



Empathy Interviews

Embracing A Mindset of Radical Inclusion

Overview

Empathy interviews, a cornerstone of design thinking, help us listen for how a person *feels* and *perceives* the equity challenge we are trying to address, as well as access their creative thinking around how to approach it. These interviews are typically one-on-one for thirty minutes or longer—ideally in-person, but over the phone or video can work as well. Whatever format you use, study the speaker’s body language, tone, and emotional reactions as well as capture their words: where emotion is at play, nonverbal cues (55 percent) and tone (38 percent) account for a vast majority (93 percent) of the meaning conveyed, not the spoken word (only 7 percent) (Mehrabian, 1981).

The Mindset of Radical Inclusion

Empathy interviews help us slow down and build our capacity to engage *with* others, rather than act *on*, *to* or *for* others, as subjects with unique stories, histories, and cultural wealth to be honored. When done with care and purpose, empathic listening can lead to real-time changes in perception, policy and practice that exemplify the mindset of **radical inclusion**, which scholar Ortiz Guzman describes as “the intentional act of interrupting inequity where it lives . . . Recognizing the multiplicity of stories, truths, their proximities, their intersections, and the people who own the stories, are requisites for equity design work”.¹ In practicing this mindset, we commit to identify and include the voices of those who may have never had a seat at the decision-making table but whose experiences and perspectives matter. There are many ways to structure deep listening, three of which are outlined below.

	Empathy Interview	Focus Group	Listening Campaign
Define	A one-on-one listening session with the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of the other person’s perspectives, struggles, and lived experience.	A small group listening session with the purpose of understanding the group’s collective perspectives, struggles, and experiences <i>and/or</i> hearing their ideas around how to address a community challenge.	A focused effort to identify concerns and priorities in a community while building relational capital, a listening campaign is accomplished through "one-on-one" or small group meetings.
Use when...	You want to gain insight into one or more colleagues’ or students’ experiences.	You are trying to get a sense of <i>patterns</i> of experience within or across particular groups of students or colleagues at the margins (i.e.	You need to gather a wide array of street-level data to really understand a pressing issue or challenge from a 360 degree

¹ Ortiz Guzman, C. M. (2017). equityXdesign: Leveraging identity development in the creation of an anti-racist equitable design thinking process (p. 45) (Doctoral dissertation). Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA.

		parents of EL's, students with IEP's, etc.).	perspective.
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Preparing to Listen

1. Identify an equity-centered question or challenge that feels important and timely.
2. Identify a series of questions you want to ask the students you will interview. Speaker gives responses in the form of a story while the interviewer captures what they hear in the graphic organizer below.
3. After the speaker has responded to all prompts, interviewer practices active listening skills to reflect back, “What I heard you say was...”
4. Interviewer asks if the speaker wishes to clarify or add anything.
5. Interviewer quietly reviews the narrative data, highlighting resonant words or phrases.

Capturing Street Data from Empathy Interviews

General Interview Questions	Beginning of School Empathy Interview Questions	Maximo's Idea-Generating Interview Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What's it been like to be a student here? What has worked well for you, and what has been challenging? ● What is the biggest challenge you have faced over the past year? How have you navigated that? ● Share something about yourself that your teachers wouldn't know just by meeting you. ● Share an experience of bias or exclusion that impacted you as a person and/or a learner. ● If you could wave a magic wand, what's one thing you would like to change or create in our (classroom, school) to make it more inclusive and equitable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What has your experience of the past year been like? ● What has been the best part of coming back to school? ● What do you hope we keep from when we were in person? What do you hope you never have to do again? ● What is your favorite way to learn (prompts if needed: alone, with classmates, listening, moving around, laying, standing, etc)? ● How do you like to show what you know (writing, telling a story, acting it out, projects, making things, completing a test)? ● How will I know or what might tell me you are enjoying class? What might you say, think, or do? ● How will I know or what might tell me that you need help or are having trouble in class? ● What is one thing you think I should know about what makes you a great kid? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Did you particularly enjoy any of the tools that you used in distance learning? Should they remain and in what manner? ● Are there any issues with the return of in-person regarding morale you hope to solve? ● There is currently little effort to address the state of the country, the wars we're in, the environment, all that. Do you have any ideas to both talk about it and maybe do something to help? ● What is one issue in our society you would like to take action on? ● Any more bright ideas in general to improve schools?