Chapter Ten
Conclusions and recommendations

. . . what Momo was better at than anyone else was listening.

Anyone can listen, you may say—what’s so special about that?—but you’d be wrong. Very few people know how to listen properly and Momo’s way of listening was quite unique.

She listened in a way that made slow-witted people have flashes of inspiration. It wasn’t that she actually said anything or asked questions that put such ideas into their heads. She simply sat there and listened with the utmost attention and sympathy, fixing them with her big, dark eyes, and they suddenly became aware of ideas whose existence they had never suspected.

(Ende, Momo, 1985, p. 18)

As explored in this study, listening may have a powerful impact in mediation to enable the disputants to fully describe their concerns, potentially enabling disputants to listen to each other and possibly to reach more effective decisions and outcomes during their mediation sessions. In this chapter, I want to describe the major findings of this study as well as explore the limitations that may have impacted on these results. I will also offer some recommendations to suggest ways in which the information raised during the exploration of this topic may be applied in the training, supervision and professional development of mediators. Further, I will make recommendations for future research based on the more surprising or noteworthy findings and areas that would benefit from deeper exploration. In addition, I will also outline exercises in listening based on the themes that arose from the participants’ exploration of the topics. Some of these exercises derive from ideas suggested by the participants and others are exercises that I have used in other training programs that relate to the topics and themes in this thesis. All aim to develop listening capacity as well as to encourage the skills that arise from a deepened capacity for listening.

Major findings

Through the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis, I derived both great familiarity with the transcripts and a deep understanding of the information in the interview data. The findings have been recorded in Chapters 5 to 9, that discuss the themes and topics that emerged from the participants’ descriptions of their experience. I have interpreted these findings with reference to relevant literature and theory where available, and the findings are summarised below.

Qualities of mediator listening

The first areas that I investigate in this study are the qualities of mediator listening. Two distinct features emerge from the interviews. The first is the focus on stillness,
absorption, and deep engagement with the communication of the disputants. The second feature is the self-awareness of the mediators and their ability to suspend their emotional reactions, judgements and biases, solution seeking and hypothesizing, in order to achieve the deep level of receptivity and engagement that they describe. The notion of ‘suspension’, derived from the literature of dialogue (Bohm, 1996; Isaacs, 1999), is particularly useful to describe this capacity. Suspension involves the mediator’s acknowledgement of their inner experience in order to make the associated emotions, habits of thinking, prejudices and biases transparent to themselves. The result may be that they can free themselves from the influence of these factors and that their listening and behaviour in mediation will be impartial, unbiased and unfettered by personal judgement and emotional reaction.

**Inter-disputant listening**

Inter-disputant listening is a phenomenon that most participants observe, yet few are able to relate to their specific intention or interventions in mediation. Some participants are able to describe the impact that inter-disputant listening had on a dispute or reflect on successful experiences of fostering inter-disputant listening. However, participants are much less able to describe this phenomenon and often attribute the development of inter-disputant listening to factors other than the direct interventions of the mediator such as the listening ‘atmosphere’ of the mediation or the ‘mystery’ of mediation. They rarely describe the impact of specific interventions to foster inter-disputant listening, or the particular approach, theoretical orientation or model of the mediator herself. The neglect of inter-disputant listening as a potential focus for mediation is a topic that is worthy of theoretical discussion and further research, and potentially for inclusion in the training and education of mediators. Scharmer’s work on listening (Kahane, 2004; Scharmer, 2007), that heavily influenced much of my interpretation and analysis, is particularly pertinent here, as is the notion of ‘recognition’ that is discussed in the literature of transformative mediation (Bush & Folger, 2005). This area was a key influence in my desire to research listening as I observed my own experiences of the effect of listening to someone else’s story to enable me to shift from conflict to a more peaceful response.

**Listening to emotion**

Participants in this study value the role of emotions in mediation. Contrary to the notion of ‘venting’ that suggests that emotions must be allowed to escape so they do not influence the rational process of negotiation, most of the participants described encouragement and validation of the expression of emotions. They practiced validation and encouragement of emotional expression to enable the ‘guts’, ‘core’, ‘essence’ or ‘texture’ of the dispute to be revealed or enhanced. The validation of the disputants’ emotions through effective reflection is a key theme. The participants describe the effect of emotional expression and validation as leading to recognition of the other disputant’s
point of view (‘perspective-taking’ or recognition), and it may lead to empathic and generative listening by the listener. According to the participants, emotional expression may assist disputants to understand the cause, motivation and situation of the other disputant.

Some of the participants describe their ability to listen deeply to the emotional expression of disputants as helping them to achieve greater detachment—moving their involvement from sympathy to empathy.

The participants report their capacity to listen for, encourage, reflect and validate emotion as amongst their most significant skills.

Creating a listening space

Participants in this study described a significant aspect of their work as the creation of an atmosphere of listening, safety and trust to enable conflict to be discussed fruitfully. Aspects that participants see as contributing to the development of the listening atmosphere included physical factors such as the setup of the furniture, their own body language, and the particular individuals, items and objects in the room. As well as attending to physical factors, the creation of a listening space seems to rely largely on the mediator to establish this space through their attention, personal qualities and qualities of listening. Participants spoke about the mediation as a time and space set apart from the everyday experience in which the utterances and communication of the disputants may be honoured.

Training in listening: developing greater options for training for mediators

It is evident from this research that training in listening is not highly influential in mediator education, at least as far as participant recall is concerned. Participants with a background in other professional areas such as counselling recall their training more clearly than many of the other mediators. This may have been due to the high level of experience of the mediators in the group, for most of whom training had occurred some years before, but even for those who had undergone more recent training, few recalled significant or memorable discussions of listening beyond basic skills. This indicates the potential to develop greater training for mediators to develop their capacity for listening based on greater self-awareness and monitoring of their own reactions, prejudices and habits as suggested in the listening exercises described below.

Limitations of this study

This study used interpretative phenomenological analysis to explore in depth the participants’ ways of understanding the topic of listening and in their work as mediators. Although contributing to dense, rich data for analysis and interpretation, the in-depth nature of the interviews and the use of personal interviews as the method of data collection may also limit or influence the findings of this study.
Use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)

Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006, p. 103) warn that studies using IPA may not extend data analysis beyond ‘first order’ initial themes,

‘[IPA may] be over-cautious or at least to be too easily satisfied with a “first order” analysis (i.e., one which summarises participants’ concerns, but does not develop further to an interpretative or conceptual level)’.

By relating themes and topics to related literature and theoretical information, I have striven to move beyond a ‘first order’ analysis and to develop the content to a deeper level whilst preserving the participants’ intended meaning. As Smith and Osborn (2004a, p. 52) stress, the emphasis in IPA is on ‘sense-making both by the participant and the researcher’. This has been my aim throughout the analytical and writing up stages and any limitations in the findings are due to my lack of familiarity with relevant theories or my inability to develop the analysis at a more sophisticated level rather than the failure of the analytical method or the paucity of data.

I have particularly focused on the lens of the distinctions between the different approaches to mediation such as facilitative, transformative and narrative as these were of interest to me. This distinction may be more easily overlooked than other dimensions. It may have been useful to consider such dimensions as the experience of the mediator in more depth, and to explore cultural, gender and other dimensions in addition the participants’ preferred model of mediation.

Self-reporting and possible dissonance between espoused theory and theory-in use

Due to the use of interviews as the only method of data collection, I relied on the participants to provide meaningful reports of their model, approach, theoretical understanding and experience about listening in mediation. In quantitative approaches, self-reporting may be seen as a potential danger to the validity of the research, whereas in methods like IPA, plausibility is achieved by deep exploration of the meaning attributed by the participants to the area of research.

I did not undertake observation of these mediators in practice to confirm how their reported information matched with their practice. This further step would have enabled me to check whether the participants listened and intervened in the ways that they describe. I have commented throughout this thesis on the distinction between espoused theory and theory in use as outlined by Argyris and Schon.

When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However the theory that actually governs his actions is his theory-in-
use, which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory; furthermore, the individual may or may not be aware of incompatibility of the two theories. (Argyris & Schon, 1976, pp. 6-7)

Further exploration of whether there was dissonance between the espoused theory and theory-in-use for participants would require observation of mediation sessions. As the focus in this study was on the ways in which participants make meaning of their own listening experience and that of the disputants, verification of their theoretical beliefs in practice was not deemed a priority. Such an investigation may be useful to assess the congruence of participants’ beliefs and theories with their actual practice. This kind of investigation would be a separate but related area of investigation and may be recommended as further research.

Low awareness of fostering inter-disputant listening

The surprising finding that mediators do not foster or seem explicitly aware of whether the disputants are listening to each other is a most unexpected outcome of this study. It may have been partly an artifact of the research and the interview structure in that I was asking about the internal processes of the mediator and their own listening, and then switched to consideration of inter-disputant listening, which is a different and more external focus. Alternatively, as I suggest, mediators simply may not be attuned to the impact that fostering listening between the disputants may have in terms of enabling them to move from downloading and factual listening to the stages of empathic and generative listening.

Focus on the mediator

Interviewing mediators about the particularity of their own experience may have encouraged them to be ‘mediator-centric’ in their responses to the questions I asked. As outlined above, they may therefore have been less able to describe the experiences of inter-disputant listening that I also sought to explore and was surprised to find that there was little engagement with this topic from this group of expert mediators.

Lack of explicit questions regarding the relationship between the model favoured by the participant and their listening

Although I included questions about the participant’s approach to mediation and questions about their listening, I did not always include specific questions asking participants how they believed that these two were linked. Such questions may have provided participants with an opportunity to further delineate their understanding of their theoretical approach to mediation, its purpose and the impact on their own listening and inter-disputant listening.
**Recommendations**

The experiences of the participants in this project suggest several recommendations to augment the training of mediators and to encourage greater attention to the mediator’s listening and to inter-disputant listening in mediation practice in general.

The finding that deep listening requires suspension and self-awareness suggests that this area may be usefully included or expanded in mediator training and continuing professional development. From my personal experience, mediation training often includes reflective journal writing and debriefing of role-play experiences that provide useful insights. The specific focus of such reflection is usually on the impacts of mediation interventions rather than the inner experience of the mediator. Specifically focusing on the mediator’s inner experience and developing an understanding of the best methods to augment self-awareness may be useful.

As a way to deepen self-awareness, Rock suggests mindfulness meditation training as a beneficial experience for lawyers and mediators, particularly in relation to the notion of neutrality or impartiality (Rock, 2005, p. 349). He states:

*The more aware a mediator is of the emotions, values, and agendas he is personally experiencing during a mediation session, the more he can structure his outward behaviour to dissipate any manifestation of bias or preference.*

Bowling and Hoffman suggest that mediators may explore a range of practices such as ‘meditation, yoga or religious disciplines’ (Bowling & Hoffman, 2000, p. 23) as pathways to the kind of personal development that will permit greater self awareness or what they describe as mediator ‘presence’. They go on to emphasise that although such presence is significant for the mediator, it is helpful in all areas of our lives. To assist mediators to develop greater self-awareness, Fisher suggests some simple practices from mindfulness meditation that mediators may undertake as preparation for mediation such as a few minutes’ breath-counting, non-judgemental awareness of sounds around them, or a swift scan of the physical body (T. Fisher, 2005, p. 29). Based on the work of Schön and Argyris, Lang and Taylor outline the importance of reflective practice as a way for mediators to develop greater self-awareness and artistry in practice. They suggest that reflection can be ‘developed through a course of study and enhanced through a disciplined approach to practice’ (Lang & Taylor, 2000, p. 119). Reflective practice tools may enhance self-awareness and these include reflection inventories—a list of questions to address before and after mediation; coaching; peer supervision; and journal writing.

As Rock has suggested in the quote above, deeper self-awareness is significant in enabling mediators to attain impartiality, neutrality or detachment. A greater emphasis on the listening capacity, and the self-awareness required to demonstrate deeper receptivity, may be a helpful way to emphasise this highly discussed (and sometimes disputed) notion in mediation during training. As several participants referred to their
experience of deeper listening and its effect on enabling greater detachment, this would be both a useful area for further research, and a helpful aspect of mediator training. Activities such as role playing highly conflictual and emotional disputants, and viewing video material of difficult clients may be one way to deepen this capacity as well as the self-awareness and reflective activities described above. A focus on monitoring inner response and reaction, to foster impartiality and neutrality would be helpful.

As several mediators described learning the skills and techniques of listening during their training rather than exercises in deepening their listening capacity, the development of a range of listening exercises that is based on self-awareness and the ‘aesthetics’ of listening is recommended. In the section below, I have included a range of suggested exercises specifically focusing less on listening technique, and more on the development of a capacity characterised by flexibility, mindfulness and awareness.

As discussed in the chapter on listening to emotion, the expression of emotion in mediation is beginning to be more greatly valued, and certainly the participants in this project emphasise the significance of attending to emotion and validating its expression to enable better decision-making and negotiation by disputants. In order to foster greater comfort and familiarity with responses to expression of emotion, this topic may be more explicitly addressed during training. As some of the participants describe, there is a ‘spectrum of comfort’ with the expression of emotion amongst mediators and this may impact significantly on what the disputants are encouraged or allowed to express during a mediation session. Mediators also differ in their approach to the value of emotion according to their professional background (that is whether they have experience as a counsellor or a lawyer, for example) as well as their mediation approach (facilitative, transformative, narrative or other model). Exercises on listening to, and reflecting emotion may assist mediators to grow more adept in their ability to attend to emotion and more comfortable in their own response to it. Self-awareness exercises will obviously be important in contributing to this capacity as well.

In all of these areas, the role of mentoring and supervision in mediation is one that is significant. The blending of diverse professional backgrounds (crudely divided between legal and social sciences) amongst mediators creates distinct styles. For those with a legal background, notions of mentorship, coaching and supervision for self-care are less familiar than for those from areas such as psychology, counselling and education where these strategies are habitual, if not an actual requirement for professional registration. In most institutionalised settings of mediation, mentoring and supervision will be required, whilst for private mediators and those working in legal firms, the unfamiliarity of these processes may require attention. As well as providing an excellent opportunity to experience the benefits of being heard, such sessions also provide opportunities for the reflective practice that fosters self-awareness. Regular mentoring and supervision are recommended for mediation services and as part of accreditation standards. The
inclusion of specific attention to listening capacity and development is further recommended.

**Recommendations for research**

**Observation of listening in mediation sessions**

In this study, I used interviews to collect data and did not verify the approaches, interventions and theories described by the mediators via observing their mediation sessions. Future investigations of mediator listening may use observation of mediation sessions to assess mediator listening and inter-disputant listening, and the use of interventions to foster inter-disputant listening, in situ. An action research project based on further development of listening and following some of the recommendations from this study may be a useful way to acquire further data as well as to provide practical information to mediators about ways both to develop their own listening capacity and to augment inter-disputant listening.

**Further investigation of inter-disputant listening**

That the realm of inter-disputant listening remains a mystery to many practitioners indicates that it may be an area ripe for research, education and development.

Further research including assessing mediation by observing actual or videotaped sessions to identify moments of recognition and understanding, and shifts in levels of listening may be helpful. Using a taxonomy similar to the one developed by Moen et al. and employed in the chapter on inter-disputant listening (2001, p. 119) may assist observation of shifts in listening and understanding. Scharmer’s taxonomy (2007, pp. 11-13) could also be used to distinguish communication that indicates downloading, fact-based, empathic and generative listening and to assess interventions that encouraged the two deeper levels of listening. Specifically it would be helpful to identify the kinds of interventions and listening from the mediator that encourage and promote greater listening and understanding of each others’ perspectives for the disputants.

The role of inter-disputant listening and conversation in the outcome of mediation, and interventions that may assist inter-disputant listening and conversation is another potential area for research. The prevention of interruption is often a major focus in the facilitative model of mediation, and Wilkinson’s work (2005, p. 236) certainly supports the satisfaction that the ability to speak uninterrupted may provide. Yet the transformative model does not prevent interruptions, and the mediator, following the hallmark that the ‘the parties have what it takes’, would allow the disputants to interrupt each other unless they asked for a specific guideline about prevention of interruption (Folger & Bush, 2001, p. 27). This suggests a significant question for future research: how would inter-disputant listening and communication be most effectively supported and what are the impacts when it is fostered? The question of whether the mediator needs to control the conversation to prevent interruptions or to foster conversation trusting in the
disputants’ capacities is significant and one that has not been assessed. In this research again, Scharmer’s taxonomy of levels of listening (2007, pp. 11-13) may be a useful way of tracking the levels of listening that both mediators and disputants move through during a mediation session.

**Levels of listening and self-awareness**

Working with mediators in training to deepen their understanding of listening and recognition and the roles that these may play in effective mediation may be a useful focus. Using Scharmer’s levels of listening, mediators may be encouraged to track their own listening and the listening of the disputants during mediation sessions.

**Listening for emotion**

Investigation of the ways in which mediators listen and respond to emotion would be another potential area for research. Kathryn, a participant in this study, described the distinction between mediators who like to ‘keep the lid on’ (Kathryn, 178/179) and those who are happy to allow the steam to escape and do not fear what may emerge from Pandora’s box. Kathryn reported that comfort with acknowledging and reflecting emotion seemed to work with high conflict disputants.

Awareness of the distinction between the emotional state of the ‘initiator’ of a separation or conflict and the ‘recipient’ may also be significant here. This is especially evident in family separation mediation, where one disputant has usually felt the impact more strongly than the other. Frequently in couple separations, one person has already moved on from the relationship perhaps even before announcing it to the other or leaving before the other person has confronted the conflict or separation. Thus the person who has not already moved on, often feels more ‘raw’ emotion and is probably less likely to be able to shift from the level of downloading and factual listening unless the emotions are recognised.

The example discussed by Joanne, another research participant, is pertinent here as one disputant was grieving the change in relationship and needed to have that grief acknowledged in order to be able to negotiate (Joanne, 64-75). Joanne points out that the more vulnerable disputant may not wish to reveal that vulnerability to the other disputant and will therefore avoid emotional discussions (Joanne, 93). Yet, she and other participants describe the benefit of exploring that territory to enable acknowledgement of hurt, grief and anger. As described above, it would be useful to observe mediation sessions to track the levels of listening that occur during mediation and relate these to the opportunity for emotional expression. It would also be useful to assess the mediator interventions that may assist greater emotional expression and acknowledgement and potentially lead to generative listening. From the reports of the participants in this project, it may be hypothesised that listening to and validating the expression of emotions may encourage empathic and generative listening.
Interventions to assist inter-disputant listening

The outcome of interventions to promote inter-disputant listening is also an area that would benefit from further research and examination during mediations. Some participants described using ‘mirroring questions’ whilst others commented on the interactional dynamics during mediation. Many were unclear about the interventions or strategies that may benefit inter-disputant listening. Research to explore this area would be useful.

Influence of cultural factors in mediator listening

The impact of cultural aspects such as ethno-cultural, gender, context of practice and class may be another area for future research to assess the differences and potential strengths, weaknesses and potential for development and learning according to culture.

A wide variety of potential research projects in this area of listening in mediation and other related fields emerge from the findings of this project. Further attention and research would increase the understanding of this area.

Suggestions for developing listening capacity

A focus on listening attitude and capacity is an area that could be further developed in training. As well as, or perhaps instead of, training novice mediators in the ‘technology’ or skills of listening, the art of capturing the essential emotion or significance of utterances could be explored in training curriculum either through the kinds of emotional identification exercises that Murray describes, or for the more adventurous educator, by artistic exercises such as haiku writing, drawing, sketching or painting. Such exercises emphasise the embodied and artistic quality of listening, the need to attune to the essence.

Trainee mediators could also be encouraged to listen to conflict stories and identify what is going on within them as they listen as a way to develop greater self-awareness. In a recent negotiation course my colleague Alikki Vernon and I taught to undergraduate law students at La Trobe University (2008), I played excerpts of videos showing George W Bush and Aung Sang Suu Kyi speaking about war and violence and asked students to monitor and observe their responses and feelings about these two different speakers. The conversation allowed students to monitor their reactions and responses to these speakers and to ‘listen within’ as a precursor to suspension.

In the training that I received in the transformative model of mediation (Bush, 2002, p. 30), this kind of self-awareness was spoken about as ‘monitoring’ – the second of a three part process that enables the mediator to be present to the mediation and to decide on appropriate interventions. The three parts were:

attend: tuning in to the disputants

monitor: tuning in to yourself and your own impulses (both helpful and unhelpful)
respond: implement an intervention

Like listening itself, these three stages are not linear and strictly staged activities. Instead attention and monitoring seem to occur as states that are continually if intermittently ‘on call’; attention perhaps shifting from inner to outer conditions as different circumstances arise. I recall a wonderful description of this kind of process described in a book on horse riding (Swift, 1985, p. 29) where the rider attends to the external environment and the relationship between her body and the horse, and then subtly shifts her attention to her own body and moves her seat or hands or applies leg or heels (the interventions of horse riding) to ensure effective riding and interplay with her mount.

In this example, attention switches between the body and the internal experience and the external environment in the same way that the mediator’s attention may switch from the disputants’ conversation and behaviour to her own inner responses, and when an intervention is prompted, attention shifts again. This continual cycling of attentional activity from the conversation at hand to inner responses, to the promptings of speech and action and then back again is the cycle of mediation attention. This may explain the exhausting quality of listening attentiveness that some participants describe as they are focused relentlessly on what is occurring both inside themselves and with the disputants. Such a cycle is illustrated below.
Mindfulness practices are helpful here. As Fisher (2005, pp. 28-29) states, it is a paradox that ‘self-awareness is central to the recognition of the needs of others’. He describes the use of a practice of STOPping, where he Stops what he is doing, Takes a breath, Observes his bodily sensation and mental state before Proceeding with his activity.

These kinds of practice deepen the listening capacity and also enable participants to practice reflection rather than simply acquiring more skills.

**Exercises for listening**

I have collected and developed, in the course of learning from (and listening deeply to) my research participants and writing this thesis, a range of exercises that may be used to encourage greater consideration of deep attention, self-awareness, listening for the essential elements and emotions, and understanding the qualities and experience of listening. These may be useful to consider for training curricula in mediation and conflict communication.
Observing your own responses (suspension)

**Purpose**: development of awareness of personal responses when listening to different speakers

In this exercise, you can use videotaped examples of two very different speakers (as noted above, I have used Aung Sang Suu Kyi and George W Bush talking about war) or excerpts from a videotaped mediation or simulation. The presenter asks participants to listen deeply to these two whilst observing their own inner responses.

After the activity, you ask participants to share their observations and experiences. You can also check their understanding of the message and meaning of the communication as well. This may be followed by discussion of the theory of suspension.

Deep attention

*Developing deeper observation and attention*

**Purpose**: development of deeper attentiveness in other sense domains and with non-human items before listening to human communication.

As a prelude to listening activities or exercises, participants can be asked to observe the qualities of various objects. Depending on what is available in the environment, participants could move through a hierarchy of attentive experiences.

- A stone, rock, an ornament, part of a building
- A plant or a flower
- An animal or bird (or a picture or other representation of one)
- An artwork or a poem

Observe the above items, focusing on the deep attention to the qualities of the experience.

You can use this exercise prior to other listening activities.

Haiku experience

**Purpose**: development of awareness of the qualities of a human experience or utterance.

This exercise is taken quite literally from Lederach’s suggestion that listening is about aesthetics and requires a ‘haiku’ attitude (Lederach, 2005, p. 70).

A haiku is a short Japanese poem traditionally constructed in seventeen syllables to capture the essence of an experience.

After familiarisation with some haiku, through a handout or some examples, participants are sent out into the natural environment or given something natural to observe and then asked to write a haiku to capture its essential elements.

Alternatively, participants can be asked to write or draw a description that captures the essential elements of a particular experience, environment or object. After trying to capture this for something in their environment, then they could be asked to construct a...
haiku after viewing a video or a role play of a conflict situation and to create haiku for the different people in conflict.

For example in a workplace dispute:

For the employee—

**Oh my busy boss**

*You never listen to pain—*

*I feel so ignored.*

For the boss—

**When nothing gets done**

*My panic overwhelms me so*

*I cannot hear you.*

**Representing the experience of conflict**

**Purpose:** development of understanding of the qualities of a conflict experience through listening.

After listening to a conflict story from the presenter or sharing a personal experience of conflict with another, participants are asked to draw the situation using colours, symbols, metaphors or other methods to capture the essential elements of the story or experience. They are then asked to describe the drawings they created and the qualities and emotions they represent. Alikki Vernon and I have used this exercise in teaching mediation with a slightly different focus. In this exercise, participants can be asked to draw the core or essence of the dispute.

**Recalling a deep listening experience**

Ask participants to recall an experience of ‘being deeply listened to’ by someone. What were the qualities of the listener? What did the listener do, and refrain from doing while they were listening to you?

What was the impact of that listening?

This is a useful preamble to discussing listening qualities. Whenever I have conducted such a conversation with students, they always bring up all of the ‘skills’ and ‘qualities’ of deep, receptive listening.

**‘Getting clear’ exercise**

**Purpose:** experience of the effectiveness of deep listening.

This activity was used in transformative mediation training that I attended both with Baruch Bush and Judy Saul (Bush, 2002). In the exercise, one person talks about a concern while the other person simply listens. The listener may reflect the content and emotion of the speaker’s utterance but they should avoid asking questions, giving advice, options or solutions, or otherwise intervening. You can practice this exercise for just five minutes and then discuss people’s findings in terms of the impact of the exercise
on the speaker’s clarity and the challenge for the listener in terms of monitoring and suspending emotions, solution giving, hypothesising and advice giving.

**Deliberate attention and non-attention**

**Purpose:** Experience of the difference between deep attention and non-attention.

This exercise is from the Dispute Resolution subject originally developed by Marilyn McMahon at La Trobe University. The speaker is asked to speak about a topic of interest while the listener is given instructions to change from attending to the speaker to non-attending once a bell is rung or another signal is given. The impact of withdrawal of attention and the power of listening can be discussed as in the similar exercise below.

**Exploring the spectrum of listening**

**Purpose:** Experience of the difference between listening and non-listening.

One of the most potent listening exercises I have experienced occurred during a workshop on storytelling in organisations, conducted by storyteller, Ashley Ramsden. It was helpful that we were in a large hall with ample space between pairs. Ashley introduced this activity by reminding us that this was to be done ‘in the spirit of play’ with no violent reactions permitted as the experience of the withdrawal of listening attention may lead to intense frustration. It is an exaggerated version of the deliberate attention and non-attention.

Speakers need to prepare themselves to talk about some area of passion or concern in their life.

Speakers and listeners sit facing each other.

The presenter faces the listeners (that is, standing behind the speakers). According to the presenter’s position in the room, the listeners vary their listening from ‘110%’ listening at one end, to no listening at the other end. They are not required to ask questions or make reflections, simply to listen.

As presenter, start at 110% listening and move at your own pace, with pauses as desired, to no listening. You may wish to end with returning to 110% listening.

Reverse the speakers and listeners and repeat the activity before giving an opportunity for feedback in pairs and then with the whole group.

Speakers may find this extremely frustrating and hurtful as attention is withdrawn. Continuing to speak becomes almost impossible without the attention of the listener.

Listeners may also find this activity very hard as it is difficult to withdraw attention once you have engaged with someone.

Reflections may consider the role of attention, the creation and destruction of a listening atmosphere, the speaker’s and listener’s physical, emotional and intellectual experience of this activity.
**Listening to emotion**

**Purpose:** Development of greater skill and comfort in listening to emotional language and behaviour.

This activity is based on a training exercise described by one participant, Murray (14/15). He mentions the difficulty in naming emotions experienced by many people and particularly those in certain professions. In his mediation training, he emphasises reflection of the emotional dimension of the dispute by recalling emotional events in his own biography, acting them out and then asking participants to reflect the emotional and content dimensions of the dispute.

In preparation for this activity, you may want to brainstorm a wide range of emotions, and list them for students or have a list that you have already developed. Janine Björkman (2009), a mediator who also teaches parent effectiveness training, has comprehensive lists of emotions that she uses in helping parents to identify their emotion more appropriately when using ‘I-messages’ (Gordon, 1970, p. 121). I have included two lists of terms that Janine uses in her Parent Effectiveness Training. The lists are derived from Thomas Gordon’s work, initially in parent effectiveness training and later in a broad range of communication skills (Gordon, 1970). Rosenberg also presents comprehensive lists of feelings distinguishing between those that are likely to be present when ‘wants are being satisfied’ and those that are likely to be present when ‘wants aren’t being satisfied’ in his language (Rosenberg, 1983, pp. 11-13).
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## Table 2: Range of emotions (b)

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In this exercise, the presenter or others if available, act out a conflict playing the role of one or more of the people in conflict. It may be useful to refer a conflict you have personally witnessed or experienced (provided you have processed it fully yourself!).

Act out a typical utterance from the situation and ask the participants to tell you the emotion that the person may be experiencing. Encourage participants to move beyond the emotional hold-all ‘upset’ into more finely nuanced emotions using the lists of emotions above or a list generated by the students.

Conclusion

I hope that this work will inspire mediators and others to consider the significance of listening in their work and to cultivate the attitudes and capacities that assist them to listen with depth and care. I also hope that the insights from this research will assist mediators to work with more understanding of the possible significance of inter-disputant listening and the ways in which they may foster listening during mediation. The significance of listening to emotion and the value of emotion in furthering and deepening understanding of the narratives presented in mediation and to foster greater understanding is also a significant theme in this research project and one that deserves greater exploration and acknowledgement in the field. I recommend greater focus on training in listening as part of the mediator’s professional and personal development. The role of self-awareness in deepening the listening capacity of mediators and assisting the creation of a listening atmosphere is also pertinent. In my personal journey, reminding me to listen and not to move into action and reaction is a constant challenge, and this work has served to help me to understand my own listening, self-awareness and reactivity and to ponder and implement changes to more helpful ways of being in communication with others.

A move to greater receptivity to change and difference is evident in the election of US President, Barack Obama. As I write this conclusion he has just presented an historic speech in Egypt that sensitively acknowledges the pain of the past for all the participants in the Middle East conflicts (Obama, 2009). He offers a receptivity and listening capacity even to former ‘enemies’ in order to work towards the future. Such collaboration and willingness to listen is the capacity that Corradi Fiumara (1990, p. 8) lauds as ‘radical reciprocal openness’, a human gift that may be much needed in our time of challenge, crisis, conflict and enormous potential for change. Like Ende’s (1985) fictional character, Momo, through deep listening we may be able to summon up new ideas that we never knew existed both in ourselves and in others.
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