the social awkwardness of online dialogue – cutting in when the communication platform froze or stalled, leaving the conversation early when the doorbell rang, and taking pause to go refill their coffee cups. I found myself wondering how these technological realities compromised or enhanced listening.

I felt a deep sense of satisfaction with the group interview. I felt grateful for borrowed time, for the willingness of participants to reflect and speak, and for the gift of sharing and holding space with and for one another.

Emerging theory, draft two.

From this rich dialogue, I immersed myself in the data once again, leading to the reassembling of the connections to create a revised version of the theory (Draft 2), presented below.

Table 4. *Draft 2, Theory based on Feedback from Participants in the Focus Group Interview*

Listening is a complex skill. There are several competing distractions that can compromise the quality of listening or the ability to be present to whom you are listening to. Self-awareness, especially in dissonance discourse, can be an asset to improving the quality of listening.
Listening, despite or amidst the content, and knowing how to respond when the discourse is 'triggering', hateful, or harmful would be a beneficial skill for environmental communicators to have.
Listening is easier when there is respect for the person you are in dialogue with. This involves recognizing the environmental spectrum each person holds and realizing the role of process instead of just outcome in listening to various worldviews.
The experience of being listened to is profound and can be rewarding or even transformative for the person being listened to; it can also be transformative for the listener.

Listening offers more fruit than just an exchange of new ideas. Rather, listening brings awareness, positive feelings, a sense of openness, and deepened levels of understanding.
Listening can be risky business. Strong listeners risk changing their understanding, beliefs, or heart if they want to truly listen. A change of heart may also be the result of authentic listening.
Agendas tend to overshadow the authenticity that strong listening requires. Best-case scenario: environmental communicators have the reputation of and authority to listen authentically, while still being able to promote organizational agendas and missions.
Providing environmental communicators with more opportunities to practice and reflect upon listening would strengthen their confidence and effectiveness as listeners. This could be a helpful step in re-imagining the public square, where differing views and perspectives are welcome in dialogue.

Section Three: Heading North to Listen

Neither I, nor the poets I love, found the keys to the kingdom of prayer and we cannot force God to stumble over us where we sit, but, I know that it's a good idea to sit anyway. So every morning I sit, I kneel, waiting, making friends with the habit of listening, hoping that I am being listened to.

(Padraig o Tuama, 2015)

In the background of these interviews, was the memory of a sabbatical year that I – along with my husband – took in Whitehorse, Yukon from September 2016 – August 2017. Life 'north of 60' offered a wilderness experience that differed from my experience growing up in the city of Calgary and the adjacent mountain landscapes I had spent so many seasons exploring. With a small population of approximately 40 000 people, roughly 75% of whom live in the city of Whitehorse, the land and water of the Yukon is open, largely untouched, and beautifully quiet. I often described the Yukon to friends back home as 'magical', 'quiet', 'breath-taking', 'colourful', 'untouched', 'eerie', 'slow-paced' and 'truly wild.' It was these qualities that made my basecamp of Whitehorse an important and wonderful setting for my year away.

During my time, I thought lots about listening. I used both a digital, then hand-written journal to record my ponderings and learning. Following the completion of the focus group interview and the emergence of the second draft of the theory, I pulled these Yukon journals 'off the shelf' and I began reading. I wanted to use my own journal reflections about listening as a comparison for the theory that had been constructed through participant interviews. I found that several themes in my own journal paralleled what participants had articulated. I also found one unique contribution that had not overtly surfaced in the interviews with participants:

Introspective, contemplative and self-reflective practices assist committed listeners in navigating the complicated and challenging dynamics involved in being a strong listener.

Learning about listening: personal journal reflections.

The following section includes select excerpts from the digital entries I kept over the course of approximately six months, before beginning the contemplative practice of place sitting and deep listening in the latter half of my stay up north. I selected entries that offer salient 'clues' for listening as an environmental communicator.

I recognize that I am missing dates on several entries and that I casually reference authors, sometimes with proper dates and page numbers, other times not. This reflects the casual intimacy of my journal keeping. Bold fonts, references, quotations, dates or days reflect a direct 'copy and paste' from my digital journal. The underlined text was inserted later as a means to highlighting what I deem as the most salient points within the entries.

Excerpts from my Digital Journal: 2016 – 2017
Benedictine monastic Joan Chittister (1991) writes, "the real monastic walks through life with a barefooted soul, alert, aware, grateful, and only partially at home" (p.10). This morning, in the forest with Grayson, I felt barefooted – alert, aware, grateful, without a sense of fretfulness or worry. It felt like a gift as it wasn't a rare walk either. Walking in the forests out our new back door has already become a given, a normalcy and a delight for the two of us. <u>I can't help but wonder however, what walking and listening look like when it's messy – when the crisp of the morning is gone, I'm with company I don't really like, or I feel inconvenienced by my own</u>

self? The Rule of Benedict says, "simply take the dust and clay of every day and turn it into beauty" (Chittister, 1991, p. 6). **I would like to know how better to do this – not to make things beautiful, but to notice the beauty that is there in dust and in clay**.

I was touched by Chittister's words that "Benedictine spirituality is the spirituality of the open heart" (1991, p. 24). Tich Natt Hahn, in his interview with Krista Tipett, said that people **"need tools to keep our hearts open"** (*On Being* **Interview, Listened to September 23, 2016). I am curious about these tools.** Forest walking feels like one. Hearty and honest conversation? The death of a loved one? Arriving in a new land? Exploring? **I am curious about the intersection between listening and having an open heart.**

(Day 2)

I am intrigued by Joanna Macy's (2013) book, "Greening of the Self." She asks a friend how he deals with [environmental] despair, and John Seed replies, "I try to remember that it's not me, John Seed, trying to protect the rainforest. Rather, I am part of the rainforest protecting itself. I am that part of the rain forest recently emerged into human thinking."
"This," Macy describes, "is what I mean by the greening of the self. It involves a combining of the mystical with the pragmatic, transcending separateness, alienation, and fragmentation. It is a shift that Seed himself calls "a spiritual change," generating a sense of profound interconnectedness with all life. She later asserts that without roots in spiritual practices that "holds life sacred and encourages joyful communion with all your fellow beings, facing the enormous challenges ahead becomes nearly impossible."

Macy talks about the emerging forces that are already at work to disarm the ego – impending natural disasters, science helping us see that we humans are part of an interconnected web, and lastly, the resurgence in our time of nondualistic spiritualties (happening in Buddhism, the Jewish Renewal Movement, Creation Spirituality in Christianity and Sufism in Islam).

(Day 4)

I feel grateful for the landscape. For the slowness of its shifting and changes; for the gentle welcoming each morning brings; for the intuitive sense of gratitude for the hours the sun shines (likely in anticipation of the sun not shining); for its abundance and it providence – carrots, potatoes, beer, natural ointments that heal my skin and feed my body, for the fuel it provides for the fire in this home where I live, the friendships the landscape has offered me and us, for the beauty that takes my heart each day.
I feel grateful for the time I've been given to unwind, walk, sleep, wonder, volunteer, read up on where I live, research, pour over maps, dream into spring and summer trips, wander town looking in store windows and asking strangers questions. I feel grateful for this – and sense its importance. There is something perhaps, about how I am going about getting to know this place that is personal…..

…All of these interactions have helped me begin to place my place in this territory. I think even observing my own self has been helpful in acclimatizing. I sleep way more and for way longer each morning. I plan my meals further in advance. I walk on different walks several times each day. I am open to meeting new people – something that hasn't been of intrigue for quite some time.

I have just begun reading David Abram's book, "Becoming animal: An earthly cosmology." He

suggests, "only by welcoming uncertainty from the get-go can we acclimate ourselves to the shattering wonder that enfolds us. This animal body, for all its susceptibility and vertigo, remains the primary instrument of all our knowing, as capricious earth remains our primary cosmos" (p. 8). The pursuit of authentic truth, of the truth, through an instrument that is persuadable, susceptible, breakable, aging, shifting – my body – seems crazy. And yet, it feels so intuitive to know this world through the "participatory life of our senses" (p. 7). **Is there a question for me in the living my senses and trusting their teachings?**

(Oct. 9, 2016)

…As I spoke, I heard myself returning to Abram's work around knowing through my senses, vs. science and religion and theories and experts, etc. I listened to myself talk about that, amidst the breaking, unwinding, changing of my self and my body, there is still a trusted way of knowing that my body is worthy of teaching me.

I heard myself touch on the forest as friend….and the walks through her boughs and mosses and rocks, as a practice of opening and closing and unwinding and processing.

I heard myself reference philosophers, poets, and psychologists as who and what I am reading currently, and, noticing the shift in wanting to read their words.

I heard Elin emphasize my desire for having an authentic life. She affirmed this and called it out in me – I care about this. And, she contrasted this desire for authenticity with the current norms of our culture, who are less about authenticity and more about producing, compartmentalizing, and moving forward. Even environmentalists do this, and that also caught me attention.

In fact, I became interested as Elin spoke about, in the dominant culture that is telling me how I have to be or what I have to do…..and how I have choice around that. The world of environmentalism falls into this category too – **what is the true invitation or act of the environmentalist? As environmentalists, are we not trying to get people to think differently? This is a great question! And, how do we do this?**

(October 11, 2016)

The thing that gets me the most fired up in life is:

Why don't people ask questions of other people? Where has the question and response discourse gone? Why is it all about having the answers vs. asking the questions? Where is the awareness? Isn't environmentalist about asking questions of others? Evoking? Provoking? Exploring? Prompting? Calling to one's attention?

(October 20, 2016)

Dialogic Organization Development does not follow or use the conventional "create a vision – get buy in – execute" approach to planned change. Instead, Dialogic OD works by creating new conversations that:

1. disrupt habits and embedded meanings so that something new and better can emerge
2. bring increased diversity into conversations so that creativity and innovation are heightened
3. energize networks of motivated people to propose and try small experiments that, if successful, can be leveraged into transformational changes

Trying to generate new images that allow people to see old situations from new perspectives and change the core organizational narratives – the prevailing beliefs, stories and images that shape how people in the organization make meaning of any situation.
> (*Taken from* http://www.dialogicod.net/)
>> (November 30th, 2016)

"The idea of "the public sphere" in Habermas's sense is a conceptual resource that can help overcome such problems. It designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state. The public sphere in Habermas's sense is also conceptually distinct from the official-economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling. Thus, this concept of the public sphere permits us to keep in view the distinctions between state apparatuses, economic markets, and democratic associations, distinctions that are essential to democratic history" (Fraser, 1990, p. 57).

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE: PUBLIC OPINION AND DEMOCRACY by James S. Fishkin (a google read, great overview of the democratic process and being represented by someone)
p. 18 (chapter 2) – "when and how do people speak?"

Could one of the roles of environmentalists be to ground people in reality? Not based on images, media, reflections from others, but to facilitate a reconnection to ones own self? To create micro-democracies where conversations are authentic?
> (December 11, 2016)

Ecopsychology, psychoanalysis, mentorship, language, healthy conversation, defense mechanisms, teacher motivation. This morning though, poetry is on my mind. And as I consider the works and words of David Whyte, "Poetry: Language of which we have no defenses." **I wonder how my assumption about defenses or apathy in conversation might be altered through poetry instead of argument.**

This feels intimidating to study of course, as I have very little background and understanding in poetry or English or verse. But I can attest that poetry was a key for my own environmental baptism. Where I felt validated in the beauty around me that I noticed by Wendell Berry and Mary Oliver and even Jesus. Tiny encounters with natural world became validated as immense productions of love, beauty, and a testament to a larger narrative.
What does it mean to speak as an environmentalist, trying to connect with people of differing views?
> (December 13, 2016)

…Then I walked to the look-out above Stinky Lake…..and I was struck by the sounds of the crows. It was a true murder – probably 20-30 of them gathered to ride the air waves above the lake. I closed my eyes to listen to their conversing – which happened with a dozen different calls and songs and squawks and creeks and throat songs. Sometimes I got too nervous to keep my eyes closed because the sounds of their wings were so prominent and loud. Sometimes I opened my eyes simply because I was too curious! At one point, as I was standing there looking

up, it seemed as though the birds weren't just riding the winds above Stinky, rather they were circling me. Dozens of crows, calling, swooping and circling above my head. For just a brief moment, I felt as though I was part of their gathering….actually a crow in this murder – singing, squawking, calling, and chattering back and forth. It was a very special and awe-filled moment for me. I felt free, open, and calm – a real gift for me in this day of darkness, angst, and a bit of sadness over what is occurring in our world.

(December 18, 2016)

Through this commitment to reading, reflecting and writing almost daily, I gained life altering and research driving insights, not simply about listening, but about myself, my culture, my environment, and the potential to shift the ways I communicate and facilitate communication. I must comment, however, that this "commitment" was not necessarily intentional at first. I held deep concern about the degradation of the environment, degradation of our democratic discourse at all levels, and a sense of lament around inauthentic conversations in my various communities. Thus, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of what was happening in these contexts. It was this awareness of my own internal communication dissonance and what was happening to our environment, paired with the gift of time, space, a forest out my back door, and a wood-burning fireplace, that facilitated these entries. I felt compelled to learn about listening in communication according to various writers, philosophers, poets, scientists, journalists and environmentalists.

Many of the works I read (some referenced in the table above) guided me to a place of authentic curiosity, openness, self-awareness, and a profound commitment to learning more about listening. Evidenced by comments in my journal such as: a desire to live with an "open heart" (Day 2), "holding life sacred" and "disarming the ego" (Day 4), "feeling grateful," "observing my own self," and allowing the process to be "deeply personal" (October 9), "welcoming uncertainty" (October 9, citing Abram, p. 7) and holding onto the desire to live an "authentic life" (October 11), provide a glimpse into both my process and learning.

At the time, my journal entries seemed to be a future wish or a longing for a reality still to come. For example, "I wonder what it would be like if…". I seemed to feel somewhat on the peripheries of the things I longed to discover or see come to light in environmental communication. In an entry from 'Day 2', I wrote, "I am curious about the intersection between listening and having an open heart," not fully realizing at the time that by pausing, noticing, and even asking, I was both listening and allowing my heart to open. I was, arguably, at the intersection! I can see now how by choosing the practice of reading, reflecting, and writing each day, I was already sampling or already doing the things I longed to see come to fruition such as live authentically, develop a deepened awareness of who I am, and gain confidence to listen and respond.

In addition, I see now how my curiosity about the subject and my passion to live more authentically made me a receptive learner. Without a hunger to learn about listening, I am uncertain if or how the words of great scholars and poets would have landed upon me. Learning about listening, I suspect, happened partly because of my own desire and openness to learn. Participant TT spoke about this in a quotation above, suggesting how enrollment in a worldview class with a professor who modeled and prompted the expansion of one's thinking was an important contribution in learning to listen.

During the spring of my year in Whitehorse, I shifted away from reading the works of others and writing in response – a pursuit of trying to understand communication more broadly – to walking and writing, and then eventually to sitting in silence in the forest behind where I lived, listening, and writing. I did not realize the significance to my research at the time, but by engaging silence, the forest, a desire to listen, and time for written reflection, I experienced profound learning about how difficult it is to listen…to myself.

Learning <u>to</u> listen: personal journal reflections from the forest behind my home.

The thought of sitting on a sunny slope in a beautiful Forest sounded delightful. I capitalize *F* in Forest here, as I think of Forest as a living friend. I wanted to pause and listen and be met in return with a clearer understanding about being an environmental communicator who listens at a time in history where authentic listening seems sparse. I had practiced this type of regular Forest place-sitting years earlier, where breath, peace, and self-compassion became my closest friends. This round, however, dissonance, frustration, and distraction accompanied me through much of my time. "What am I doing out here?" (Personal Journal Entry, April 9, 2017); "See? I sit here and my inner narrative turns sour" (Personal Journal Entry, April 13, 2017); "All the while, I tried to remind myself that I'm trying to learn about listening. In my daydreaming, I questioned what I should do with my life, if I should…" (Personal Journal Entry, April 14, 2017); "Hmmm….meditating and listening has little space for the tired mind and body" (Personal Journal Entry, April 15, 2017); "Listening is so hard. I feel like I have the space in my schedule to come here, but I don't have the tools to guide me in how to listen to myself…I lose my ability to think, focus, talk honestly and I either daydream or fall asleep" (Personal Journal Entry, April 15, 2017). While I cognitively knew that listening and allowing my thoughts to drift away could be difficult, the practice of implementing listening in this context felt, at times, agonizing.

Listening as a challenging experience.

I realize now, there were several factors that made listening such a challenging experience. First, I placed pressure on myself to hear something. At the time, this agenda seemed to prevent me from settling into the rhythm and practice of listening. I recall straining to settle into the space, and feeling somewhat defeated almost daily. There is ridiculousness in this

pursuit, as I was the only person putting pressure on myself to do this. Participants shared a

similar sentiment when reflecting on the interviews with their friend or colleagues during phase

two of the three phase interviews. Participant QQ reflected, "Having an agenda made it

challenging to truly listen…and I judged myself for that and then got frustrated with my inability

to listen, which made it even harder to listen!"

I can attest that sometimes the distractions were legitimate. The place I chose to sit, while

I felt safe, was both new to me and off the beaten forest trails. There were sounds I hadn't

noticed before; occasional dog walkers or mountain bikers would pass by. I had fluctuating

temperatures and precipitation to deal with, and my curiosity about the daily changing

environment I was dwelling in would catch my attention. Thus, the movement within the forest

did interrupt me. In the interviews, a SS acknowledged, "There are so many distractions when

listening."

Third, I felt out of practice with quieting my thoughts and sitting in silence. I had

anticipated entering this contemplative practice with a far greater level of ease. I had practiced

sitting in silence before, and had really enjoyed my daily journaling in the first part of my year.

However, ease just wasn't with me. And, as I've since learned, ease is not the case for most

people who hold contemplative practices either. Feelings of pressure, distraction, and dissonance

are indeed common for people beginning practices such as deep listening (Barbezat and Bush,

2013).

Lastly, while external distractions in the Yukon wilderness were present, I also

encountered a heightened degree of internal dissonance and distraction as well. In one entry, I

wrote, "Dissonance. This whole time I've believed I'm good at holding tension and

unknowns…turns out, when it's really uncomfortable, I CHECK OUT" (Personal Journal Entry,

August 6, 2017). This "checking out" became apparent in several of my entries. To cope with

this internal unrest, I would "check my phone…", "pack up and leave…", "succumb to sleep…",

"flip through books for inspiring quotes…". Sometimes, the internal dissonance would evoke

emotions of anger, regret, frustration or shut down.

Insights from Yukon reflections.

Having digital and hand-written accounts of my own listening experiences in the Yukon,

provided a unique opportunity to engage with my thinking again *after* my interviews with

participants had completed. Three major themes emerged from my journals.

Theme 1: Internal chatter is a real deterrent to listening.

As I was rereading many of these frustration-filled entries, nearly two years after they

were first recorded, I was struck by how so many of my own words and sentiments held a very

familiar tone. I realized that several of my responses and emotional quotations, some noted

above, could be 'cut and pasted' into a hypothetical dialogue I might be having with someone of

differing environmental perspectives. This 'someone', I imagine, would be the type of person to

'trigger' my instincts to get my guard up, defend my position, or tune out. Themes of inner

narratives turning sour, feeling too tired to remain engaged, day dreaming or feeling highly

distracted, and feelings of being ill equipped to even know how to listen are common

experiences among those who attempt to listen deeply. Participants spoke both in one-to-one

interviews and the focus group interview about these feelings popping up when in discussion

with someone of really different views on environmental resources, land-use, and conservation.

Until this realization, I had believed that it was the words coming out of people's mouths

that made listening so difficult. While sitting with Forest, however, there were no people, no

political views, and no fiery or inaccurate environmental outlooks to hear. And yet, a similar

internal physical and emotional tension that I have known to be present when listening to people

on the other end of the environmental spectrum was with me on the hillside, but I was listening

to my own self. This was an important discovery for me. Part of the challenge of listening, I

learned, is the internal chatter that accompanies being human, no matter the audience, if any

audience at all. It is difficult to listen regardless of the content, context, person, or physical

influences such as fatigue or loud sounds. The culprit for tuning out, feeling 'triggered', or

becoming fixated on what I am hearing is one's own internal chatter.

Theme 2: Contemplative practices evoke and support listening.

Another important contribution I gained from rereading my journals, was noticing the

repetitive use of prominent verbs in my writing. Most notably: *notice, wonder, realize,*

understand, feel, question. I have come to view these verbs, upon reflection, as evidence of an

unfolding sense of mindfulness that comes through contemplative practices such as place sitting

and deep listening. Contemplative practices "help focus the mind, offer the dispassionately

reflective capacities of mindfulness, reduce stress, create and uncover meaning, insight and

wisdom, as well as facilitate awareness of both inner and outer worlds and our fruitful

engagements in them" (Gunnlaugson, Sarath, Scott, & Bai, 2014, p. 2). The level of awareness

and attentiveness beneath my initial frustrations and dissonance was not apparent at first. Perhaps

it was not even there at the time. It was awareness and attentiveness in reflection, however, that

allowed me to detect these uncomfortable emotions and to persistently hold them in the practice

of listening and place sitting. Through rereading my journal entries with a lens of curiosity,

inquiry, and patience, I was able to "uncover meaning, insight and wisdom" and gain an

"awareness of both inner and outer worlds" (Gunnlaugson et. al, 2014, p. 2). This process, where

I sat and wrote, then reflected, was an example of listening for me. And, by taking time to return

to the interactions on the hillside by way of my journal, I have been gifted even greater

understanding about what it means to listen.

Furthermore, when dissonance or conflict (internal or external) were present, these

contemplative practices provided an entry point to acknowledge and learn from these emotions.

At first, I dismissed many emotions, which resulted in "checking out." However, I can see now

how by gaining the tool of reflection, I gained greater insight into who I am as a listener.

Theme 3: Objectification is a barrier to listening openly.

The third major theme that I constructed from my writing and listening experiences

revealed how challenging it is to listen when I objectify the 'other'. The following quotation is

one example that illuminates the tension I experienced one day between heady objectification

and quiet listening. I suspect it is the act of 'other-ing' or 'objectifying' that is another culprit for

"checking out" – or, stopping listening. I have underlined certain phrases in this lengthy

quotation as a way of emphasizing key points.

April 20th, 2017
…about 2 meters west of the Crooked Tree.
Pale overcast with warm sun, gentle breeze.
About -3 degrees.

I have just returned from my time in the meadow. I sat, this time, where I wanted to (not against Crooked Tree – my visits there are starting to show in worn away ways), so I plunked myself down in an open space. I breathed, I greeted many things around me, within me, my feelings and uncertainties, the ground beneath me, the jumping bugs, the emerging crocuses…and I sat. Eventually, I noticed the sun on half my body. I turned and raised my eyes to the sun. I said aloud, "I want to listen and I want to hear. I want to learn to listen and hear." And there I sat, listening…trying not to try. Letting go of the lists and wonderments that made their way into my consciousness. I likened my soul to a deer, my heart to a lion and my brain to a squirrel.

Then a thought came to mind. I noticed that every time I consciously identified the sound I was hearing, it changed the way I listened to it. For example, when I would hear the cry of the squirrel, I would notice it and name it as that. Or, a bird call – even if I didn't know the bird, I would notice it and name it as bird…same with wind, raven, jumping bugs, cars, planes, etc. Instead, I wondered how identifying, translating, naming the sound

separated and removed me from it. This frame is perhaps an awareness piece for me around dualism (this and that, I and them), cognition, and NOT listening. So, for the remainder of my time (minus an interrupted call from my doctor), I tried to hear/listen, but let the sounds be sounds from the forest versus individual isolated, analyzed, cognitive, labeled pieces. This way, they seemed to hold both less and more power at the same time. Less in that I couldn't 'write them off' as insignificant or normal or menial…while at the same time, I could count what I was hearing as a significant voice in the earth's chorus. It felt like more of a hum, a pulse – there and/but needed! After some time of (trying to!) listen(ing) that way, I heard some startling sounds in the forests below….a large animal walking, snow crunching, twigs breaking and the squirrels started going NUTS. Their basic instinctual alarm cry, which had been part of the quiet chorus, turned into a loud and sad sounding whimper with long sounds. I couldn't help but open my eyes – curiosity and fear pried them open. I listened and looked for a while, and then I did something odd – I opened my phone and I checked Facebook, iMessage, then email. I wondered if I was trying to remove or distract myself from the very thing I had been sucked into – forest song, life, presence! (Personal Journal Entry, April 20th, 2017).

This excerpt highlights salient points about awareness, both of self and other, and reflection. Of significant note is how, until this entry, I had been listening as the 'knower' to the 'known'. Creating this separation between myself and what or whom I was listening to, exposed my lens of objectivism (Palmer, in Barbezat & Bush, 2013, p. 10). This type of listening removed me from a level of openness as I compartmentalized that which I believed I was listening to. In a way, assigning a label to what I was hearing facilitated an unconscious disassociation from the 'thing'. Disassociating inhibited the potential for hearing anew, or listening openly, and thus prevented potential for valuable learning, collaboration, or true dialogue even. By naming a squirrel as a squirrel, for example, I assumed that since I had heard a squirrel before, and that one squirrel must be the same as all squirrels more or less, I closed myself to the possibility that this specific squirrel had new contributions to my listening ears, my worldview, or even my life.

I would not have made this realization without the skills to reflect upon what I had been doing – applying a label, objectifying the 'other'. Adam Kahane (2007) wrote about listening reflectively as a critical tool for constructing new realities in tough situations:

> It is not enough to be able to hear clearly the chorus of other voices; we must also hear the contribution of our own voice. It is not enough to be able to see others in the picture of what is going on; we must also see what we ourselves are doing. It is not enough to be observers of the problem situation; we must also recognize ourselves as actors who influence the outcome. (p. 84)

I wonder how withholding objective labels, and, including my own self in the chorus of what was being 'spoken' there on the hillside, might have opened me to hearing differently and much earlier in the process. I had objectified what and whom I was listening to and made assumptions about what was being spoken.

I realize I also do this with people whom I don't understand or share a perspective with, particularly around climate change and environmental discourses. I have objectified people based on their political positions, environmental values, or even whether they subscribe to the city-wide composting program or not. This has resulted in shutting myself off from what is being said, or holding it at an arm's length. And while I might seem like I am listening, because I have separated myself from them, I realize I have partially checked out.

This directly contrasts with Stenberg's (2011) explanation of Rhetorical Listening discussed in the literature review section earlier, which invites listeners to:

> …move beyond a position whereby one holds a new idea or unfamiliar voice always at a safe distance, which can leave the listener unchanged and more firmly entrenched in his or her own thinking, and instead to leave open the possibility of being changed by the safekeeping of another's ideas (pp. 255 & 256)

By allowing the "sounds to be sounds," instead of objectified knowns, I could physically feel a new level of openness towards the unnamed and unknown to whom I was listening to. I

believe I sensed this openness because I was *not* seeking to know anything. Instead, I was simply, yet profoundly, listening. Without naming, I couldn't really know. And without knowing, I was open.

The Fruit of listening.

The *openness* and *awareness* I experienced that day on the hillside, as a result of listening authentically, was spoken about throughout participant interviews as well. While no participant attributed their skills in awareness to 'contemplative practice', I suspect that learning and practicing some level of contemplation could support and accompany environmental communicators in their quest to listen authentically. Gunnlaugson et. al., (2014) ask, "How might contemplative practice, both traditionally and re-conceived, address the hunger and search for re-balancing the pervasive modern habits of production and consumption…" (p. 3). I found for myself that contemplative practice, while challenging, was a necessary antidote to the quick solutions for listening I was initially searching for. I was unable to see this at first, but through reflection and committed practice, the wisdom that accompanies introspective practice emerged.

Also emerging from the review of my field notes was an affirmation of several of the themes constructed through drafts of the grounded theory and the summation of the interview data. Strong listening seems to require, evoke, and multiply skills of awareness, process, memory, and relationship. These subtle skills mandate a level of surrender for the listener, whose goal is no longer to listen so that they might change the speaker, but instead to listen to hold space for the person speaking.

From my experiences of learning to listen in the Yukon, I generated one additional theme that fits within the grounded theory:

*Introspective, contemplative and self-reflective practices assist committed listeners in navigating the complicated and challenging dynamics involved in being a strong listener.

The findings from my time in the Yukon also supported several of the themes that had already been constructed and formulated from participant interviews. I intentionally waited until interviews had completed to revisit my personal accounts and reflections on listening as a way of confirming and exploring the themes that had been constructed already.

Section Four: A Grounded Theory Reflecting Insights about Listening in Environmental Communication

I acknowledge that my theory reflects my experience plus those of four students/ alumni from the RRU MAEEC program, taken from a pool of nearly three hundred students who have gone through or are enrolled in the program. I suspect that, whether parts of this theory are translated into action or assimilated into practice or not, it may support future research and program curricula moving forward, or affirm the work that is already happening in environmental communication programs. My theory may also encourage colleagues in similar environmental programs and fields of employment to consider the ways they incorporate practices of listening into their communication approach.

Table 5. A Grounded Theory Reflecting Insights about Listening in Environmental Communication

Listening is a complex skill. There are several competing distractions that can potentially compromise the quality of listening or the ability to be present to whom you are listening to. Self-awareness, especially in discussions with dissonance or conflict, can be an asset to improving the quality of listening.
Listening, despite or amidst the content, and knowing how to respond when the discourse is 'triggering', hateful, or harmful would be a beneficial skill for environmental communicators to have.
Listening is easier when there is respect for the person you are in dialogue with. This involves recognizing the environmental spectrum each person holds, realizing the role of process instead of just outcome in listening to various worldviews, and remembering that each person is a person.
The experience of being listened to is profound and can be rewarding or even transformative for the person being listened to; it can also be transformative for the listener. Listening offers more fruit than just an exchange of new ideas. Rather, listening brings awareness, positive feelings, a sense of openness, and deepened levels of understanding.
Listening can be risky business. Strong listeners risk changing their understanding, beliefs, or heart if they want to truly listen. A change of heart may also be the result of being listened to authentically.
Agendas can overshadow the authenticity and space that strong listening requires. This is one reason why listening has been so absent from conversations – there are competing timelines and missions. Best-case scenario: environmental communicators have the reputation of and authority to listen authentically, while still being able to promote organizational agendas and missions.
Providing environmental communicators with more opportunities to learn about, observe, practice and reflect upon listening would strengthen their confidence and effectiveness as listeners. This could be a helpful step in re-imagining the public square, where differing views and perspectives are welcome in dialogue.
Introspective, contemplative and self-reflective practices assist committed listeners in navigating the complicated and challenging dynamics involved in being a strong listener.

Chapter 5: Final Discussion

"…it is time to bring listening out of the theoretical basement."

(Welton, 2002, p. 197)

"You often say, "I would give, but only to the deserving." The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture. They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish."

(Gibran, 2013, p. 22)

Overview

Chapter 4 outlined the key findings constructed through each stage of this work. Because many discussion pieces have already been illuminated in the previous chapter, I use this chapter to explore the key considerations that emerged from this entire thesis project. To identify which considerations were 'key', I took a step back from my findings to ask myself, "What matters most from this theory and from my learning about listening in environmental communication?" The answer to my own question became the content for this chapter.

I will discuss how participants spoke to a 'different approach' to listening, one that challenges the more common habits of listening and leans instead on listening from a place of authenticity, hospitality, and values. I offer insights regarding how remaining this type of listener – when the context is right – might be a critical and currently absent component of environmental dialogue.

I approach this chapter with a level of humility, seeking to share these insights in the spirit of community, environmental health, and affirmative action to advance the work of environmental communication. I use the terms "we" and "us" throughout this chapter, not as a way of homogenizing all MAEEC students or environmental communicators in general, but instead to highlight the potential for collective capacity built through an Appreciative Inquiry

approach. What would it be like if "we" – referring to all environmental educators and communicators – learned from the listening experiences of fellow environmental communicators and attempted communication where listening was prioritized? Again, with humility I present, this chapter as a catalyst for each individual reader to reflect on their own journey and roles.

Key Considerations from the Research

      One question and one observation frame the discussion.

I begin by returning to a topic that initially prompted passionate dialogue in the focus group interview. Participant SS suggested that environmental communication programs should consider teaching environmental communicators both how to listen authentically, as well as *how to stop listening* and walk away from conversations that are highly offensive. In many ways, SS's suggestion is similar to the wonderments that first drew me to this research, touching on one's relationship with and accountability to listening when conflict and difference arise.

It brings forth the question, is part of an environmental communicator's role to 'draw a line' when speech unravels and becomes inaccurate, offensive, or hateful? Alternatively, can being a communicator in environmental discourse mean holding space for people, no matter for whom or what they are speaking? In addition, are there worldviews that are *too different* to listen to? How does one navigate dialogue when listening feels one-sided? Does the urgency implied by the climate emergency change the rules of listening? Within all these wonderments, one overarching question and one overarching observation arose: *Is there a time to stop listening in environmental discourse or conversations?* And, *listening seems so self-evident, and yet it remains largely absent from communication skills and strategies.* This question and observation frame the following discussion.

To set the stage, I briefly explore three contextual concepts: freedom of expression, 'line drawing', and identity groups. These concepts both expose the fragility and subjectivity inherent to listening, while also revealing its potential strength to uphold values of community, collaboration, and democracy.

Question: Is there a time to stop listening? Context for question one.

Freedom of expression.

Moon (2008), in exploring Canada's legal system in a commitment to freedom of expression identifies how "The listener, and not the speaker, is responsible for the judgments [they] make and the actions [they] take" (2008, p. 89). He goes on to ask:

> Upon what is our commitment to freedom of expression based, if not on a belief in human reason and its power to recognize truth? What restrictions on expression are not acceptable once we have lost faith in human reason? If we are unwilling to trust, or give space to, individual judgment and public reason, then the question of censorship will turn simply on whether the particular expression conveys a good or bad message or whether we think that public acceptance of the message will have good or bad consequences. But this amounts to a rejection of freedom of expression as a political/constitutional principle. A commitment to freedom of expression means protecting expression for reasons more basic than our agreement with its message, for reasons independent of its content. (p. 90)

As environmental communicators, I feel that we can and should support freedom of expression by *not* basing our listening upon whether we agree or even feel comfortable with the message being spoken, as Moon articulates and as I have come to learn is possible. In fact, the familiar freedom of expression argument suggests that certain claims – no matter how absurd or offensive they may be – should be "responded to and not simply censored out of public discourse" (p. 92). This is no easy task, filled with imbalanced and layered complexities.

Line drawing.

Moon also explores how difficult it can be to intentionally exclude certain beliefs, messages or forms of expression in public discourse anyway. By studying the work of Madame Justice McLachlin, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, and the problem of "line-drawing" or, deciding when someone's beliefs or speech has gone too far, Moon (2008) asserts that one of the challenges is that the 'line', "may be drawn in the wrong place so that valuable expression is restricted" (p. 91). I am equating the colloquial term 'line drawing' to mean the same thing that participants spoke of when they used terms such as "walls go[ing] up," "defenses," "barriers," "triggers," and "stop[ping] listening." We draw lines when the speaker's words become too difficult – be it offensive, different, foreign, inaccurate, or biased – that we can no longer listen. However, as Moon articulates, "the line may be drawn in the wrong place" (p. 91).

Recall the codes applied to participant identified reasons explaining why listening can be so difficult (Table 3):

Table 3: *Barriers to Listening*

Factors Imposed by the Person Talking, which Cause Listening to feel Challenging	Factors that 'Just Are', which Cause Listening to feel Challenging
The speaker is assertive or aggressive	Trying to listen from an empty place – no capacity for hearing
The speaker is over confident	Having completely different worldviews
The speaker makes the listener feel attacked, which causes the listener to shut down	Feeling distracted
The speaker has an agenda that the listener doesn't care about or relate to	Educational differences – talking and seeing topics at very different levels
The speaker is talking just to fill up the space	Tuning out – boredom, repetition, other thoughts on the mind
The speaker isn't listening; they are clinging to their own ideas	Intimate relationships – it can be hard to listen to your partner or spouse
The speaker is making the conversation all about themselves	Jumping ahead – assuming you know where the speaker is going with their words or thoughts

The speaker is overtly confrontational	Power imbalance
	Processing rates
	Listening isn't within the job scope
	Listening to diffuse a situation
	Putting on a shield of defense
	Technology can be a distraction

If listeners can only listen when conditions are ideal or when they feel comfortable enough with the content, then listening becomes subjective, based primarily on what a person is able to manage or endure emotionally or physically. We might also say that listening in these circumstances becomes about feeling safe and secure as listeners only listen to what they are able to tolerate or what is familiar to them. I personally found, during my time on the hillside, listening to be physically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually uncomfortable most of the time. I suspect part of this discomfort was because I had a difficult time letting go of what I thought *should* be happening as I sat in silence on the hillside. Being an authentic listener requires a temporary suspension or surrender of expectations, opinions, and comforts. There is potential loss for both speaker and listener if we restrict listening to the safe, secure and familiar.

Identity groups.

On the other side of the 'listening spectrum' is a related concern. Participant TT expressed concern about how, if we stop listening to people of differing views, environmental communicators risk becoming insular "…preaching to our own choir. We must teach people and students to diversify or we are no better off than other radical extremes." This theme, of exposing oneself to people of differing worldviews and remaining open to people on different ends of the environmental spectrum arose in three of the four interviews, and was returned to in the focus group interview. Environmental communicators "must shift away from needing to change people and instead, teach people how to integrate differing worldviews," suggested participant TT.

The inclination to listen to and surround oneself with like-minded colleagues implies that environmental communication might suffer from a tendency common to identity groups; that of affirming one's bias and beliefs by surrounding oneself with information, voices, personalities, and 'lenses' that align with one's own perspective. Political psychologists, scientists, and other social scientists call this *biased assimilation*. Suhary and Erisen (2018) describe this as "an evaluative bias in favor of information that bolsters one's views and against information that undercuts them" (p. 793). Bolstering one's views or undercutting the views of an opponent, while not uncommon, raises concern.

The dilemma.

I fear that if environmental communicators only remain the listener under specific circumstances – we feel safe and comfortable, we understand the content or the perspective(s), we trust or align with the speaker – we may miss the opportunity to engage the endless gross environmental challenges that we are facing due to talking past those of differing perspectives, values, and agendas or shutting down in response to them. We will also certainly miss the opportunity to dialogue across difference, a principle and value essential to a healthy relationship, community and democracy. Lastly, we may miss the opportunity to know ourselves more deeply as individuals. Feeling 'triggered' by someone else's words, resulting in the desire to "put on a defensive shell" (RR) or eventually draw a line, offers an opportunity to look and *listen* inward to understand *why* and *how* someone else's views impact or rub up against us in certain ways. The fruits of an introspective commitment includes greater awareness, compassion, tolerance and understanding of self and other – all qualities of exceptional listeners. However, the work of knowing oneself is no easy task. Probing for personal understanding requires a courageous willingness to engage vulnerability, confront despair or grief from long ago, or

acquaint ourselves with ego. Perhaps this deeply personal and hugely challenging mandate is just

one reason why listening has been so absent in environmental communication.

Observation: Listening seems so self-evident, and yet remains largely absent.

It should be noted that I had intended to define and place listening within a specific

context, that of environmental discourse. In environmental discourse, people engage topics that

relate to environmental and energy policies, projects, and goals at all levels of society. However,

I noticed almost immediately that each participant had a difficult time conjuring up specific

examples of *being listened to* within environmental circles, as reported in the previous chapter.

This realization lead me to re-categorize examples of *being listened to* from the 'environmental

dialogue' category which I was seeking to understand, into a new category: absence of listening

in environmental discourse.

What do we do with absence?

Participant experiences, as well as my own journaling and observations, revealed that

listening has not been promoted as one of the main communication tools for engaging others in

environmental dialogue. Some environmental communicators might advocate for an approach to

communication that seeks to change the behaviors of others as the solution for the absence of

listening in environmental communication: If listening is absent yet meaningful, then let's start

listening more. There are at least two major challenges with this 'behavior change' approach,

however. First, listening requires an emotional level of engagement, not just a cognitive or

behavioral shift. This requires a move in *how* environmental communicators listen and *what* we

listen for. Second, the opposite of absence is *presence*, not 'more'. While 'more listening' could

have positive impacts, it may also result in negative impacts, as the caliber of listening that

participants spoke of was different than simply the transference of information. Being present as

a listener necessitates awareness and skills to take a step back from the words to listen to "the

whole of the message" (participant SS) and through "the safekeeping of another's ideas"

(Stenberg, p. 256, 2011).

Shifting how we listen and what we listen for: Authentic listening.

Participants spoke about exemplary listening experiences, either as the listener or when

being listened to, and recalled how unique, fruitful, and authentic these conversations had been.

The term 'authentic' was used by each participant to refer to a type of listener, listening, and

being listened to that reflected a genuine and openhearted curiousness. Listening authentically

shifts the ways we listen as well as what we listen for. Instead of acquiring information to

evaluate its merit against our own understanding, authentic listening requires a conscious shift in

outward, inward and collective foci. Eve Pearlman (2019) suggested that a stronger dialogue-

based process, "has a slower pace and a different centre."

This 'different centre' is elusive and difficult to define. Yet, as outlined in Chapter 4

through sharing personal stories, I believe each participant spoke to this 'pace and centre' as they

offered examples of full and rich engagements with others through authentic listening and

dialogue. With this different centre, TT spoke about the capacity to deeply listen to his/her

research participant, despite vastly different worldviews. QQ spoke about the gift of being

listened to by someone she didn't know, and feeling listened to and understood in a very special

way. SS spoke about the rich conversation that arrives when the microphone is turned off, and

the person shares far more openly and authentically. SS also spoke about how much easier it is to

listen to people who are sharing this way. RR spoke of the responsibility of listening to their

child process their day, and realizing the honour of being the listener despite the circuitous or

rabbit-trail nature of a young child's process.

Authentic listening implores listeners to maintain self-awareness so they can remain accountable not to what they are hearing, per se, but rather to values that frame overarching desires as humans, environmentalists and citizens of local and global communities. Values of good and just process, connection, understanding and compassion, and growth hold the power to move conversations away solely from the head (facts, agendas, critique) towards the heart (compassion, curiosity, connection).

Practicing presence.

"Being present" was another term used by three participants to explain how they could remain authentic in dialogues that felt difficult. In addition, it seemed to be paralleled with the phrase "taking a step back" (QQ & RR), "checking in with oneself" (QQ & SS) and "constantly bringing myself back" to the conversation (QQ & TT). Participants referred to 'being present' as a tool for slowing down one's listening tendencies. Instead of moving ahead of what the speaker is saying through assumptions, judgments, or closing oneself off to what is being spoken, being present allows one to remain open and current in the conversation.

After analyzing my research findings, it became clear that interested listeners might gain the following gifts from practicing presence in dialogue: (1) Presence allows a person to 'step back' from heated conversations and 'check-in' with oneself. This can offer time, space, or pause for the dialogue; (2) Presence prepares a person to live more reflectively, harvesting insights from being able to reflect on what they are or are not hearing, as well as notice their own embodied response; (3) Presence provides the freedom to 'let go' of what a person believes 'should be', thereby creating a greater capacity to listen to differing views and approaches to environmental issues; (4) Presence removes some of the franticness that environmental discussions can hold, often fueled by deep concern and passion for the environmental realities.

Presence places the dialogue in a context or narrative larger than just that conversation. It reminds listeners that each interaction is one small piece of a larger, global conversation leading to action, compassion, and healing.

Being present provides a mirror for the listener to notice the quality of their listening in a conversation and to acknowledge the person one is in dialogue with. One can realize through being present, that often it is one's own internal voices that are the real deterrent to listening.

Quieting down our own internal chatter.

Earlier, in the literature review, I quoted Kahane (2007) who noted that, "being an expert is a severe impediment to listening and learning" (p. 54). He explained how experts tend to listen more to their own internal voices, which tend to be "reacting and projecting, judging and prejudging, anticipating and expecting, reloading and drifting off. The biggest challenge of listening is quieting down our internal chatter" (Kahane, 2007, p. 107). A major finding for me in the Yukon, noted in Chapter four, was just that; my own internal chatter was the real deterrent to listening on the hillside, and the only person I was listening to was myself. Until I realized this, I had always assumed it was exclusively the words of others 'coming at me' that caused such emotional and physical reactions, leading me to withdraw from the conversation.

The influence of internal chatter was physically and emotionally distracting. I had to learn to quiet this chatter first by making space for it, then listening to it, before finally gaining insight and uncovering meaning into what listening could offer. The contemplative practice of sitting in silence in the Forest, regularly and as presently as I knew how, brought awareness to my own internal dissonance. The culprit for my inability to listen was primarily me. It required weeks of practice before I received the insight to bring attention and awareness to the dissonance I was experiencing.

Environmental communicators could benefit from adopting some version of a practice that supports them in being present in dialogue including holding skills of reflection and learning to quiet down their own internal chatter. Being a listener, as the findings reveal, is no easy task. In fact, there are several barriers and forces that compromise the quality of listening and detract from the listening experience overall. Claiming a somewhat-regular practice to support communicators in navigating their own dissonance – whether internal or external, personal or collective – may assist environmental communicators in approaching all types of dialogue more openly and presently, no matter the content.

Being present in environmental discourse.

The way we perceive and approach listening will inform whether we can indeed dwell in various types of conversations authentically. Conversations about environmental topics are often equated with the need to persuade the other. This drive for persuasion is often rooted in the underlying urgency associated with environmental degradation and a changing climate. The path forward requires diversity of thought and the means to dialogue in union with, and not past each other. In former U.S. president Barack Obama's farewell address in 2017, he spoke with conviction about the challenge in a society that relies on diversity in thought to fuel innovation, understanding, and tolerance of difference. He said, "[W]ithout a willingness to admit new information, and concede that your opponent might be making a fair point…then we're going to keep talking past each other, and we'll make common ground and compromise impossible" (Obama, 2017).

The scope of my research cannot fully speak to the need for common ground and compromise. However, what this research has illuminated is that common ground and compromise can be some of the fruit that comes from approaching environmental dialogue

presently and authentically as a listener. Participants reported that when environmental communicators are engaged as listeners, a change of heart – for either party – through dialogue is possible and that this change of heart is evidence of openness and willingness to see issues anew.

Listening as an act of hospitality and generosity.

Part of the beauty of being an authentic and present listener is that the goal – to listen out the whole message, including the person, their process, and their contributions – benefits everyone at the table. I use the term 'table' intentionally to evoke an image of people in dialogue sitting together on different chairs, possibly even with different food, but at the same table. If environmental communicators could imagine their role as host of a dialogue, I suspect the shifts would lead to a softening of conversation, compassion in understanding different worldviews, and empathy for the ways that environmental degradation impacts each person. The late theologian, writer, priest and justice activist Henri Nouwen (1932-1996) wrote about hospitality as:

> …primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines…hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own. (1975, pp. 67 – 68)

Remaining attached to our own conscious values or sense of identity, or listening only to confirm our own beliefs and biases will not create the space at the table that is needed to connect with people of differing worldviews, beliefs, and political or environmental alignments. If listening is approached as a mere waiting period, allowing speculative judgments to compromise one's level of engagement, or we listen only with our critical brains and physical ears at best,

pausing before inserting our own response, we will not be able to listen to challenging speech for very long, if at all. Stenberg (2011) references this level of critical listening as "hunting."

 "Cultivating," however, "requires us to nurture, tend to, and safely keep that which we engage" (Stenberg, 2011, p. 252). This cultivation involves taking a step back, holding space for the person speaking, opening ourselves to hearing beyond just the words, and risk being changed by new ideas. The 'space', created and held by the host (the listener), exists in order for the guest (the speaker) to process, say, believe, and speak whatever they need or want to. This is a true act of hospitality. It is also the elusive approach participants referenced as they described the feelings of listening and being listened to 'at its best.'

Environmental communicators will need to decide for themselves that listening matters enough and that the context is right for them to incorporate listening into their communication approach, even if it feels uncomfortable. Framing authentic listening as an act of hospitality and generosity – or being the host at a table – could be a helpful tool in imagining how to listen across difference. Hospitable listeners hold the ideas and words of the speaker without *needing to* attach to, attack, or judge what the speaker is saying. In fact, these listeners have the awareness that difference and diversity is important in environmental discourse and needed at the table as, "the holding together of differences creates new possibilities" (Martin, 2005, p. 73). This is why listening, at its best, has a different centre, a slower pace, and a holds the potential to impact people in profound ways.

Listening Reflections: A Synthesized List of Learning

Through listening, I have been gifted insights from participant interviews and through befriending silence in the Forest behind my Whitehorse home about how one might remain authentic, present, and hospitable as the listener. I am aware that this list, as well as the two lists

found in the conclusion, have redundancies from previous sections of this paper. However, given the circuitous nature of this project, and the impact that these understandings have when housed together, I have chosen to include these reflections as a type of synthesis of learning. This list has been constructed over the past years and will undoubtedly continue to evolve. I have found:

- … that by giving listening greater authority as an effective communication tool, 'we' would be strengthened as communicators;

- … listening to be an incredibly valuable but often undervalued practice;

- … that when we try and change what people are saying, try and solve their problems, or try and discredit their beliefs, we contribute to the dominant narrative of polarized sides in the environmental conversation, thereby removing 'us' from the creative, collaborative and generative discourse we seek to build;

- … that communication is about relationships, even with people of completely different environmental views and agendas;

- … that communication is about relationships with oneself. Contemplative practices strengthen one's ability to be present, quiets internal chatter, and reveals wisdom;

- … that the more we practice listening, the greater our capacity to listen will become;

- … that people enjoy being listened to and that authenticity in listening can be a life-altering gift;

- … that "holding space" for others, or being held within a space that is respectful is rare, yet profound;

- … that listening is a learned art and skill, and that trusted mentors, teachers, and leaders can embolden this as a normal and valued part of communication;

- ... about the challenges of learning to listen, especially when conflicting views are present;

- … that an inquisitive approach of positive appreciation for people's experiences can conjure emotion, momentum, and wisdom;

- … that part of being an effective listener is a *desire* to hear and an openness to having a change of heart.

Chapter 6: Actionable Insights & Conclusion

Where to Begin: Actionable Insights for Interested Listeners

Choosing to enter dialogue authentically, presently and hospitably necessitates specific skills. These skills, however, must stretch beyond rational or 'heady' approaches that see listening as simply a skill to be mastered. Instead, as an art, listening requires practice, humility, trial-and-error, persistence, tools for reflection, and training in order to improve the craft.

Emerging from this project are tools one can lean on to strengthen their approach as listeners, including:

- using appreciative inquiry to notice and affirm where listening exists in ones work place or organization,

- beginning or continuing contemplative practices to quiet down one's internal chatter and reflect on listening experiences,

- supporting or advocating for shifts in communication curricula at all levels,

- participating in learning opportunities that promote listening, some listed in this paper.

I offer the following summary of insights for those who benefit from more tangible steps. I spoke in the previous chapter about approaching the discussion through a lens of humility, knowing that this knowledge has been constructed through a collective much greater than just myself, the researcher.

Insights about listening for environmental communicators.

- Make friends with the habit of listening. Expect your internal chatter to be a deterrent to listening, to yourself more than anyone. This may create feelings of frustration. Go easy on yourself, develop a practice that feels right for you, trust that the process of listening to yourself will develop the capacity to listen to others.

- Hold space for others as they are sharing words, rants, and ideas. Let their ideas lay before you. You may be changed or challenged by their ideas, or not. Alternatively, it is possible that the speaker might be changed as a result of your listening.

- Notice where listening is already living. Consider commenting on or appreciating the ways you feel listened to.

- Listen to children, to nature, to yourself. All three are kind teachers in learning to listen.

- Take a step back when you feel 'triggered' or when you feel like you want to change or fix what is being said. Check-in with yourself regularly. You may find an invitation here: to stop the dialogue, to get more rest, to clarify something, or to lean in more whole-heartedly.

- If you are in a formal communication position, request that listening become part of your employment contract. The mandate to listen holds great influence in achieving listening practices.

- Trust that listening is communicating beyond the content of the conversation.

    Insights for environmental communication programs.

 For formal programs of communication, including the MAEEC program, I offer this summary of insights that emerged from the data, findings and discussion. The following considerations were spoken in interviews, as well as formulated by reading the data from a 'step back' and offering a synthesis of the major themes that emerged.

- Create opportunities for students to engage in conversations with people of differing environmental views and values. Instead of engaging in these conversations for the sake of persuading or changing views and behaviours, encourage and teach listening for the

sake of listening. Formal interviews in the research process were very conducive to this for three of the participants.

- Teach about the history and culture of communication. This includes philosophy, cultural influences, and the role of listening and speaking in democracy.

- Teach students how to navigate conversations that might 'trigger' listeners.

- Teach students how to ask meaningful and curious questions of their speakers.

- Model listening as faculty. Instead of telling, ask questions. Instead of problem solving, encourage students to process. Facilitate experiences of being deeply listened to, that they may further know themselves and be changed by listening experiences.

- Provide practice opportunities for students to be hospitable listeners. This includes asking questions, holding space, navigating silence, and responding with action.

Who should be Thinking about Listening?

As stated earlier, it is difficult to consider any demographic for whom learning to listen is not important. As a cornerstone for contemplation, deliberation and ideological change, listening holds important stake in human experience, individually and societally. Therefore, the recommendations both for who should be thinking about listening, as well as the following section, Recommendations for Future Research, feels endless. However, to provide focus for these sections, I link my recommendations back to this research, pulling themes from within the findings.

Educators.

I would like to see educators consider the role of listening in their approach to communication. Through a constructivist and pedagogical lens, growth in learning occurs through engagement, not simply through the transference of explicit information from knower to

learner, or speaker to listener. Thus, incorporating practices of 'listening out' the processes of students could mutually benefit teacher and student through building understanding and empathy. I can imagine the benefit for students as young as elementary school, up to a wide-variety of post-secondary programs with an increased focus and space around listening. As the research suggests, however, people in communication roles – like teachers – will need to decide for themselves that listening is important in their approach to working with students and choose to incorporate listening into their practice.

Political leaders and policy makers.

Democracy is built upon representatives working for those who voted to elect them, as well as those who did not vote for their election. Therefore, the ability to listen to a wide range of ideas, including ideas that differ from one's own, is a seemingly necessary skill of a strong democratic leader. Political representatives of all levels of government might benefit from thinking about listening, and learning the skills associated with listening more intentionally when difference is present. My research indicated that more harm is done than good when listening in public consultation processes is a nicety instead of authentic. In addition, when political figures appear to listen but no action is applied, citizens perceive their voice has not counted in the conversation. Lastly, SS spoke about the desire for a refreshed or reimagined version of the traditional public square asking, "where can you even go to hear people with whom you disagree with, especially in a civil fashion?" Leaders of society should be thinking about how to instill values around listening to 'the other' during a time in history when tuning out difference has never been easier. This would have impacts on public consultations, public protests and marches, policy creation, and even how elections are run.

Environmental educators and communicators.

This may seem redundant, but I want to emphasize the opportunity that environmental educators and communicators have in reimagining the ways 'we' pursue environmental health and sustainability through communication. By placing a revised emphasis on the skills and art of listening with authenticity, hospitality, presence and appreciation, the role of the environmental communicator has the prospect to deepen, expand and ground others through dialogue. In addition to being known for their passion, vision, persistence and desire for justice – as many are currently known for – imagine environmentalists were also known for their authenticity, patience, willingness to listen, desire to understand, and having a different 'centre' as listener.

Recommendations for Future Research.

Diving deeper into outcomes.

I feel as though this study only peeled away one of the outermost layers of the 'listening onion'. Most of my suggestions challenge future studies to dive more deeply into topics of quality listening. For example, I would like to see a study that tasks environmental communicators with listening authentically, and then investigate how their level of listening influenced the conversation. Or, I would like to know about how individual contemplative practices contribute to a collective experience or movement within a program such as MAEEC. Any element of my grounded theory could be inflated or spun to become its own area for future research.

Diving deeper into listening amidst conflict.

I would also like to see a study that explores listening in conflict exclusively. Instead of framing dissonance or conflict as secondary to the question as I did, I would be curious to know more about the experiences of listeners who have navigated tension and dialogue by listening.

This might include environmental topics, but it could also branch out into teams, organizations, or levels of government where collaboration and common ground are part of the job.

Cultural implications.

This study spoke with four educated, North American-born participants. While 'listening' has not been part of the dominant western culture of which I or the participants are part of, I suspect there are cultures within Canada where listening has a far more prominent role in informing conflict, consensus, and understanding. I would like to see more research about cultural frameworks for listening, including implications, education, and intergenerational relationships. I would be interested to know how listening is approached in certain Indigenous communities, immigrant communities, or some of the established faith communities living in Canada (i.e. Hutterites, monastic communities, Quaker communities).

Virtual dialogues.

Virtual or digital dialogues are connected to this study in a couple of different ways. First, interviews for this study occurred on an online platform, as discussed in my methods section, with one participant wishing the interview could have happened in person. Second, two participants (SS & TT) spoke about the challenges of conversations on social media platforms, recognizing the lack of accountability for users to bring an authentic version of themselves to a dialogue. Third, RR identified how technology that is integrated into daily communication can indeed impede listening (i.e., cell phones). It will be important for environmental communicators to learn how to navigate this technological age of constant interruptions that, in many ways, have become normalized. Lastly, it is spring 2020 and we are living in a global pandemic that has required citizens to stay physically distant while remaining socially connected. This implies dialoguing from afar – more than two meters – or, in most instances, using a virtual platform to

connect with others. With all of these situations and factors in mind, I would suggest creating a study to further explore listening and dialogue through virtual or digital means. What could it be like to listen "to the whole of the message" when the message, at its worst, can be selective, fake, or temporary, and at its best, can remove distraction, be intentional and act as a geographic connector.

Same study, different context.

Conceivably, listening is critically important to all interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of the human experience, and this is perhaps why this research study could be replicated and carried into a new context. For example, instead of asking about the experiences of listening and being listened to for *environmental educators and communicators*, one could change the focus group to any variation – non-profits, educators in schools, medical personnel, and so forth. Some modifications will need to be made as the contexts change, but reflecting on experiences as listener, and being listened to, may enlighten how different disciplines understand others, and how we understand ourselves.

Limitations.

There were, of course, limitations to this study. I had a difficult time identifying and recruiting participants that met the inclusion criterion, as discussed in Chapter 3, Methods. The number of participants felt appropriate for the scope of this study for me as researcher. However, including more diverse narratives and increasing the participant sample size may have expanded the theory to corroborate insights or offer new perspectives. In addition, all participants were from Alberta or British Columbia. Expanding the participant base to include other provinces could have elicited different examples of environmental tensions based on geography and political climate of their area and how these dialogues were navigated.

Another limitation to this study was the elusiveness and obscurity of the topic of listening for me as a new researcher. There were few closely related studies to look to for guidance or ideas. This was a limitation for me, as I had to conceptualize this project early on from my own limited knowledge of the topic. Now that I know what I know, there are elements I would have done differently. For example, I would have investigated specific interview questions with greater depth or, I would have had participants do a listening exercise with someone they do not know to see how the dialogue unfolded.

Conclusion

The initially stated aim of this research was to learn about listening – its absence, impact, and role in communication – through interviewing environmental communicators about their experiences and reflections of listening and being listened to. Of particular interest were specific experiences of when participants could listen or were listened to when conflict or internal dissonance arose. I believe I have largely achieved this goal through the construction of my grounded theory, *A Grounded Theory Reflecting Insights about Listening in Environmental Communication.*

To construct this theory, I developed and implemented an approved research plan involving four research participants who agreed to offer their personal narratives as data in three separate interviews. I also used my own journal reflections as a way of confirming the themes that had emerged through data analysis. In addition to my journals as a tool to ensure 'confirmability', participants were asked to provide feedback about the grounded theory. It was through receiving this constructive feedback and observing natural dialogue in action through the focus group interview, that I was able to generate a theory.

The theory reveals that listening is highly complex, physiologically, emotionally and psychologically challenging, undervalued, defenseless, time-consuming, and rarely explicitly taught, required, or evaluated in communication programs or places of employment. The theory also reveals, however, that listening can be profound, a gift to both listener and speaker, it facilitates openness, presence, and compassion, touches the heart, and helps listeners know themselves and the world more deeply. Listening compels the listener to engage the speaker respectfully and to be willing to host and hold their ideas in a metaphorical container; not so that ideas can be judged, critiqued, or discredited. Rather, strong listeners listen from a place of authenticity and presence, seeking to create space for that which may be foreign to their own understanding. Jenlink and Banathy (2005) aptly wrote, "dialogue does not eliminate differences, rather through dialogue, participants create a consciousness of differences that can sustain differences within a larger social compact of toleration and respect" (p. 11). Introspective, contemplative and self-reflective practices could assist committed listeners in navigating the complicated dynamics and challenging differences involved in being a strong listener.

At times, environmental communication has been synonymous with telling, motivating, insisting, or talking past one another. A second taken-for-granted posture involves surrounding oneself with like-minded people and beliefs, negating difference all together. I have explored and exposed how the art and skills of being a listener offers a third option for engaging humans in the quest for environmental sustainability. Listening, at its best, draws from a deeper place than simple logic. Authentic listeners understand that the speaker's words belong to the whole person, who has a whole story, who is part of a larger context and narrative than the conversation happening in that moment. By way of listening, and learning to hold and navigate the tensions and prickles innate to the human experience – including ones own – environmental

communicators may feel empowered and equipped to traverse or even pave the way for a more

effective approach to communication that neither neglects nor clings to specific views and to

commit to pursuing a new (yet ancient!) way of communicating: Listening.

  I urge you, reader, should you stumble across this humble research project in an online

database somewhere, to pause briefly and consider where and how listening lives in your own

approach to communication and relationship with yourself, your allies, and especially your

enemies.

References

Agenda. (2020). *Cambridge dictionary online*. Retrieved from

   https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/agenda

Alcorn, M. W. (2013). *Resistance to learning: Overcoming the desire not to know in classroom*

   teaching. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bach, J. (2005). A community round table: An experiment with self-organizing conversation. In

   Banathy & Jenlink, *Dialogue as a means of collective communication* (pp. 371-377). New

   York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers. doi: 10.1007/0-306-48690-3_7

Bannister, E. M. (1999). Evolving reflexivity: Negotiating meaning of women's midlife

   experience. *Qualitative Inquiry, 5,* 3 -23.

Barbara, D. A. (2009). The art of listening. *Today's Speech*, *7(1)*, 5-7. doi:

   10.1080/01463375909389484

Barbezat, D. P. & Bush, M. (2013). *Contemplative practices in higher education: Powerful*

   methods to transform teaching and learning. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Bickford, S. (1996). *The dissonance of democracy: Listening, conflict and citizenship*. Ithaca,

   NY: Cornell University Press.

Bloom, J. L., Hutson, B. L., He, Y., Konkle, E. (2013). Appreciative education. In P. C. Mather

   & E. Hulme (Eds.), *Positive psychology and appreciative inquiry in higher education* (pp. 5

   -18). In New Directions for Student Services (Number 143, Fall 2013). Wiley Subscription

   Services, Inc. San Francisco, CA.

Bohm, D. (2013). *On dialogue*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Boulding, E. (2000). *Culture of peace: The hidden side of history.* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse

   University Press.

Broome, B. J. (2009). Dialogue theories. In S. Littlejohn & K. Foss (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of*

Communication Theory (pp. 301-306). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. doi:

10.4135/9781412959384

Broome, B. J. (2013). Building cultures of peace: The role of intergroup dialogue. In J. G. Oetzel

& S. Ting-Toomey (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of conflict communication* (pp. 737-762).

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781452281988.n32

Brownell, J. (2010). The skills of listening-centred communication. In A. Wolvin (Ed.),

*Listening and human communication in the 21st century (*pp. 141-157). West Sussex, UK:

Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Buber, M. (1958). *I and thou* (R.G. Smith, Trans.). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Bushe, G.R. (2010). Commentary on "appreciative inquiry as shadow process". *Journal of*

Management Inquiry, 19:3, 30 − 35.

Bushe, G. R. (2011). Appreciative inquiry: Theory and critique. In D. Boje, B. Burnes, & J.

Hassard (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to organizational change* (pp. 87 − 103). Oxford,

UK: Routledge.

Bushe, G. R. (2005). Five theories of change embedded in appreciative inquiry. In D.

Cooperrider, P. Sorenson, D. Whitney, & T. Yeager (Eds.), *Appreciative Inquiry:*

Foundations in positive organization development (pp. 121 − 132). Champaign, IL: Stipes.

Campbell, J., Quincy, C., Osserman, J., & Pedersen, O. K. (2013). Coding in-depth

semistructured interviews: Problems of unitization and intercoder reliability and agreement.

sociological methods & research. *Sociological Methods & Research, 42(3),* 294-320. doi:

10.1177/0049124113500475

Centre for Values-Driven Leadership. (2017). *Why "What's Wrong?" is the wrong question.*

> Retrieved from https://cvdl.ben.edu/blog/asking_the_right_questions/

Chalmers, D. (1996). *Conscious mind: In search of a fundamental theory.* New York, NY:

> Oxford University Press.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative*

> *analysis.* London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Charmaz, K. (Academic). (2017). *An introduction to grounded theory* [Streaming video].

> Retrieved from SAGE Research Methods.

Chawla, L. (1998). Significant life experiences revisited: a review of research on sources of

> environmental sensitivity. *Environmental Education Research*, 4(4), 369–382. doi:

> 10.1080/1350462980040402

Chernick, M. (2016, February 2). Retrieved from https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-lost-art-of-

> argument-for-the-sake-of-heaven/

Coghlan, A.T., Preskill, H., & Catsabas, T. T. (2003). An overview of appreciative inquiry in

> evaluation. In *New Directions for Evaluation, 100*, 5 – 22.

Coleman, M. (2012). Interviews. In A. Briggs, M. Coleman & M. Morrison (Eds.), *Research*

> *methods in educational leadership & management (3rd ed.) (*pp. 251-262). Thousand Oaks,

> CA: SAGE.

Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D. K. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in*

> *change* (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Kohler Publishers.

Cooperrider, D. L., Whitney, D. K., & Stavros, J. M. (2003). *Appreciative inquiry handbook: the first in a series of AI workbooks for Leaders of Change.* Bedford Heights, OH: Lakeshore Communications, Inc.

Corner, A., Whitmarsh, L., & Xenias, D. (2012). Uncertainty, scepticism, and attitudes towards climate change: biased assimilation and attitude polarisation. *Climatic Change,* 114(3-4), 463 – 478. doi: https://doi-org.ezproxy.royalroads.ca/10.1007/s10584=012-0424-6

Cram, F. (2010). Appreciative inquiry. *MAI Review,* Issue 3.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Deetz, S., Grim, A., & Lyon, A. (2003). Communicative praxis and collective decision making: From phenomenology to the politics of experience to dialogic constitutive practices. In E. Ramsey & D. J. Miller (Eds.), *Experiences between philosophy and communication: Engaging the philosophical contributions of Calvin O. Schrag* (pp. 55-72). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Fifolt, M. & Lander, L. (2013). Cultivating change using appreciative inquiry. In P. C. Mather & E. Hulme (Eds.), *Positive psychology and appreciative inquiry in higher education* (pp. 19 – 28). doi: 10.1002/ss.20056

Florio-Ruane, S. (1999). Conversation and narrative in collaborative research. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), *Stories lives tell: narrative and dialogue in education* (pp. 234-256). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Fosnot, C. T., & Perry, R. S. (2005). Constructivism: A psychological theory of learning. In C. T. Fosnot (Ed.), *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives, and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 8-38). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Frewer, L., Hunt, S., Brennan, M., Kuznesof, S., Ness, M., & Ritson, C. (2003). The views of

    scientific experts on how the public conceptualize uncertainty. *Journal of Risk Res*earch,

    6(1), 75-85. doi: <u>10.1080/1366987032000047815</u>

Friedman, M. (2005). My dialogue with dialogue. In Banathy & Jenlink, *Dialogue as a means of*

    collective communication (pp. 137–157). New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum

    Publishers. doi: 10.1007/0-306-48690-3_7

Gerald, A. (2007). Rhetorical listening: Identification, gender, whiteness. [Review of the book

    Rhetorical listening: Identification, gender, whiteness (2006)]. *Composition Studies (35)1,*

    142-145.

Gibran, K. (2013). The prophet: A new annotated edition. London, U.K: Oneworld Publications.

Global Listening Centre. (2018, April 4). Retrieved from http://www.globallisteningcentre.org/

Grant, S., & Humphries, M., (2006). Critical evaluation of appreciative inquiry: Bridging an

    apparent paradox. *Action Research*, 4(4), 401-418. doi: 10.1177/1476750306070103

Gubrium, J., & Holstein, J. (Eds.). (2002). *Handbook of interview research: Context and method*.

    Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Guthrie, G. (2010). *Basic research methods: An entry to social science research*. New Dehli,

    India: Sage Publications Inc.

Gunnlaugson, O., Sarath, E., Scott, C., & Bai, H. (Eds.). (2014). *Contemplative learning and*

    inquiry across disciplines. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Haig, B. D. (1995). Grounded theory as scientific method. *Philosophy of Education, 28(1),* 1-11.

    Retrieved from http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~pms/cj355/readings/Haig%20Grounded%20

    Theory% 20 as%20Scientific%20Method.pdf

Hannawa, A., & Spitzberg, B. (Eds.). (2015). *Communication competence.* Boston, MA: De

Gruyter, Inc.

Hoffman, A. J. (2011). Talking past each other? Cultural framing of skeptical and convinced

logics in the climate change debate. *Organization and Environment*, *24*(1), 3–33.

doi.org/10.1177/1086026611404336

Hoffman, G. K. (1997). (2018, May 18). *Compassionate listening – first step to reconciliation?*

[A talk given at University of California at Santa Barbara]. Retrieved from

https://www.newconversations.net/communication-skills-library-of-articles-and-teaching-

materials/gene-knudsen-hoffman-articles/compassionate-listening-first-step-to-

reconciliation/

Hoggan, J. (2016). *I'm right, you're and idiot.* Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

International Listening Association. (2018, April 4). Retrieved from https://www.listen.org/

Jenlink, P. M. & Banathy, B. H. (2005). Dialogue: conversation as culture creating and

consciousness evolving. In B. Banathy, & P. Jenlink (Eds.), *Dialogue as a means of*

collective communication (pp. 3 – 14). New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum

Publishers.

Johannesen, R. L. (1997). Diversity, freedom and responsibility in tension. In J. M. Makau & R.

C. Arnett (Eds), *Communication Ethics in an Age of Diversity* (pp. 155-186). Urbana, IL:

Arnett.

Kahane, A. (2007). *Solving tough problems: An open way of talking, listening, and creating new*

realities. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Kahane, D. (1997). Reviewed work(s): The dissonance of democracy: Listening, conflict and

citizenship by Susan Bickford. *The American Political Science Review*, *91(4),* 937-938.

Lacey, K. (2011). Listening overlooked. *Javnost – the public, 18(4),* 5 – 20. doi:

10.1080/13183222.2011.11009064

Lertzman, R. (2015). *Environmental melancholia: Psychoanalytic dimensions of engagement*.

London, UK: Routledge.

Listening Project. (2019, September 17). Retrieved from

https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01cqx3b

Littlejohn, S. (2009). Language and communication. In S. W. Littlejohn & K. A. Foss (Eds).

Encyclopedia of Communication Theory (pp.585 – 589). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412959384.n220

MacLennan, J. (2008). *Interpersonal communication for Canadians: An interdisciplinary*

approach. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press Canada.

Macy, J. (1995). Working through environmental despair. In T. Roszak, M. E. Gomes, & A. D.

Kanner (Eds.) *Ecopsychology.* Retrieved from http://rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-

eco/macy.pdf.

Mandate. (2020). *Cambridge dictionary online*. Retrieved from

https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mandate

Martin, D. (2005). Dialogue and spirituality: The art of being human in a changing world. In B.

Banathy, & P. Jenlink (Eds.), *Dialogue as a means of collective communication* (pp. 71 –

104)*.* New York, NY: Kluwer Acadmic/Plenum Publishers.

Moneta, G. (2014). *Positive psychology: A critical introduction*. London, UK: Palgrave

Macmillan.

Moon, R. (2008). Hate speech regulations in Canada. *Florida State University law review,* 1(36),

78 – 98.

Nouwen, H. J. M. (1975). *Reaching out: The three movements of the spiritual life*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Obama, B. (2017, January 10). President Obama's farewell address: Full video and text. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/10/us/politics/obama-farewell-address-speech.html

On Being. (2019, September 20). Retrieved from https://onbeing.org/civil-conversations-project/

O Tuama, P. (2015). *In the shelter*. London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton.

Panel on Research Ethics. (2017, October 17). Retrieved from http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/

Peace, A. G. (2003). Balancing free speech and censorship: Academia's response to the Internet. *Communications of the ACM, 46(1), 105-109.*

Pearlman, E. (2019, April). *Eve Pearlman: How to lead a conversation between people who disagree* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/eve_pearlman_how_to_lead_a_conversation_between_people_who_disagree?language=en

Penman, R., & Turnbull, S. (2012). From listening… to the dialogic realities to participatory democracy. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, 26(1)*, 61-72. doi: 10.1080/10304312.2012.630145

Penman, R. (2008). Making a place for the practice of dissenting. In S. Banks (Ed.), *Dissent and the failure of leadership (New horizons in leadership studies) (*208-227). Cheltlenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Peterson, T. R., & Feldpausch-Parker, A. M. (2013). Environmental conflict communication. In J. G. Oetzel & S. Ting-Toomey (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Communication*

(pp. 513 – 536). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. doi:

10.4135/9781452281988.n22

Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research.

Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52(2), 137 – 145.

Ramalho, R., Adams, P., Huggard, P., & Hoare, K. (2015). Literature Review and Constructivist

Grounded Theory Methodology. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum:*

Qualitative Social Research, 16(3). Retrieved from http://nbn-

resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1503199.

Ramsey, E. and Miller, D. J. (2003). From the loving struggle to the struggle to love: A

conversation with Calvin O. Schrag. In E. Ramsey & D. J. Miller (Eds.), *Experiences*

between philosophy and communication: engaging the philosophical contributions of

Calvin O. Schrag (pp. 3 – 52*)*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Ratcliffe, K. (1999). Rhetorical listening: A trope for interpretive invention and a code of cross-

cultural conduct. *College composition and communication*, *51(2)*, 195 – 224. doi:

10.2307/359039

Rayudu, C. S. (2009). *Communication.* West Sussex, UK: Global Media Publishing Ltd.

Reed, J. (2006). *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for chang*e. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

 Publications.

Robson, C. (2011). *Real world research: A resource for users of social research methods in*

applied settings (3rd edition). Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Rohr, R. (2018, July 20). *Politics: Wisdom of the heart*. [Web log post]. Retrieved from

https://cac.org/nurturing-empathy-2018-07-20/.

Royal Roads University, MAEEC Program Description (n.d.). Retrieved May 27, 2018 from the

    Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication Program Description link:

    http://www.royalroads.ca/prospective-students/master-arts-environmental-education-and-

    communication/program-description

RRU Connect (n.d.). (2018, October 12). Retrieved from the RRU Connect link:

    https://royalroadsconnect.com/#

Ryan, G., & Bernard, H. R. (2003). Techniques to identify themes. *Field Methods*, *15(1)*, 85-

    109. doi: 10.1177/1525822X02239569.

Scharmer, C. O. (2001). Self-transcending knowledge: sensing and organizing around emerging

    opportunities. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 5(2), 137–151. doi:

    10.1108/13673270110393185

Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction.

    American Psychologist, 55(1), 5–14. doi:10.1037//003.066X.55.1.5

Shenton, A. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects.

    Education for Information, *22*, 63–75. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-618X.2000.tb00391.x

Spano, S. (2001). *Public dialogue and participatory democracy: The Cupertino community

    project.* Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Stenberg, S. (2011). Cultivating listening: teaching from a restored logos. In C. Glenn & K.

    Ratcliffe (Eds.), *Silence and listening as rhetorical arts* (pp. 250 – 263)*. Carbondale, IL:

    Southern Illinois University Press.

Stickley, T. & Freshwater, D. (2006). The art of listening in the therapeutic relationship. *Mental

    Health Practice, 9(5),* 12 – 18. doi: 10.1002/(SICI)1098-2736(199805)35:5<501::AID-

    TEA3>3.0.CO;2-T

StoryCorps. (2019, September 17). Retrieved from https://storycorps.org/about/.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Suhay, E. & Erisen, C. (2018). The role of anger in the biased assimilation of political information. *Political Psychology 39(4),* 793 – 811. doi: 10.1111/pops/12463

Suzuki, L. A., Ahluwalia, M. K., Arora, A. K., & Mattis, J. S. (2007). The pond you fish in determines the fish you catch: Exploring strategies for qualitative data collection. *The Counseling Psychologist 35(2),* 295 – 327. doi: 10.1177/001100000 6290983

Thornberg, R. (2012). Informed grounded theory. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 56(3),* 243 – 259. doi: 10.1080/00313831.2011.581686

Urquhart, C. (2013). *Grounded theory for qualitative research: A practical guide*. New Delhi, India: Sage Publications, Inc.

Warren, C. A. B. (2002). Qualitative interviewing. In J. Gubrium & J. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and meaning* (pp. 83 – 101). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Watkins, J. M., & Mohr, B. (2001). Appreciative inquiry: Change at the speed of imagination. *Organization Development Journal*, *19(3),* 92 – 93.

Welton, M. (2002). Listening, conflict and citizenship: towards a pedagogy of civil society. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, *2(3),* 197 – 208. doi: 10.1080/02601370210127819.

Whitney, D. & Trosten-Bloom, A. (2010). *The power of appreciative inquiry: A practical guide to positive change* (2nd ed.). Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Wolvin, A. D. (2010). Listening engagement: Intersecting theoretical perspectives. In A. Wolvin

    (Ed.), *Listening and Human Communication in the 21st Century* (pp. 7-30). West Sussex,

    UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. doi: 10.1002/9781444314908.ch1

World Listening Project. (2019, September 17). Retrieved from

    https://www.worldlisteningproject.org/about-us/.

Appendix A

Invitation Email: Information for the Purpose of Participant Recruitment

Sent on Behalf of Cayley Webber, Researcher
2015 MAEEC Cohort

Title of Study: What Happens When We Listen Across Difference? Experiences of Listening and Being Listened to from Environmental Educators and Communicators

Hello MAEEC students and alumni!

I, Cayley Webber, a Royal Roads graduate student in the Environmental Education and Communication program, am **seeking volunteers** to participate in my research study for my MAEEC graduate thesis: *What Happens when We Listen? Experiences of Listening and Being Listened to from Environmental Educators and Communicators.*

I am curious about the role of listening and being listened to for environmental educators and communicators. I believe the act of listening is critical for the type of understandings that are going to engage people in generating movement around sustainable environmental choices through promoting restored communicative space. The question driving my research is: ***How can environmental educators and communicators effectively listen across difference?***

Do you think you've got something to share? Would you be willing to offer your experience as a listener? I'm keen to listen and believe your experience is valuable.

Contact me, Cayley Webber, directly by email or phone indicating your interest or any questions you have about participating in this research study (***-***-**** or [email address]). Once I hear from you, your interest and/or commitment will be confidential and will not affect your status, reputation, or any services you receive through RRU.

I have asked that a copy of the information and consent letter be attached to this email. This letter should provide you full details about my study, requirements, benefits and risks, as well as confidentiality and purpose of the study.

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted, you may contact:

Dr. Hilary Leighton
Program Head, Environmental Education and Communication
Telephone: (***)-***-**** ext. ****,
Email: [email address]

Best,

Cayley Webber, MAECC 2015 Cohort

Appendix B

Letter of Information and Consent

Researcher and Participant A

Title of Study: *What Happens When We Listen? Experiences of Listening and Being Listened to from Environmental Educators and Communicators*

Student Principal Investigator: Cayley Webber, Graduate Student, School of Environment and Sustainability, Royal Roads University

Purpose: To listen to the experiences MAEEC graduate students have had listening across differences as a means to hone a theory about the role of listening in environmental communication. Specifically, I am trying to gain an understanding of the role of listening in communicating with others, especially when we find ourselves holding different views than those with whom we are communicating.

Research Participants: This research project is part of the requirements for my Masters of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication program at Royal Roads University. To participate in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age, feel intrigued by reflecting upon and sharing your insights about listening and being listened to, and meet one of the following criteria:

- Have a **graduate diploma** from the Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication at Royal Roads University;
- Be a **current student** in the Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication at Royal Roads University; or,
- Have a **graduate degree** from the Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication at Royal Roads University

What will happen during the study? If you agree to participate, then you will be involved in three different on-line interviews. The first, a one-to-one interview with myself, the researcher, will help me understand your experiences of listening and being listened to, and help me understand your thinking around the conditions for having an effective conversation. I will be asking you a series of questions about key experiences of when you have felt listened to or feel that you have listened to others, especially around topics of environmental communication or education. I am going to talk about things like dissonance, dialogue, conflict, feeling heard and feeling misunderstood. I will ask you to review a list of questions from the International Listening Association explaining qualities of exceptional listening. Using these questions as a starting point for our conversation, I will ask you to reflect with statements like: What resonates with you in this list? Do these statements seem possible? What, if anything, occurs when conflict or dissonance is present? What would it take for 'listening' and this list to be aligned?"

For the second interview, you will be asked to interview a person you already know who is involved in environmental communications or environmental education. You will mirror my role in the first interview by listening to their experiences of listening and being listened to. You

will be provided with the same questions you were asked and the list from the International Listening Association. You will now have the task of *listening* to your participants' experiences. There will be no expectation to record/film this interview. Instead, you will be asked to make a few notes about your experience of listening once your interview has wrapped up. These notes may serve as a prompt or aide-memoir for our third and final interview.

For the third interview, you will participate in an on-line group interview with the other MAECC research participants I interviewed in phase 1. I will guide a discussion about your experiences of listening during the second interview phase. I will share the emerging theory of listening I am developing from my literature review and the first interviews. I will ask for your impressions and critiques and I will incorporate these into my emerging theory of listening.

Timeframe: Depending on the length of each interview, your participation in this study may take anywhere between 90 minutes and 4 hours over the course of 3 interviews, as well as any other communication we have (confirming transcripts, debriefing as necessary, questions that arise, etc.). Mostly, the timing will depend on who you are and how you process!

Potential Risks and Discomforts: The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. There may be vulnerability involved in reflecting upon and sharing personal experiences, and this may stir feelings of discomfort, however, you do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable.

Potential Benefits: The research may benefit you as you will likely gain a deeper understanding of the study's core ideas, bringing attention, awareness, and focus to the area of listening in communication. Therefore, you, the person you interview, and the environmental education and communication community in general, may all benefit from listening and being listened to. Bringing attention to positive experiences is consistent with the principles of Appreciative Inquiry.

Confidentiality: You are participating in this study confidentially. Every effort will be made on my end to protect your privacy and anonymity. I will not use your name or any information that will allow you to be identified. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your name. However, since the MAECC community is relatively small, others may be able to identify you on the basis of the references you make or stories you share. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me. Your one-to-one interview with someone of your choice will disclose your participation in the study to them. For the focus group, I will undertake steps to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion. I will ask the other members of the focus group to keep what you say confidential, but cannot guarantee that they will do so. Again, keep this in mind in deciding what you share during the focus group discussion.

The information you provide will be kept in a locked cabinet of which only I will have access. Information on my USB key will be protected by a password when in use. Once the study has been completed, the data will be archived without identifying information.

Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study, then you can withdraw from the interview process at any time

and for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form. Once you have reviewed your personal manuscript and approved it in writing (typed or written), you have 15 days to withdraw your data and participation from this study. If you wish to stop being part of the focus group interview, you can stay and simply stop talking, or you can log out of the online forum, but it will not be possible for you to pull out your data from the flow of the conversation because of the interconnected nature of this type of group discussion.

Information about the Study Results: I expect to have this study completed approximately 4 months following the focus group interview. At this time, I will send you a summary of the results if you would like.

Questions: If you have question or need more information about the study itself, please contact me:

<div align="center">

Cayley Webber
--****
[email address]

</div>

This study has been reviewed by the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about how this study is conducted, please contact:

<div align="center">

Dr. Hilary Leighton
Program Head, Environmental Education and Communication
Telephone: (***)-***-**** ext. ****
Email: [email address]

</div>

CONSENT:

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Cayley Webber of Royal Roads University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time up until the data has becomes part of the larger data set.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of Participant (Printed): _____

Contact Information:

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

Please respond to the following questions by circling Y (yes) or N (no):

- I agree that interviews #1 and #3 can be audio and video recorded (for the purpose of audio transcription). Y or N
- I agree to have my responses from this project used in future related projects. Y or N
- I would like to receive a summary of the study's results. Y or N
- I agree to be contacted about a follow-up interview, and understand that I can always decline the request. Y or N

Appendix C

Letter of Information and Consent

Participant A and Subset Participant B

Title of Study: *What Happens When We Listen Across Difference? Experiences of Listening and Being Listened to from Environmental Educators and Communicators*

Student Principal Investigator: Cayley Webber, Graduate Student, School of Environment and Sustainability, Royal Roads University

Participant Investigator: _____

Purpose of the Study: To listen to the experiences MAEEC graduate students have had listening across differences as a means to hone a theory about the role of listening in environmental communication. Specifically, I am trying to gain an understanding of the role of listening in communicating with others, especially when we find ourselves holding different views than those with whom we are communicating.

Purpose of this Interview: Appreciative Inquiry seeks to evoke stories of heightened experiences that stand out to people. Once interviewed, it is common for participants to then go and interview others in the same open-hearted nature. This interview is part of a larger study about experiences of listening and being listened to for environmental educators and communicators. The interview you are participating in has 2 major objectives:
1. To hear about your experiences of listening and being listened to
2. To hear from your interviewer about what it was like to listen to you, fully!

Research Participants: To participate in this study, you must be at least 18 years of age, feel intrigued by reflecting upon and sharing your insights about listening and being listened to, and meet one of the following criteria:

- Have a **graduate diploma** from the Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication at Royal Roads University;
- Be a **current student** in the Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication at Royal Roads University; or,
- Have a **graduate degree** from the Master of Arts in Environmental Education and Communication at Royal Roads University

What will happen during the interview? If you agree to participate, then you will be involved in one interview; a one-to-one interview with _____ . S/he will be asking you similar questions that I asked him/her in our first interview. This will help me understand what it is like for environmental educators and communicators to listen. Your interviewer (_____) will be asking you a series of questions about key experiences of when you have felt listened to or feel that you have listened to others, especially around topics of environmental communication or education. S/he is going to talk about things like dissonance,

dialogue, conflict, feeling heard and feeling misunderstood. They will ask you to review a list of questions from the International Listening Association explaining qualities of exceptional listening. Using these questions as a starting point for your conversation, they will ask you to reflect with statements like: What resonates with you in this list? Do these statements seem possible? What, if anything, occurs when conflict or dissonance is present? What would it take for 'listening' and this list to be aligned?"

There will be no expectation to record/film this interview. Instead, your interviewer will make a few notes about their experience of listening once your interview has wrapped up. These notes may serve as a prompt or aide-memoir for the final interview I will have with them.

The objective in the third interview is not to discuss what you shared in your interview as much as it is to hear about their experiences of what it was like for your interviewer to listen to you. While specific examples will not be sought out, what you share may be offered as examples of listening.

Confidentiality: You are participating in this study confidentially. Every effort will be made by your interviewer and myself, the researcher, to protect your privacy and anonymity. Neither of us will use your name or any information that will allow you to be identified in the third focus group interview or in the finalized report. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your name as needed.

However, since the MAECC community is relatively small, others may be able to identify you on the basis of the references you make or stories you share. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to share. Members in the third interview (focus group) will be asked to keep any reflections confidential, but I cannot guarantee that they will do so. Again, keep this in mind in deciding what you share during the focus group discussion. The information you provide in your one-to-one interview will not be recorded, however the third interview will be. This information will be kept in a locked cabinet in your home, and your interviewer will be asked to keep your information and your identity anonymous to all members, excluding myself.

Timeframe: Your participation in this study may take anywhere between 45 and 90 minutes. Mostly, the timing will depend on who you are and how you process!

Potential Risks and Discomforts: The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. There may be vulnerability involved in reflecting upon and sharing personal experiences, and this may stir feelings of discomfort, however, you do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. You may choose to meet with your interviewer by phone, in person, or via secure on-line platform. Depending on what you choose, there may be travel risks involved.

Potential Benefits: The research may benefit you as you will likely gain a deeper understanding of the study's core ideas, bringing attention, awareness, and focus to the area of listening in communication. Therefore, yourself and the environmental education and communication community in general, may all benefit from listening and being listened to.

Bringing attention to positive experiences is consistent with the principles of Appreciative Inquiry.

Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study, then you can withdraw from the interview process at any time before the interview has officially started, even after signing the consent form. Once you have started the interview however, the information your share will become part of your interviewer's experience, which is nested within their personal reflections of listening. You will not be able to withdraw once your interview has formally begun. This said, you are free to stop the interview early or at any time, but it will not be possible for you to pull out your data from the flow of the conversation because of the interconnected nature of this type of discussion.

Information about the Study Results: I expect to have this study completed approximately 4 months following your interview. At this time, I will send you a summary of the results if you would like.

Questions: If you have question or need more information about the study itself, please contact me:

Cayley Webber
--****
[email address]

This study has been reviewed by the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about how this study is conducted, please contact:

Dr. Hilary Leighton
Program Head, Environmental Education and Communication
Telephone: (***)-***-**** ext. ****
Email: [email address]

CONSENT:

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Cayley Webber of Royal Roads University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time, knowing that what I share in an interview is inextricable from the larger data set.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of Participant (Printed): _____

Please respond to the following questions by circling Y (yes) or N (no):

- I would like to receive a summary of the study's results. Y or N

Contact Information (*optional)*:

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

•••

For the Interviewer:

- I have reviewed this form with the participant prior to the interview
- I have provided the participant with a copy of this form

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of Interviewer (Printed): _____

Appendix D

Interview #1: Semi-Structured, One to One Interviews – Framing & Questions

Pre-Interview:

- Confirm participants have read and signed *Letter of Information and Consent*
- Thank participants for volunteering to participate in the study
- Remind participants of their freedom to withdraw at any point up to the deadline
- *I am exploring this topic of listening through an Appreciative Inquiry lens. This means, the focus is on discovering the positive, whereby interviews focus on the 'the best' of what is/has been. Thus, the questions I will be asking you will attempt to elicit experiences and memories of particular experiences.*
- Ask if there are any questions before getting started
- Let them know how to 'pause' the interview (break, question, take pause, etc.)
- Let them know I am starting the recording devise
- Clarify their association with the MAEEC program (diploma/ certificate/ degree, year of graduation, thesis or project topic).

Interview:

Section 1

- *Tell me about a specific time in your life when you were in a conversation with someone who holds a view on an environmental issue that was so different from what you believe that you almost couldn't listen – but then somehow you did! You truly listened. And you were able to hear them in a way you never expected.*
- *Can you describe how that quality of listening felt? What made it possible for you to listen across difference in this situation?*
- *Without being humble, please describe what enabled you to be such an exceptional listener in this situation of tension, conflict or dissonance?*

Section 2

- *Similar to my first question, I'd like to hear about an experience when you felt truly and deeply listened to. So, tell me about a specific time in your life when you were in a conversation with someone who, despite differences, made you feel listened to. They truly listened! What was that experience like?*
- *And how did you know you were being listened to? What made that possible?*

Section 3*:*

- *Tell me about you as a listener*

Section 4:

- *Added: Who/where did you learn to listen? How do you attribute your strengths as a listen?*

Section 5:

- *What recommendations do you have for environmental education and communication programs around listening? It could be MAEEC specifically, or a program or curriculum in general?*
- *What would or could it be like if listening was a key component of environmental communication programs?*
- *Any ideas on how environmental communicators could be better prepared to navigate tension and dissonance through listening?*

Closing:

- *Thank you for your time today*
- *Do you have any questions or anything you'd like to add before I turn off the recording?*

Appendix E

Interview #2: Secondary Interviews with Member "B"

- *As you know, from here I am going to ask that you use the Appreciative Inquiry interview approach to interview another person about their experiences of listening and being listened to, specifically across difference. You will be mirroring the scenario of my interview with you by interviewing another MAEEC student, MAEEC alumni or someone you know personally who aligns with the values of environmental communicators and educators.*
- *You will be provided with a __letter of invitation__ for your participant. Three __consent letters__ will also be provided (*confirm mail or email). *It is critical that you review the letter document with your participant and have them sign it prior to commencing the interview. You can also keep a copy, with the original copy being returned to me, Cayley Webber.*
- *You will also be provided with a __list of the same questions__ I asked you. The focus of this interview is on listening to their experiences of listening or being listened to.*
- *There is no need to keep a record of your interview. Instead, I ask that you make notes throughout about what listening was like for your interviewee. And following the interview, I ask that you make additional notes about what listening is/was like for you during the interview. What themes and key points emerged? We will use these notes in the third phase group interview.*
- *While the nature of this interview is relaxed, confidentiality is still critical to this type of interview or conversation. While it is outlined in the letter of consent, please emphasize to your participant that your conversation will not be recorded and their names will not be used in the group interview or thesis to protect their anonymity.*
- *Any questions at this time?*

Appendix F

Interview #3: Focus Group Interview Framing and Questions

<u>**Introduction and Instructions:**</u>

- *Hello. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. I appreciated the learning I have gleaned from each of you in this process so far as I learn about environmental educators and communicators and their experiences with listening. I regret that we are not in person, with a cup of tea or coffee in hand, sitting on my back porch. This image represents the level of conversation I am hoping to achieve in today's focus group – one of honesty, positivity, reflection and comradery.*
- *Before we get going with introductions, I want to briefly remind people of a few key points around confidentiality and basic ground rules for our group discussion today:*
    - *Everyone's views are welcomed and important.*
    - *I want to emphasize that all voices are to be heard and listened to.*
    - *This conversation is being recorded.*
    - *I am assuming that when we learn about one another's views, they remain confidential. In a group like ours (MAEEC community), sometimes people are identifiable to some degree by their views and opinions. So, I ask that you keep what you hear to yourself. Whatever is heard in the 'room' should stay in the room.*
    - *That said, I cannot promise that this request of confidentiality will be honoured by everyone in the room, so I encourage you to share comments you would feel comfortable sharing in a public setting.*
    - *You are welcome at any point to stop being in the focus group. You can log out of this online platform or stay and simply stop talking. However, it will not be possible for you to pull out your data from the flow of conversation because of the interconnected nature of the group discussion we are having.*
    - *You can expect this discussion group to last about 90 minutes.*
- *Ask participants if there are any questions or comments before beginning the focus group interview.*

<u>**Interview Questions:**</u>

<u>Question 1</u>:

- *I'd like to open the conversation by asking about your thoughts on the list I provided about "10 questions to check whether you are listening" created by the International Listening Association. Responses might include elements you were attracted to in that list or feel are unrealistic.*

<u>Question 2</u>:

- *I'd like to hear about your interview; what you learned about or were reminded about while listening to your interviewee's experiences of listening and being listened to across difference? What really sticks with you from your interview?*

Question 3:

- *I have been engaging with your interview transcripts from our one-to-one interviews. I have spent time coding and analyzing the data for emerging themes about how environmental educators and communicators listen. A few themes emerged that I'd like to share with you, so that I might hear your feedback about them. Your reflections can be about your own thinking around listening, your interview with me, or your recent interview with a friend. I'm interested in whether these themes do or do not resonant with you, and in what ways?*

Possible Additional Questions:

- *How do you know you are listening?*
- *As an environmental educator and communicator, what is listening in the context of difference, conflict, and dissonance?*
- *What skills could better foster listening in communication and education?*

Closing Question(s):

- *What would the world of environmental communication and public engagement look like/be like if listening was part of the norm, culture, or mandate? What recommendations would you make to programs in our country (the MAEEC program and other environmental and/or communication programs) in order to see this come to life?*
- *Is there anything I forgot or is there something important that I should know about your experiences or the emerging theories that we haven't talked about yet?* (PAUSE)

Closing Comments:

- *I cannot emphasize how grateful I am for your participation in this study. Again, I am open to follow-up questions should something arise for you.*
- *If you requested at the beginning of this study on your initial letter of consent, then you will receive a summary of the findings from this project within a couple of months.*
- *Thanks you!*

Appendix G

International Listening Association List of Questions

10 Questions to check whether you are listening:

1) Are you giving the speaker 100% of your attention?

2) Are you listening to understand, rather than listening to respond?

3) Have you opened your mind to receive what is being said?

4) Have you rejected the temptation to prepare you response while the other person is speaking?

5) Are you open to changing your mind?

6) Are you aware of what is <u>not</u> being said as well as what is being said?

7) Are you taking account of the degree of emotion attached to the words?

8) Are you aware of any differences, and similarities (such as culture, age, gender) between you and the speaker which may influence how you listen?

9) Are you giving signals to the speaker that you are listening?

10) Are you valuing the speaker and the experience they have gathered in their life so far?

Table 1

Table 1. Draft 1, Emerging Theory based on Initial Participant One-to-One Interviews

Being a strong listener involves:
I.   A level of self-awareness II.   Having had the opportunity to learn to listen III.   Holding a respect for the person before the outcome and knowing that the person you are listening to must go through their own process IV.   Having a purpose for listening
(1) Listening is not part of the mandate for environmental communicators or communication *in general*.
(2) The experience of being listened to is profound.

Table 2

Table 2. Participant Feelings from Listening and being Listened to.

Participant Feelings when Listening Experiences feel Open	Participant Feelings when Listening Experiences feel Closed
Feeling authentic	Feeling shut down
Feeling known, as though I'm seen	Feeling triggered
Feeling connected to another human	Feeling unsure
Feeling relieved by being listened to	Feeling timid or lacking confidence
Feeling vulnerable	
Feeling grateful for the interaction	
Feeling validated	
Feeling spacious, open, like there's time	

Table 3

Table 3. *Barriers to Listening.*

Factors Imposed by the Person Talking that Cause Listening to feel Challenging	Factors that 'Just Are', that Cause Listening to feel Challenging
The speaker is assertive or aggressive	Trying to listen from an empty place – no capacity for hearing
The speaker is over confident	Having completely different worldviews
The speaker makes the listener feel attacked, which causes the listener to shut down	Feeling distracted
The speaker has an agenda that the listener doesn't care about or relate to	Educational differences – talking and seeing topics at very different levels
The speaker is talking just to fill up the space	Tuning out – boredom, repetition, other thoughts on the mind, fatigue
The speaker isn't listening; they are clinging to their own ideas	Intimate relationships – it can be hard to listen to your partner or spouse
The speaker is making the conversation all about themselves	Jumping ahead – assuming you know where the speaker is going with their words or thoughts
The speaker is overtly confrontational	Power imbalance
	Processing rates
	Listening isn't within the job scope
	Listening to diffuse a situation
	Putting on a shield of defense
	Technology can be a distraction

Table 4

Table 4. Draft 2, Theory based on Feedback from Participants in the Focus Group Interview

Listening is a complex skill. There are several competing distractions that can potentially compromise the quality of listening or the ability to be present to whom you are listening to. Self-awareness, especially in discussions with dissonance or conflict, can be an asset to improving the quality of listening.
Listening, despite or amidst the content, and knowing how to respond when the discourse is 'triggering', hateful, or harmful would be a beneficial skill for environmental communicators to have.
Listening is easier when there is respect for the person you are in dialogue with. This involves recognizing the environmental spectrum each person holds, realizing the role of process instead of just outcome in listening to various worldviews, and remembering that each person is a person.
The experience of being listened to is profound and can be rewarding or even transformative for the person being listened to; it can also be transformative for the listener. Listening offers more fruit than just an exchange of new ideas. Rather, listening brings awareness, positive feelings, a sense of openness, and deepened levels of understanding.
Listening can be risky business. Strong listeners risk changing their understanding, beliefs, or heart if they want to truly listen. A change of heart may also be the result of being listened to authentically.
Agendas can overshadow the authenticity and space that strong listening requires. This is one reason why listening has been so absent from conversations – there are competing timelines and missions. Best-case scenario: environmental communicators have the reputation of and authority to listen authentically, while still being able to promote organizational agendas and missions.
Providing environmental communicators with more opportunities to learn about, observe, practice and reflect upon listening would strengthen their confidence and effectiveness as listeners. This could be a helpful step in re-imagining the public square, where differing views and perspectives are welcome in dialogue.
Introspective, contemplative and self-reflective practices assist committed listeners in navigating the complicated and challenging dynamics involved in being a strong listener.

Table 5

Table 5. Grounded Theory: Theory of Listening Experiences of Environmental Communicators

Listening is a complex skill. There are several competing distractions that can potentially compromise the quality of listening or the ability to be present to whom you are listening to. Self-awareness, especially in discussions with dissonance or conflict, can be an asset to improving the quality of listening.
Listening, despite or amidst the content, and knowing how to respond when the discourse is 'triggering', hateful, or harmful would be a beneficial skill for environmental communicators to have.
Listening is easier when there is respect for the person you are in dialogue with. This involves recognizing the environmental spectrum each person holds, realizing the role of process instead of just outcome in listening to various worldviews, and remembering that each person is a person.
The experience of being listened to is profound and can be rewarding or even transformative for the person being listened to; it can also be transformative for the listener. Listening offers more fruit than just an exchange of new ideas. Rather, listening brings awareness, positive feelings, a sense of openness, and deepened levels of understanding.
Listening can be risky business. Strong listeners risk changing their understanding, beliefs, or heart if they want to truly listen. A change of heart may also be the result of authentic listening.
Agendas can overshadow the authenticity and space that strong listening requires. This is one reason why listening has been so absent from conversations – there are competing timelines and missions. Best-case scenario: environmental communicators have the reputation of and authority to listen authentically, while still being able to promote organizational agendas and missions.
Providing environmental communicators with more opportunities to learn about, observe, and practice and reflect upon listening would strengthen their confidence and effectiveness as listeners. This could be a helpful step in re-imagining the public square, where differing views and perspectives are welcome in dialogue.
Introspective, contemplative and self-reflective practices assist committed listeners in navigating the complicated and challenging dynamics involved in being a strong listener.