

Creative Conversations: “It’s surprising what you hear when you listen” (BBC Listening Project)

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Introduction

‘Creative Conversations’ is designed to assist churches and those involved in urban mission to develop a deeper awareness of their own location or context. Its specific aim is to help Christian groups explore in particular the everyday lived experiences of those who find themselves marginalised from mainstream society and through their growing awareness of the issues to frame thoughtful and practical responses.

Aim

This project aims to give voice to those who experience marginalisation, exclusion and deprivation so we can hear the experience of it in the first person in order to challenge and inform our engagement in mission.

What We Aim to Do

The project will involve the production of ten to fifteen audio recordings (each edited to between 5-8 minutes in length) that explore a wide range of experiences of exclusion, marginalisation and deprivation. Each conversation will take place between two or three people who have shared in particular situations such as long-term unemployment, discrimination, mental health, struggles with debt and low levels of income, etc. In terms of ethnographic research, it is our understanding that a careful preparation for such conversations creates a particular sense of attentive space in which participants and others come to understand the experiences and causes of exclusion in fresh ways. This understanding draws on the use of sensory methods and reflective practice where perspectives that were previously unseen and unknown, even by those who are participating, are made known and revealed.

Conversations will be convened between small groups of two or three people who have had a shared experience of severe or chronic deprivation (for example, the conversation might be between people who have used a food bank on a predominantly white estate, or between migrants who have been unable to settle their immigration status). Conversations will be carefully set up with the help of local friends who will help establish the care and atmosphere for honest and open sharing. Audio recordings of conversations will be produced and, where necessary carefully edited so that the final product is about 5-8 minutes. For an example of this

kind of approach see BBC Radio 4 series 'the listening project.'¹ In the three months by the end of 2015 we will do some analytical work on the collection of conversations which will include, where possible, further reflection from the participants themselves.

Orientation Day

Creative Conversations in Context

- What does a Creative Conversation actually look like?
- An introduction to listening as a method of research
- Creative Conversations as a way of researching your context. Why 'creative'?
- Introduce the idea of a Creative Conversations network – to be picked up at the end of the day.

How to Prepare for a Creative Conversation

- Recruiting CC participants
- Preparing a safe conversational space (thinking about ethical issues and ideas of power and influence in conversations)
- Reflecting on the particular challenges of your own context
- Preparing conversational cues and questions
- Ethics. Does your situation pose particular ethical challenges?

The Main Event

- Welcome and clarifying expectations
- Your presence as a host and being aware of power dynamics (including reflexive practice)
- The technicalities of making a good quality recording
- Ending the conversation
- Capturing insights – what to do immediately after the conversation
- How to save and edit recordings (including confidentiality)

Analysing the Conversations

- Analysis: first impressions. What is 'creative' about this conversation?
- Presenting findings and using Creative Conversations webpage
- Deeper analysis: getting under the surface of the conversation
- Further research and theological reflection.
- Creative Conversations and doing theology from your patch

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/features/the-listening-project>