

Free Listening: Developing Skills for Dialogic Praxis

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Abstract: Given the widespread ideological polarization of the current times, cultivating ways to empathize across difference has never been more important. In this essay, we outline Free Listening (FL), a pedagogical practice that helps people grow their capacity to empathetically engage others across difference by engaging in structured sessions of active empathetic listening. Our prior work demonstrates that the structured practice of FL has both affective and practical implications for how students engage with others; students leave the practice with a greater sense of awareness, appreciation for other cultures, and ability to listen across cultural and ideological boundaries. We believe FL has great promise within the teaching-and-learning process in relation to civic and community engagement, service learning, and relational praxis. In this essay, we outline the practice of FL and review literature that helps elucidate what this practice is and does. Some key themes are discussed that reveal the valuable contributions of this practice as they have emerged from our students' and our own experience with/in FL. Finally, we trace the pedagogical implications of FL as they connect to theories of dialogue and dialogic praxis. Overall, we argue that FL should be a regular practice for pedagogues across the social sciences in order to cultivate in students the relational and empathetic skills that are needed to advance the project of depolarization—a project in which other-centeredness should be a defining feature.

Keywords: listening, empathy, dialogue, activism, Free Listening.

To state that our current sociopolitical moment is charged is characterizing it lightly. A majority of Americans believe that the country is heavily divided, punctuating the diminishment of democratic thought and action (Jones & Najle, 2019). Evidence of the increasing strife, anger, hostility, and polarization abounds. Examples range from peaceful protests (such as those of the Black Lives Matter movement) to hostile takeovers (such as the storming of the U.S. Capitol) to divisive news commentary (such as the discourse on “cancel culture”), among others. These contentious phenomena are especially visible and salient in the context of social media, wherein the homophilic tendencies of users and targeted content of platforms foster feelings of division (Bischoff, 2019; Yarchi et al., 2021).

And amid this climate of differentiation and polarization, college faculty are often left in discomfort, being ill-equipped to facilitate classroom discussions around topics such as race and politics (e.g., Maruyama & Moreno, 2000; Pasque et al., 2013). As a result, instructors often avoid such conversations, which can lead to failed or missed learning outcomes for students (Grant, 2020; Gurin et al., 2004; Sue et al., 2009).

There is also a remarkable phenomenon that coexists (or perhaps correlates) with this increasing polarization in society. College students today are the most socially and mentally challenged cohort in U.S. history, with ever-rising levels of loneliness, anxiety, and stress (Polack, 2018). And as students become more and more disconnected, they tend to lose the ability to communicate well with others (Turkle, 2016). All of these challenges foster feelings of disconnection that compound issues of social division wherein many students choose to avoid engagement and the stress that may come from confronting those with dissenting opinions.

Taken collectively, these intersecting issues create conditions in which people find themselves not only more polarized than ever but with less *ability* to communicate across those polarized divides. For pedagogues, a question emerges: How can we help students develop the capacity to communicate

across difference?

We feel that this work begins with an understanding of polarization as a form of “antidialogue.” Freire (2000) explained that the social division and polarization felt in the world are characteristics of antidialogue—an intentional project advanced by oppressors with the purpose of fostering disunity among the oppressed. Fostering dialogue is the action needed to overcome this antidialogue and we feel that this should be a central concern in depolarizing pedagogy. In doing so, educators can resist the climate of objectification and othering that permeates a polarized world and push toward a vision of radical humanization (Freire, 2000).

In this essay, we highlight Free Listening (FL) as a pedagogical tool that helps students develop empathetic listening skills in polarized times. Empathetic listening has been widely understood as a core element of dialogue that functions to rebuild, repair, and realize social relationships ranging from the interpersonal to the international (Bodie & Crick, 2014; Broome, 1993, 2009b; Cissna & Anderson, 1998; Lipari, 2010; Rogers, 1957). Our experience with this practice—as both participants and facilitators for our students—suggests that FL not only helps students reflect critically on their own listening practices (i.e., recognizing that they listen to respond rather than to understand) but also facilitates a level of understanding and appreciation across difference as they empathetically listen to others. In this way, we offer FL as dialogic praxis. Moreover, we present FL as a concrete pedagogical tool that, when facilitated, can support the realization of a depolarizing pedagogy.

This essay progresses as follows. We begin by outlining and describing what FL is and explaining some of the pedagogical affordances of the practice. Next, we describe students’ and our own experiences engaging in the practice to show the kinds of moments and reflections that have emerged in the process. Finally, we trace the ways in which FL connects to theory and how this illuminates the dialogical nature of FL, which makes it a tool that can support the project of depolarization.

Free Listening: “People Need to Be Heard”

FL is part of an activist movement founded by Benjamin Mathes in Los Angeles and is now internationally organized under the name Urban Confessional. The movement emerged in response to a perception that more and more people are feeling lonely and without someone to talk to (Urban Confessional, n.d.). In response, the practice of FL aims to make people feel heard by occupying public places and awaiting strangers who choose to participate.

Enacting FL is simple. To be a free listener, one needs only to write “Free Listening” on a sign and to occupy a place in public, awaiting those who would like to talk. To be a *good* listener, though, Urban Confessional argues for a few guidelines and principles to be followed. The most practical of these guidelines are the four “keys to listening” offered in the Free Listening Partner Guide (Urban Confessional, n.d.). These are:

- *Imbalanced Conversation.* Otherwise known as the “80:20” rule, this focuses free listeners on listening for 80% of the time and speaking for 20% of the time by asking questions, clarifying, and moving the conversation forward.
- *Empathetic Agreement.* Rather than sharing opinions or disagreeing, empathetic agreement is about empathetically seeking to understand another’s point of view.
- *No Barriers.* This guideline calls for listeners to be present and attentive with conversational partners, removing any potential barriers to verbal or nonverbal communication (such as headphones, phones, sunglasses, hats, or other distractions).
- *Respect the Silence.* The organization encourages listeners to let silence linger rather than filling moments of awkward silence, as this may lead to deeper and more meaningful conversation.

These practices are *essential* to FL as a tool for listening across difference. FL explicitly focuses one's listening on the other. Not only does FL encourage free listeners to work on listening 80% of the time and use their 20% talk time to draw conversation back to the other, but it asks people to respond to difference with empathy and curiosity rather than sharing their own opinion. And, as we explain more fully below, this structure of listening deviates so sharply from the typical way of listening to others that it leads to deeper understanding of others' perspectives *as well as* a critical self-reflexivity around one's own poor listening habits.

In many ways, this practice is a form of mindful listening (Burleson, 2011) that most closely resembles active-empathetic listening (Bodie, 2011) in the way that it focuses on coming to understand others while remaining actively present and emotionally attentive to one's conversational partner. We find particular value, though, in the low-skill and experiential nature of the practice. In other words, FL requires little-to-no startup beyond having a pen, some cardboard, and a willingness to attempt these active-empathetic listening behaviors. This practice does not call for perfection. In fact, we often implement this practice by introducing our students to FL quickly in class in a deliberate attempt to get students to "try out" the practice for themselves prior to developing any preconceptions drawn from theory or others' experiences with FL (for a more thorough explanation of FL in pedagogical practice, see Tietzort et al., 2021). We feel that the structure of FL affords students the opportunity to understand their listening behaviors and play with new behaviors in situ. And in this opportunity, we have found that many students return with rich stories, reflections, and insight into their own and others' lived experiences.

Beyond the classroom, our research underscores the usefulness of FL for developing interpersonal communication skills (Tietzort & Hanners, 2019). We worked with two groups of honors students over the span of an academic year and observed an array of outcomes for students who participated in FL (Tietzort et al., 2021). These students were asked to practice FL for 1-hr sessions on campus every week. Each session was followed by a brief writing reflection exercise, and the study culminated with individual and focus group interviews with the students. In total, 20 students participated as free listeners in the study. An important benefit of this project was our ability to observe the ways that student narratives of their FL practice changed over time. We explain this further in the essay as we apply these significant themes to the phenomenon of polarization and the pedagogical goal of depolarization.

We have incorporated this practice into various courses and topical areas that include but are not limited to interpersonal communication, small group communication, and relational communication. We value the way that FL aids students' development of conversational skills and their building of supportive communication styles in small groups, in addition to many other teaching-and-learning opportunities. For one, we appreciate the practice as a way to move beyond the classroom, thereby mixing up the teaching-and-learning modes of a given course. Second, we cherish the debriefing discussions that take place in class after the practice. These discussions are filled with unique stories, insight, praise, curiosity, an eagerness to share, and sometimes highly emotional and moving moments. Last but not least, we admire the critical-pedagogical component of practicing FL ourselves—as teachers—alongside students, to help establish a class community and (ideally) reduce the power disparity between the teacher and students. In other words, teachers and students are able to embody a teacher-student role and enter into a dialogue in which all are supporting, teaching, and learning from one another (Freire, 2000). We estimate that since we began practicing FL, more than 100 students have participated with us.

We came to this special issue because of the dialogic spaces that FL has created across our work, ranging from interpersonal praxis to critical theory and community service. We maintain that FL—and other empathetic communicative practices—should be treated as a vital component in any university education. In what follows, we elucidate how and why we hold this position.

Experiencing Otherness and Cultivating Empathy

How is it that FL helps cultivate empathetic listening skills? We argue that FL represents a shift in one's typical way of communicating, one that tends to disrupt many taken-for-granted assumptions and behaviors about communication and social interaction. In other words, FL is a difference that makes a difference. We contend that—because of its open-ended, experiential, and emergent quality—FL is a practice that opens up rich teaching-and-learning spaces for us and our students. To illustrate this, we highlight themes that have emerged throughout students' experiences with FL in our classes and research. By narrating and examining our own and students' stories of FL, we draw out the pedagogical implications and depolarizing opportunities of the practice:

It kind of felt like the world was happening around me and I was just there, which was weird at first. But then I liked it because ... either I can just be in this space, and just like, I guess notice things about campus that I hadn't noticed before. But also ... I was noticing people a lot more. I noticed what people were doing a lot more.

This student's story is not unique. In a general sense, this sort of otherness showed up through students' talk about how "standing with a sign" was so markedly different from their everyday experiences. One student observed: "As a college student there's always stuff going on. ... Sometimes you don't realize you need to escape from that." Many students also remarked about noticing how strangers would ignore them through acts of putting their headphones on, changing their path, or averting their eyes. Combined, these reveal a shift in student awareness, departing from their typical ways of being as students.

This experience of otherness opened up various spaces for students to explore their own communicative behaviors, assumptions about themselves, interactions with others, and relationship to the larger community. For instance, some students used the example of campus solicitors (e.g., recruiters, fundraisers) as a comparison to describe their experience. "I always see people standing off to the side on campus doing something, but it felt weird to be that person." Some of these same students claimed that they would stop for these people more in the future because they know what it feels like to be ignored. Put together, this reveals students' feelings of otherness that emerge from the experience. It is common for passersby to ignore solicitors and public demonstrators on campus, and some students directly related to that experience of being ignored. These examples show a distinct shift in awareness that generates an empathetic stance toward these types of interactions.

FL also facilitated spaces for students to overcome their own anxiety around communicating with others. At first, many students are hesitant to participate in FL and unsure of what they will talk about or if others will approach them. Because we have students participate in FL once per week over several weeks, however, they get many opportunities to work through these initial fears. FL is indeed a vulnerable practice. Many students noted that the practice did cultivate a sense of unease wherein they felt "vulnerable" and experienced difficulty with "putting yourself out there." However, this vulnerability quickly gave way to a great sense of confidence in interacting with others, and even the most nervous students quickly moved past their anxieties. Furthermore, we noticed that many students claimed to experience a "quiet" during FL, as well. As one student explained, "I've never had time like that in my life where there's just like—there was no obligation." With the goal of standing and waiting—and without the ability to check out their phone or reach out to others—many students experienced a calmness in which they could process their emotions and slow their thoughts. This represents a kind of deceleration of everyday experience, something that felt unusual to some: "I don't usually sit and think."

Students were challenged to listen in new ways, which often led to distinct moments that

expanded their understanding of and interactions with others. One student recalled a conversation with a disgruntled student who talked about an ongoing family conflict. In telling the story, the disgruntled student remarked that his mother was “being a bitch.” This student (the one who was listening) was shook by his comment, thinking to herself, “how could you say that?” She explained that, instead of expressing her shock and disappointment, she leaned into the guidelines and said: “Tell me more about that.” In this moment of interaction, the student recognized the structure and purpose of the practice and pulled back on her own self-interest to attend to another’s. She went on to state that the moment “made me more aware of how other people go through things and so that, sort of, made me less thinking that everyone thinks the same way that I did.” Another student explained that in the practice, “it was really good just to kind of keep my trap shut a little more so I could really just understand these people.” Many students also began identifying their typical ways of listening to others as a listening-to-respond style, remarking that this often stifles conversation because space is not created for others to converse. As one student summarizes, there would not be “much of a conversation” if free listeners did not continue working on suppressing these listening-to-respond habits.

These student experiences had a profound combined impact, where many students experienced moments of empathy that were directly enabled by the focused structure of FL. In the case of the student hearing about family conflict, this student was able to momentarily let go of her ego, pause her judgment, and be of service to another. We maintain that the structure of FL is uniquely and practically positioned to build out the capacity to empathize through frequent moments such as these wherein empathetic behavior is challenged.

FL offers a grounded practice of other-centeredness that focuses on the microcommunicative moves that can cultivate other-centered capabilities. With elements such as the 80:20 principle, participants can gain experience in other-centeredness through a kind of listening that simply is not enabled by the ongoing self-interest that is maintained in everyday experiences. Because the people who stop to engage (the “talkers”) are strangers to the listeners, we reason that the ability for participants to decenter themselves as listeners in the interaction is much easier than if the talker was a friend or family member. Put another way, the practice is not about building and maintaining relationships, it is about being of service to others. In this service, though, the practice helps build one’s relational *capabilities*—of which empathy is a central component. Thus, one benefit of FL is its capacity to decenter oneself while in service of others which, as a result, helps one grow the communicative capabilities necessary to work across difference with others. It has the capacity to move one from “*How could you?!*” to “Tell me more.”

We have also found that the calmness felt within FL created room for students to explore their everyday communication habits. When students had downtime between listening sessions, they were able to reflect on their experience and forecast behavioral alternatives. In other words, students exhibited mindful moments that can likely be attributed to this slowing-down of experience wherein they could be present in the moment and attentive to the other (Schure et al., 2008; Shapiro & Carlson, 2009). Collectively, the experience of FL cultivated a new sense of clarity in how students listened that spilled over into their personal lives. For example, one student shared about her discovery that she gives advice far more than she actually listens to others:

I did learn about myself that I am someone who tries to give advice more than I thought. So, I caught myself so many times being like, “Oh well, oh wait, never mind, because we're not supposed to do that.” So, I thought that was really interesting because I always was like, “Oh yeah, I'm a good listener.” But I never realized that I'm more of an advice giver. So that was, kind of, something interesting to learn about myself for the future.

For another student, this led to a more patient listening style during a conflict with her mother:

Yeah, well I'm trying to see her side of it rather than me just countering back everything. So, I think that helps the conversation. I mean, it resolved the problem a lot faster and I was able to see it from her side a lot better than if I was just to argue mine.

Both of these examples reveal moments of practical transformation in students' lives. Through observation and reflection, many students drew upon discrete experiences from FL to change their attitudes about interpersonal difference and embrace critically reflexive forms of thought and action in their everyday interactions.

These discoveries and changes in communication skills represent perhaps the most significant opportunity afforded by the practice of FL. When asked to reflect on what was learned through the experience, student research participants often narrated these microcommunicative insights from which they were able to enact change in their own lives almost immediately. This is striking in the context of a world replete with selfish bluster. FL provides the opportunity to be still and present in conversation in order to be of service to others. This practice, then, serves as a break from the generally selfish state of social affairs whereby students are able to catch their breath and experience what full other-centeredness *feels* like. Through the calm and clarity of the experience, these student examples demonstrate the practically transformative potential of FL that supports a turning away from self-centered forms of social interaction.

Moreover, students described a disruption in their taken-for-granted ways of being toward other people in their everyday life. We found that students were deeply impacted by this practice, where the majority shared a renewed sense that "everyone has a story," and "everyone has something they're dealing with." This empathetic way of being is of particular significance when working toward a depolarizing pedagogy because it demonstrates how such perspective taking lays a foundation for alternative ways of interacting with others who one might typically disregard or be in direct conflict with.

This is where we center FL as a tool for depolarizing pedagogies. As we have described, FL has provided our students and us with the meaningfully rich experiences, vocabularies, and skills required to empathetically engage with others in meaningful ways. In what remains, we braid together various strands of theory and practice to elucidate FL as a form and function of dialogue that can contribute to depolarizing pedagogies.

Resisting Antialogue Through Other-Centered Communicative Praxis

To begin, it is necessary to recognize some of the boundaries of FL as a pedagogical, interpersonal, and depolarizing tool. We do *not* argue that FL is a/the means by which depolarization is enacted. Rather, we argue that FL is a communicative practice that cultivates empathetic and dialogic forms of interaction. Empathy and dialogue, we argue, are elements that precondition depolarization. Without the capacities to authentically think, feel, communicate, and be present with others, there is no path to travel that would draw people away from poles and toward each other. We recognize that hate is real. Violence is real. Oppression is real. As pedagogues, we do not put forward this practice as a way to directly address hate speech in the classroom or to soften a potentially violent encounter on campus, for example. Nor do we equate or promote the cultivation of empathy as a medicine for social injustices such as the state-sanctioned murder of black and brown bodies in the United States. Rather, we have observed and experienced FL as an ontologically disruptive practice that enables students to sit with others' experiences. This enables moments such as in-class discussions wherein students reflect upon their assumptions of and everyday practices in the social world. More importantly, they

are able to recognize that “everyone has a story” and that being *with* others is a means to richer, deeper understandings of the world. In sum, this is a practice that confronts students’ understanding of self-and-other and it offers the tools through which they can attend to others in ways that can resist an increasingly individualized and polarized climate.

The other-centeredness that is cultivated in FL represents a dialogic form of social interaction that can support the project of depolarization. To illustrate this point, we draw from the works of dialogue theorists to illustrate the ways in which this structured practice can build the dispositions and skills that precondition experiences of dialogue and, therefore, pedagogies of depolarization.

Freire’s (2000) theory of dialogue is an appropriate point of entry to explain FL as a valuable pedagogical tool. His germinal work laid a foundation for critical pedagogical theorists to explore the ways that educational practices can be made authentic and humane. He characterized dialogue as the ideal state and practice of education in which learners can fully become human. This represents a marked difference from the “banking” model of education wherein students are treated as objects (read: nonhuman) that knowledge is poured into. He further describes this model as necrophilic in that it seeks out the othering and death of students-as-humans. Ultimately, Freire regarded dialogue as the practice of becoming fully human and, therefore, argued that educational practice ought to foster dialogic teaching-and-learning practice.

FL facilitates such a practice. We have found rich opportunities in practicing FL *with* our students. The practice of working alongside students has brought about emic discussions of what it means to listen, to empathize, to relate, and to communicate well. In this way, we treat FL as a form of problem-posing education (Dewey, 2015; Freire, 2000; Young, 1992) in which teacher-students (Freire, 2000) approach the problem of “*What does it mean to be other-centered?*” and critically reflect on the experience collectively. This constitutes a precondition for depolarizing pedagogies because it works to level the power relations between students and teachers through the affirmation of individual agents in the process of becoming as they simultaneously reflect and act with/in the world—a “revolutionary futurity” (Freire, 2000, p. 84). Thus, FL structures a pedagogical environment that includes and affirms all in the process through the practicing, sharing, and reflecting upon mutual experience.

Beyond the process of teaching-and-learning, FL is also a means of relational reflexivity. Many theorists argue that the human condition is naturally a dialogic phenomenon by which we navigate the world through our relating to one another (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Throughout the practice, students shared unique insights about how they related to others—both in the moment of practicing FL and in subsequent moments in their lives outside of the practice. Some students expressed their realizations of how they typically show up in interactions with others. An example of this is how students recognized that they typically inserted their thoughts in some moments instead of keeping the space open for others. And other students expressed how their ability to withhold themselves in FL conversations (remain other-centered) contributed to actual change in their personal relationships. We argue that the structure and practice of FL opens dialogic possibilities in the lives of those who practice it. These possibilities are fostered through these microlevel moments of realization—moments in which listeners come to deeply understand themselves and their selfish practices in relation to others.

This leads to our claim that FL is a structured attention to *Thou*. Buber (1958) made the distinction between monologue and dialogue through the relationships of *I–It* and *I–Thou*—the former describes an objectifying stance toward another, and the latter describes a subjectifying stance toward another. The current state of affairs in the United States is (reductively) selfish—an *I–It* climate wherein those who talk loudly and often are those who are valued. FL represents a practice that is seemingly opposite. Listeners are asked to intentionally withhold themselves from the conversation and rarely, if ever, to bring in their own ideas, opinions, or experiences. Thus, this experience is highly

focused on Thou. Ontologically, this marked disruption from I–It to I–Thou is revealed in students’ comments about on-campus solicitors and conversational partners who transgress their own (the listeners’) boundaries of acceptable behavior. The practice of FL, then, is a unique opportunity for students to experience a more authentic form of social interaction—one that reflects an I–Thou relationship—than the typical interactions had in everyday experience.

Ultimately, we assert that FL is a means to enact depolarizing pedagogies because of its structured other-centeredness. Drawing from a prescriptive position on dialogue—treating dialogue as a moral pursuit of social justice (Broome, 2009a; Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997; Stewart & Zediker, 2000)—we offer FL as a dialogic form of engagement that serves the moral imperative of decreasing polarization in society. FL enables listeners to make sense of their own communicative practices and ability to empathize with others in relation to their larger lifeworlds. Many students in this practice offered specific realizations about their misperceptions and misunderstandings of others, thereby revealing a disruption of the taken-for-granted assumptions about others in the world. This marks a necessary precondition to dialogue in that it works to deconstruct the boundaries that separate one from another. In other words, listeners are made aware of their own self-centeredness in interaction and demonstrate a unique attentiveness to their conversational partners that is considerably different from their everyday experience. Moreover, many students articulated newfound insight into others through expressions such as “everyone has a story” and “everyone has something they are dealing with.” Together, this demonstrates a discernible pattern of deconstructing the boundaries between self and other, which, in turn, works to decrease the constant differentiating that saturates our polarized world.

We hold that FL is an excellent pedagogical tool when it is used appropriately. FL is not an end, but a means. In other words, FL is not a solution to uncivil, hostile, or polarized discourse. Rather, FL is a means through which one can cultivate the empathetic communication practices that are needed to engage in dialogue with others. The pedagogical value lies in the “trying on” of different ways of being and interacting so that any empathy practiced in FL can be reenacted throughout one’s interactions. FL is a practice of cultivation. It cultivates in people the cognitive and communicative capacities needed to bridge the widening social, cultural, and political divides inside and outside of the classroom.

For pedagogues, it is necessary to assess the affordances and limitations of FL before deciding to include it in curricula. For example, it would be inappropriate to practice FL as a medium to overcome racial injustice on campus or to promote neutrality in a class discussion on gendered violence. Rather, it would be appropriate to practice FL during class sessions if the goal is to experience intercultural interactions and analyze them in relation to critical theory. For curricula such as this, we recommend prompting class discussions with questions such as “How did it feel to focus almost exclusively on others?” “In what ways did intersecting cultural identities affect your conversations?” “Were there specific challenges that emerged from these cultural intersections?” FL should not be treated as a practice that is able to mute difference or depoliticize intercultural encounters. We do not suggest, for example, that pedagogues use FL as an opportunity to facilitate a dialogue between a student who is Black, Indigenous, or a person of color and a Neo-Nazi demonstrator on campus. Power is always already present in any interaction and power disparities—in addition to safety measures—must be accounted for before asking students to openly interact with the public.

It is also necessary to recognize that the social responsibility of depolarization does not rest with those who are oppressed. For comparison, the work to repair the material and cultural wounds of colonial violence does not and should not fall on indigenous folks. Similarly, the labor needed to rectify hostile social relations and bring people together does not and should not fall on those who are continuously othered and disparaged. Perpetrators of hate, violence, and social division must be held responsible—and this amounts to a distinct project in itself. This kind of work cannot be realized

by simply empathizing more with oppressors. We hold that everyone can benefit from this practice but also recognize the complexity involved when considering the equity of empathetic labor in oppressor–oppressed interactions.

In the project of depolarization, FL aims to normalize empathy and promote dialogue. The capacity to empathize is a precondition for dialogue and, therefore, depolarization. Without empathy, depolarization cannot occur—a disinterest in others is a disinterest in depolarization. Polarization is an intentional project, one that uses antidialogue to maintain the privileges of the powerful (Freire, 2000). In this way, FL is an act of resistance to discourses and practices of antidialogue that work to serve the powerful. We describe FL as a dialogic tool because it grows in us the capacity to attend to others that is noticeably absent from much of the sociopolitical discourse at all levels of interaction. Drawing on Freire, Buber, Rogers, and others, we contend that the cultivation of empathetic attitudes, experiences, and skills work to generate dialogic forms of interaction that, in turn, upset the status quo of antidialogic division and depolarization. Our hope is that by experiencing this grounded other-centeredness, students are able to create real transformation in their lives and the lives of others.

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