ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

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The Graduate School
Morehead State University
March 25, 2013
VALUING THE VOICELESS:
UNDERSTANDING SILENT STUDENTS IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

Abstract of capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
College of Education
At Morehead State University

By
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Committee Chair: Dr. David Barnett, Professor
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March 25, 2013

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VALUING THE VOICELESS:

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Students from traditionally marginalized groups lack voice and become invisible within the educational setting, subject to the pacing of curriculum delivery by those who speak out. Evaluation of assessment data finds an overrepresentation of students from traditionally marginalized groups falling in the lower tiers of student achievement creating achievement gaps (Ginter and Barnett, 2011).

According to Jones and Gerig (1994), 25-33% of the students in schools cannot or will not speak out. These students are often over-looked and over-represented in our dropout rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Christian (2011) found that students who have been retained during high school are 50% more likely to dropout. Schultz (2009) identified the following categories as silence as resistance, power, protection, and response to trauma, and she noted that students who have these issues often have academic difficulties.

Participants in this study included eighty-five high school students in one rural, eastern Kentucky school district over a two and one-half year period. Surveys and interviews were conducted to answer the question of why students are silent in the classroom. Using Schultz’s (2009) phenomenology study as the foundation another category became evident as the interviews continued. This method showed that social expectations, hence social conformity, have begun to emerge as a classification.
This study used a qualitative approach to action research with supporting data (i.e. grades, attendance) together with a grounded theory approach to identify external and internal factors of what impacts student voice.

Results from this study have been recorded and analyzed. Results indicated that all but two research participants have since experienced improved grades and attendance, some have gotten involved in extracurricular activities, and eight have recently graduated while five are seeking higher education. One of the students dropped out to avoid truancy charges, but attained his GED within weeks of withdrawing.

KEYWORDS: Silent students, Closing the gap
VALUING THE VOICELESS:
UNDERSTANDING SILENT STUDENTS IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

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Copyright © Ray Ginter December 24, 2012
This book is dedicated to the silent students past, present, and future. May students past see what might have been and become motivated to change the present. May students present see and embrace the efforts of change so they may approach their full potential. May students future reap the benefits of experience as teachers’ methods consistently address the needs of the silent. May every student’s educational experience be enhanced by the contributions of those formerly known as silent.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the teachers and administrators at Rowan County Senior High School for recognizing the importance of this project and adding to their responsibilities by collecting and reporting data, seeking methods of improvement, and developing meaningful relationships with silent students. I am grateful to those adult students who provided an enormous amount of insight during the interviewing and debriefing sessions. I am indebted to Mr. Jason Ratcliff’s art students who captured the emotion of silent voices in their work and allowing me to use their talents in this book. I am especially gratefully to Principal D. Howes for encouraging me to pursue this endeavor.

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I am especially indebted to Dr. David Barnett, who in frequent conversations about the silent students, challenged me on every turn, inspired me to look outside the box, and encouraged me to piece this puzzle together in such a way as to create a tool as near to a living document as possible. The point of it all being that educators, parents, and even the silent themselves can benefit.

I also want to express my gratitude to my family for graciously giving up the time that was required to research, write, and rewrite this book; without their understanding and support, writing this book would not have been possible. I would like to thank Wendy Fletcher for editing and teaching the finer points of APA. I
would like to thank my daughter Brooke, who took time from her studies to edit this work. Her suggestions reminded me why I became a high school math teacher and stayed as far away from English as I could get!
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Executive Summary

What is the Core of the Capstone?

Silent students exist everywhere. They live in rural areas, large cities, suburban areas and all places in between. The cause for their silence varies and may have many causes and influences. This project explores the literature of experts and brings their writings together with my own research in a way that will help organize and identify the types of silence and its causes. Once the different types and reasons for silence have been considered, methods for breaking the silence will be discussed.

Teachers, counselors and administrators at Rowan County Senior High School have been asked to identify students who are academically silent; those students who hesitate or refuse to participate in instructional deliberation whether as an individual, in small or large groups. These same students often have difficulty verbalizing their thoughts and find ways to avoid discussions, such as getting in trouble so they have to be removed from the class. Once identified those students were then interviewed and qualitative data recorded to identify the reasons for their silence. The students’ information such as grades and attendance was recorded so periodic checks could be made for comparisons. An action research approach was then implemented as these students were guided through the process of breaking their silence.

The information gathered was used to write a book for the purpose of giving educators an opportunity to identify silent students, understand their silence, provide ways to give them voice, which ultimately should help those students reach their fullest potential. The impact upon the educational process does not end there. Giving
these students voice will enrich classroom dialog, positively affecting every student. This will be reflected as improved attendance, higher graduation rates and improved scores on state assessments.

**Who is the Capstone Meant to Impact?**

Instructional design, examples to address curriculum goals and teaching resources, often embrace the customs of the dominant culture, with little regard for other cultures represented (Foley, 1996). Students from traditionally marginalized groups often lack voice and are at times almost invisible within the educational setting. An evaluation of assessment data typically finds an overrepresentation of these students falling in the lower tiers of student achievement, creating achievement gaps (Cohen, Gardia, Apfel, & Master, 2006).

In effort to remove or at least minimize the identified achievement gaps, educators develop improvement plans, conduct extensive curricular alignment activities, and develop instructional strategies. Seldom do these efforts include infusing the curriculum with ideas and examples that are more easily understood by less-dominant cultures. Improvement strategies rarely focus on creating a greater understanding for marginalized cultures, missing the opportunity to provide voice for the silent.

The focus of this research was to identify silent students, the internal and external factors that determine their success or failure and to gain a greater understanding of silence in the academic setting.
Prior to Shultz's work in 2009, most literature about the silent voices described in educational literature was of students deemed as having special needs. Some were autistic, some had speech impairments, and others had a variety of disabilities. Limiting the discussion to students with special needs constrains and confounds the purpose of silence research.

The silent include teachers who are afraid to speak out about controversial subjects, minorities in dominant cultures that disallow and discourage other voices, and administrators who see questionable practices but do not have the courage to speak. The silent also include secretaries who “see all and hear all” but have no job security, students who will not speak out about issues, the gay and lesbian individuals who exist in an unaccepting society.

The silent include those who have been abused and too often blame themselves. They are females who are in classes with dominant males who may be frequently diagnosed Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. They are adults who were silent as youth and youth who will be silent as adults unless we make positive changes.

It is essential to recognize that being silent does not always equate to a problem. Townsend (1998) noted, “Students who are quiet during class discussions may be doing important mental work” (p. 76) or they may be intrigued by the discussion, as it may be a new topic for them.

Townsend (1998) provides examples of students who are conscientious of their work ethics and make temporary choices, who become part of a larger problem.
Their decision to avoid classroom participation, although temporary, positions them among the silent.

In her book “Rethinking Classroom Participation: Listening to Silent Voices,” Katherine Schultz (2009) identified additional concerns that could result in a lifetime of silence. Her work pioneered the effort to seek out silent students and give them voice. She provided specific questions that teachers can use to help identify silent students. The questions she feels should be considered are:

- Were the students who chose not to speak aloud just shy?
- Did they lack the knowledge or skill with English to participate in the group conversation?
- Were they following cultural practices that guided them to speak only when they had something meaningful to add to the conversation?
- Did the students who enacted silence act out of control or were they simply day dreaming (p.10, 11)?

Another particularly important segment may experience those same feelings if not given voice and heard. Whitehurst (2007) states, “Very often, the thoughts of young people with learning disabilities are not included because professionals do not have the resources or experience to conduct the interviews” (p. 55). These students must be empowered with voice. They must be equipped with appropriate tools for complex communication, an interpreter who is trained, and sensitive to the student’s voice.

How was the Capstone Project Implemented?
Teachers, counselors and other school administrators have been helpful in identifying who among the former dropouts were silent and identifying current students who are silent using the following criteria:

- Do the students often hesitate or refuse to participate in deliberation related to instructional topics whether in small or large groups?
- Do the students have difficulty verbalizing their thoughts on classroom topics or verbally sharing their completed assignments?
- Do the students find ways to avoid discussions such as having to use the restroom, going to the nurse, or getting in trouble so they have to be removed from the class?

The school district requires that dropouts fill out a questionnaire that is used to identify reasons for students dropping out. The dropout forms were gathered from 2008 through 2010 and shared with the teachers and counselors to see if those students met the same criteria as silent students. The names of the students and the person who identified them were recorded and maintained in a confidential file.

Two major obstacles in researching silent students were identified. First, there was limited research about silent students. Second, identifying and categorizing the characteristics of silent students was challenging. Qualitative research was obtained utilizing one-on-one interviews with counselors and teachers about former dropouts and with current students identified as silent. Other information gather included grade point average, the number of absences, their discipline referrals, age, grade level, and
participation in extra-curricular activities. One on one interviews with the silent 
students addressed the following questions:

- Is there an adult in the building who you are comfortable talking to?
- Who is your favorite teacher? Why?
- Who is your least favorite teacher? Why?
- What is your favorite subject? Why?
- What is your favorite activity? Why?
- How many friends could you share your biggest secrets with?

These questions were selected to provide information on the student’s silence. 
Question one provided insight on the extent silence. Question two allowed the 
researcher an opportunity to foster a student/teacher bond. Question three provided 
the researcher information about typical dislikes, which may be used to help the 
students overcome their silence. Question four allowed the researcher to build rapport 
with the silent student and develop course loads that was more advantageous to the 
student’s needs. Question five, similar to question four, provided the researcher the 
opportunity to find an extra-curricular activity that the students may enjoy, perhaps 
removing a silence-causing barrier. Question six gave the researcher the final piece to 
the puzzle which helped the researcher determine if the student is silent in social 
setting as well as academic settings.

After the initial interview, follow-up meetings were held approximately every 
two weeks in an effort to build a relationship with each student. The information
provided from those six questions and subsequent meetings, moved the project from one of a qualitative nature to one of action research. The extent of the students' silence was assessed by linking the information from the interactions with them to the currently available research. This provided the groundwork to identify silent students, explain why they are silent, intervene to overcome their silence, and evaluate their success.

**Why Was This Capstone and Related Strategies Selected?**

Often those who seek positions in education are motivated by previous experiences; my story is no different. A former teacher touched or changed a life in such a way that a person feels rewarded by doing the same, thus becoming a teacher with the inherent desire to have a positive effect on his students. Upon reading *Privileged Thinking* by Barnett, Christian, Hughes, and Wallace (2010) I began to understand and relate to the scenarios. It seemed obvious that as a child I could have done much better if I had a voice, whether speaking out on my own or if I had an advocate to communicate for me. In fact, looking back, there were many times I wish I had those opportunities as a “do over.”

The senior year of high school would be one of the biggest “do over” moments. Neither of my parents went to college nor did they know what to expect throughout the process. Being too shy to see a guidance counselor left all my questions unanswered. Therefore, the first years of college were more about being successful in sports than academics. Still, without guidance, and with wife and child,
education fell further down on the list of priorities. Struggling to find work and unable to feel proud of any accomplishment, I listened to the counseling of an Army recruiter. Once out of the Army, and still looking for work, becoming involved in the community became a priority.

Working with kids as a football and basketball coach, and as president of the local Little League provided a sense of satisfaction. Teaching little life lessons through athletics created many little successes that those children were able to experience, and the feeling of accomplishment became addicting. Finishing college and starting a dream job as a math teacher and coach was now the priority. It was in the very first year as a teacher that certain experiences caused an awakening within me. I discovered there were kids who could speak out with an abundance of charisma and win a teacher’s attention; there were others, just as deserving, who could not or would not speak. It was those children who triggered a self-realization regarding silence and promoted my conscientious effort to provide more attention to those children who needed more voice.

Over the years, criticism has been offered from the adult “haves” about the attention given to the “have-nots” children, perhaps because of the adults’ lack of understanding. Ruby Payne (2005) explains the differences of understanding values of socio-economic cultures. Payne (2005) may be correct, but understanding the differences in values is not enough. This capstone project, and other research shows that you must first build relationships if you want to help many of these children. I owe that understanding to a child I will call Tom.
Tom fell asleep three times during the required recording portion of the classroom lesson for my Kentucky Teacher’s Intern Program. The first time he fell asleep, I walked over and rested my hand on his shoulder. When Tom lifted his head, I whispered “Sit up.” The second time he fell asleep, I tried to move the camera since he was front and center, then tapped him on the shoulder and asked him to wake up and sit up. The third time, still on camera, I walked over and nudged him. This time Tom jumped up, pointed his finger, said if someone touched him again he would put that person in a grave, and he ran from the room.

The principal needed to be notified of this situation. For such behavior, Tom should be suspended, even expelled if it was a serious threat. Three hours later the principal held a three party conference in her office. Tom had just awakened and was waiting there to speak with me where he would follow the principal’s request and apologize. It was not however an apology that Tom had to offer; in fact, he had anger in his voice when he asked if anyone could stay awake in class after searching all night for his mom. Anger turned to tears and his voice shook as he told about the fight his parents had the previous night. Both had been drinking and as their voices grew louder Tom was awakened. He thought it was around midnight that chilly early spring night. The fight had moved to the front porch when he heard his father tell his mother to “get out.” When the front door slammed, and he knew he would not be seen, Tom snuck to the door to watch. These fights had happened before and he did not want his mother to get hurt. He heard his father tell his mother to leave, not to come back, and not to take anything with her. He watched his mother undress, and throw her clothes
on the ground, and run into the woods. Tom searched the woods until almost five o’clock before he found his mother.

What kind of monster would punish this child for sleeping in class? I connected with Tom after hearing his story. I had watched many similar fights as a child, fights that finally ended in a courtroom with me, a twelve year-old, as the primary witness. Tom was twelve. He, like me, was forced to be an adult as a child.

And so it began....

Even before reading *Privileged Thinking* (Barnett, et al., 2010) I learned through coaching recreational leagues that I liked helping kids. It was a thrill to see a child become successful with a little guidance. I then knew that teaching was my calling. I continued my studies in education and now I am pursuing a terminal degree. While processing thoughts about this capstone project with my chair, it became clear that I needed to find a way to help those kids who cannot speak for themselves.

So the researching began for literature about silent students. One of the first bits of research found was from Jones and Gerig (1994) and they reported that one third of the fourth through eighth graders were silent and twenty-five percent did not participate in any way. Those numbers stayed consistent until those silent students attained an age that the legal system allowed them to dropout, and many did. Shultz (2009) confirmed something that was obviously a problem, but frequently denied. She said that teachers simply do not have the time or energy to worry about students who do not talk when other students are asking for immediate responses to their ideas and questions. Teachers also do not have time to identify learning preferences of
their students, nor to address student anxiety with the tools currently given to them in teacher education programs. Then, considering the budget cuts, how could this capstone be afforded and how could it fit into the curriculum if it's already packed? Fortunately, concerns were erased when Knaus (2009) proposed that building relationships was one of the best strategies to helping the silent children, because it is free! So the only thing necessary to do was to create a way to teach teachers to recognize and listen to silence, and with the amount of professional development hours required by the state, this project seemed as though it would make a great book study. The last hurdle to overcome was to reach the superintendents and the principals and show them the importance of the project from their standpoint. For this, J. Barber, (personal communication, 2010), Schultz (2009) and Jones and Gerig (1994) became essential.

State testing is a primary concern of the upper level administration and their jobs often depend on results from high stakes testing. Barber (2010) tells us that the kids coming from the lower socio-economic class are the majority of those without voice. Shultz (2009) tells us that they keep getting further and further behind until they drop out. Jones and Gerig (1994) tell us how including the prospective dropouts with formative and summative assessments that keep them engaged will improve their academic performance. Inevitably, test scores will go up, dropout rates will decrease, the gap will begin to close and we will have education administrators interested in the program.
This researcher began focusing on students whose ability to attain their academic potential has been taken away from them for reasons other than disabilities, and when he read *Privileged Thinking* (Barnett, et al, 2010) he wanted to see why these children and parents wouldn’t, or couldn’t, do something about these atrocities. After meeting with the department chair and committee chair, it was agreed that silent students could not speak for themselves and things happened to them, not for them! The need to understand and become an advocate for the silent became this researcher’s passion.

Thinking outside the box became a necessity to research this topic. A few articles provided an introduction as they dealt with silence because of a disability. With creative internet searches, a web site belonging to Columbia University called “Teacher’s College Record” was discovered. It displayed an article written by Mary Reda (2010) that was a review of *Rethinking Classroom Participation, Listening to Silent Voices* by Katherine Schultz (2009), which also became a part of the research collection. Schultz should be credited with pioneering the research of silent students as she did a lot of research and, although she called her studies qualitative research, they were really action research. Her references provided pointed to a number of related research projects. When comparing the references from each study if the titles came up more than once, they were added to the possible research repertoire for this capstone. Once articles written in the 1960s were increasing in popularity in the references, although they offered good insight, the addition of sources came to a close pending more recent data. Informed consent was attained from adult students so
information from the interviews could be shared. The search stopped there and the assembly of ideas and plans began.

The articles that had the most impact were:


While reading these articles, I reflected on things that I had heard from two very special people. Clyde Mays (personal communication, Fall, 2002) had made
some very profound statements during the time I worked with him, and it was his way
of thinking and working with students that provided a great deal of insight as to the
importance of building relationships with these students (more on page 101). Joann
Barber (personal communication, November 25, 2010) had mentioned some things
that had occurred while in her current position. She discussed the success story of a
student (name changed to Devin) in her service area and how a team of parents and
instructors worked together and accomplished the best-case scenario for the silent boy
(more about Devin on page 123).

In her research, J. Barber, (personal communication, November 25, 2010)
found some profound ideas that stimulated the thought process to help Devin. Those
and other books are listed below. Some of these books have been cited and referenced
in this research; the others have been instrumental in developing a greater
understanding.

Blankstein, A. (2004). *Failure is not an option: Six principles that guide student

Brown and Co.


New York*. Teachers College Press.

When Was the Capstone Implemented?

**Timeline.** The data collection process began in the fall of 2009. It is anticipated that the process and the book will be completed in the spring of 2013.

**Completion.** This capstone serves as a continuation of the work of the many authors cited throughout the capstone document. This document is not considered the final step in this author’s desire to help the silent find a voice research. This research and the stories of students past and students present are meant to prepare the readers’ understanding and provide strategies when the silence is so loud that no one can hear.

**Impact of the Capstone**

Knaus (2009) writes about one of his students who opened up after 18 55-minute classes. She read aloud her paper that described the years of molestation that she had endured. When she had finished her classmates applauded and made comments regarding her bravery and trusting them enough to share. In the final moments of class, one student commented to Mr. Knaus that school should be like this all the time.

Student voice is imperative in the formative evaluation process that occurs in classrooms each day. Once all students have voice the teacher can pace lessons more appropriately and evaluate all students’ understanding easier ensuring that each student has grasped the concepts. “There are other benefits from instructional discourse, such as the opportunity for students to compare themselves to others and discover their strengths and weaknesses. Whole-class interactions reveal which students can understand a concept quickly and which require more time. A
socialization process occurs as students learn to function as members of a class and to work with others in achieving common goals and solving problems" (Jones and Gerig, 1994, p.180).

Camahalan (2006) describes her understanding of silence through her classroom by realizing that when the whole class stares at her in silence she needs to rephrase her question. When a student pauses while reciting, she knows some concepts she has taught are not clear. When a student does not say anything but smiles sweetly, she knows her ideas made an impression. When students are engaged in a lesson, they will think reflectively. The teacher may prompt this process, but it often occurs in silence. To maximize the results, students must be taught how to use reflective silence. Students feel more confident about their ability to cope and more empowered as a learner, after learning this technique and so they respond more thoughtfully and less emotionally (Camahalan, 2006).

Townsend (1998) recalled a student named Anne who he had worked with for a brief time. Anne was reflective in her silence as was proven by the notes she took in class. Each day she would write the question posed by the teacher and scribe a few points of her own. Anne lacked confidence to speak out; nevertheless, her notes demonstrated her academic ability level was equal to other students. Anne began reading ahead of her class and making notes in the margins. When the teacher paused and asked questions, Anne was ready. She remarked, “I couldn’t believe I was so talkative” (Townsend, 1998, p.76). In her next interview, Anne remarked that class was more interesting because she was able to share her thoughts with the others.
“There are potentially grave consequences for students when teachers do not understand their silence as a form of participation” (Schultz, 2009, p.5). When a teacher does not recognize silence as a form of participation, some students may disengage from school learning and withdraw from the classroom community altogether (Schultz, 2009).

Schultz (2009) reflects that without understanding students’ uses of silence in the classroom, teachers risk missing much of the participation and learning that occurs. There is silence in every classroom. Often, the silence is connected to talk. Silence is always filled with meaning. We tend to privilege talk in classroom (Schultz, 2009). The times when silence occurs during lessons can be used as another teachable moment whereas the teacher can become the student.

When this study began, certain traits emerged from the readings and two of the most predominant were many silent students dropout and that many slip through the cracks. To begin addressing the dropout concept, this researcher gathered three years of district data pertaining to dropouts. Teachers and counselors were asked to identify the students they believed were silent. The number was staggering, over 80%! This researcher also serves as the school’s assistant principal. That large percentage leads to an examination of the dropout rate among silent students. As more anecdotal data were collected, it became obvious that this was not going to be a pure quantitative research project. It was evident that my job as researcher and assistant principal were causing a dilemma because I would do everything that I could to keep them from dropping out. Three years later, only one of the original 50 silent
students has dropped out. This student did so because of pending truancy charges. After dropping out of school, the student went to the adult education classes and received a GED within three weeks!

Another category of students was those slipping through the cracks. Some of these included dropouts, but slipping through the cracks also meant that the students did not reach their fullest potential. Because research has shown a link between student involvement in extracurricular activities and staying in school until graduation, there was an effort by this researcher to find activities the students liked and get them involved and observe their GPA over the three years. Relationships were established between the students and this researcher. Their favorite teachers, this researcher, other staff member (including cooks and custodians) and other administrators monitored their GPA as if we were caring parents.

This role of caring parent was demonstrated in many ways including checking on their assignments and tests, bragging on accomplishments and encouraging them when they were not as successful. This researcher would get them in tutoring when they were afraid to ask for themselves. Every identified silent student received this type of nurturing through relationship building. Over the course of as many as three years, some observable differences in the students’ final GPA’s increased an average of 23.3% or 0.9 on a 4.0 scale. The biggest gain by any one child was 2.5 points on his GPA! One student remarked that he had never had an A before. He was so excited until the end of the next trimester because we pushed for more and he finished with three A’s and two B’s. Evidence of a child reaching their
potential is reflected when they look at you with tear-filled eyes and say, “Thank you; I am going to be somebody someday!” The child went on to say that he has always been told that he can be anything he wants to be, but he never knew how to do that, never really cared how to do that. He said that now he knows what it takes, “drive, like a will to be successful.”

Out of 50 students who were involved in this project, there were seven students who either made no gain or their GPA dropped. Ten of the original fifty have graduated and gone to college or vocational school, one is working, while the other 39 continue to pursue their high school diploma. One student was placed in foster care and moved.

Thirty-five students did not receive help from this project simply because the researcher could not devote the appropriate time to more than 50. On the average, the 35 students who did not receive help from this project had a very slight drop in their GPA, while 13 of them had a significant drop. Three of the thirty-five have transferred out of county to other schools and one of them dropped out. Another student dropped out of high school and returned a few months later. That student is back on track to graduate. Finally, one student was placed on homebound to complete his diploma.

Limitations of the Study

Numerous research projects focus on keeping students silent in a classroom, typically for discipline but also to insure that all students have the opportunity to receive the same message as it is delivered from the instructor (Knaus, 2009).
However, it has been this researcher's experience that the research is much more limited when focusing on students who are silent. The only possible exception is for students who have disabilities. Jones and Gerig (1994) found that between 25 and 30 percent of students were silent. Schultz (2009) was among the first to begin describing the many reasons for their silence. Yet an unsolved issue is the problem of how to identify the silent students while young enough to collect information and make a difference in their lives.

Another limitation lies in the identification of students who are silent. Extensive professional development with teachers is crucial, teach them what to look for in student silence, how to listen to the silence, and ultimately to give the student voice. This is not a small endeavor. If teachers are to teach every child and help them reach their full potential, they must give these students voice. If administrators want to take steps to close the gap, they must give these students voice. This is not meant to solve every problem and should not be considered the only step necessary in closing the gap. Nonetheless, it has been, and will continue to be a problem in our schools if we do not address it and give every student a voice.

Reflections

This capstone, Valuing the Voiceless: Understanding Silent Voices In and Out of the Classroom has been the single most rewarding project in which this researcher has ever indulged. When the project was started, the task of “Collecting data” quickly changed to “Getting to know kids and valuing their opinions.” The key was building relationships. This researcher had no understanding that so many tears hid in
voicelessness. Early on, even with the second meeting of these children, it was noted that many had been longing for help for so long that secrets starting pouring out. The dilemma and sometimes conflicting roles of researcher and assistant principal were problematic and sometimes frustrating. As a researcher, collecting data for a qualitative research study there were limitations on what I could and could not do. Yet, as an administrator, as a human being, the need to support and care for these students was obvious. Clearly, helping the students was more important than the research.

One of the questions that this researcher used to get to know the students and their way of thinking and learning was to find out who were their favorite and least favorite teachers and why. Again, the question was surprising to this researcher. Three unexpected and positive outcomes emerged.

- The students’ favorite teacher was provided the positive comments from the student. That seemed to strengthen the relationship between the two as the teachers felt valued and appreciated.
- The students’ least favorite teachers learned why they were identified as least favorites. They learned why some children felt as though they were being left out. Follow up observations of those teachers revealed that many changed their methods to begin including all students.
- Finally, beyond pedagogy learned in teacher education classes, this researcher learned how certain teacher’s demeanor provoked uncomfortable feelings that
some of these kids bring in from their home life. The most predominant “carry
in” feeling was prompted by yelling.

Another unexpected surprise was the level of respect that was shared after the
relationships were formed. The feeling shared between each child and this researcher
was much like a parent and an advisor. The students would speak about their course
schedules and their activities. One child developed homemade videos that he shared.
Students would discuss conflicts that were occurring between them and their friends,
but the change that stood out the most was the way that the students and this
researcher (the assistant principal) interacted when the students would get in trouble.
Instead of yelling and arguing to get out of it, they were apologetic, embarrassed, and
they acted as if they had let me down. When they demonstrated that remorseful
attitude, it was important to move forward, this time teaching them that their mistake
does not change the feelings of those who care for them. They were still liked and
respected, but it was important that they demonstrate adult-like behavior in accepting
their punishment.

By no means did this project give a voice to every child. What it did was bring
awareness to participants, students, and adults that some students will not speak out
for themselves. Teachers reported that they became more in tuned to the silence and
found ways to help the students be heard. Because of their involvement and the
understanding they gained from their direct and indirect participation, other students
developed a greater respect for those who do not speak.
Valuing the Voiceless:
Understanding Silent Students In and Out of the Classroom

Ray Ginter, Ed.D.

Cover by Lilee Fouch
Dedication

This book is dedicated to the silent students past, present, and future, in the hope that the students past can see what might have been and become motivated to change the present; the students present see and embrace the efforts of change so they may approach their full potential; and the students future reap the benefits of experience as teachers’ methods and delivery consistently address the needs of the silent, and every child’s educational experience is enhanced by the contributions of the students formerly known as silent.

Artwork by Jennifer Sabon
Preface

The professional development that has been gained from the design and implementation of this project has not only heightened the researcher's awareness of the existence of the large number of silent students, but also the ability to hear and understand them, and to accommodate them comfortably. This book has been written as a practitioner's reference on how to provide a voice to the silent. Vignettes, literature reviews, and research have been incorporated as supporting documentation and will provide the reader a background and an informed understanding to lead the silent to the next level of education.

Much like a diamantaire increases the value of a rough gem as he cuts, shapes and polishes many facets creating a beautiful precious stone, so can educators shape and polish children by guiding them to reach their full potential when they give voice to a silent student.

Shultz (2009) points out that extensive research has been completed on how to silence a student, but remarkably little research is focused on hearing the silence. She refers to stanza V from the "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," by Wallace Stevens (1923). Like all forms of great art, the interpretation is left to the audience, and this is no different. Still, this researcher found this poem, especially the fifth stanza, to be profound yet simple. With each reading, one can find more meaning behind them. Like this researcher, many others learned to appreciate the genius in Wallace Stevens, who won a Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1955.
Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

Wallace Stevens

I
Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II
I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

III
The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.
It was a small part of the pantomime.

IV
A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.

V
*I do not know which to prefer,*
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.*
VI
Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.

VII
O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?

VIII
I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

IX
When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

X
At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.
XI
He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.

XII
The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.

XIII
It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.

Schultz saw the beauty and strength that was summed in stanza V of Stevens’s (1923) *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*. The perfection of the stanza provides intrigue and its interpretation influenced this researcher’s understanding of silent students.
Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the teachers and administrators at Rowan County Senior High School for recognizing the importance of this project and adding to their responsibilities by collecting and reporting data, seeking methods of improvement, and developing meaningful relationships with silent students. I am grateful to those adult students who provided an enormous amount of insight during the interviewing and debriefing sessions. I am indebted to Mr. Jason Ratcliff's art students who captured the emotion of silent voices in their work and allowing me to use their talents in this book. I am especially gratefully to Principal D. Howes for encouraging me to pursue this endeavor.

I am grateful to the instructors and doctoral candidates in Morehead State University's Cohort-I who listened, read and made suggestions to improve this project.

I am especially indebted to Dr. David Barriett, who in frequent conversations about the silent students, challenged me on every turn, inspired me to look outside the box, and encouraged me to piece this puzzle together in such a way as to create a tool as near to a living document as possible. The point of it all being that educators, parents, and even the silent themselves can benefit.

I also want to express my gratitude to my family for graciously giving up the time that was required to research, write, and rewrite this book; without their understanding and support, writing this book would not have been possible. I would like to thank Wendy Fletcher for editing and teaching the finer points of APA. I
would like to thank my daughter Brooke, who took time from her studies to edit this work. Her suggestions reminded me why I became a high school math teacher and stayed as far away from English as I could get!

Introduction

As a high school student, math appealed to this researcher because it never changed; two plus two always equaled four. Consistency was inherent. Facts were essential. Accuracy was vital. The subject of math was a cornerstone of the entire educational process. Each successfully completed problem contributed to a solid foundation that gave security and self-confidence this researcher had yet to realize. Thus, this researcher began studying math education almost twenty years ago, and it was during those studies that Non-Euclidean Geometry was seen for the first time.

This researcher was one of the silent, embarrassed to ask questions for fear of appearing foolish or of others snickering and pointing. It was in the sophomore year in high school that this researcher took geometry for the first time. In the advanced class, because this researcher's mother thought she was looking after her son's best interest, signed the researcher up for such a difficult class. The first few weeks were terrible. The teacher sat on a stool and, using new technology, wrote on this thing called an "overhead projector." It was the only one in the entire school, and this class was permitted to use it. Unfortunately, this researcher could not keep up. She would start a problem, roll the plastic and just like that, it was gone. As a student, this researcher knew it was not going well, but the parents did not know until the first
quarter was over. The principal told his mom that he thought that her son should try regular geometry with a different teacher. The principal described the new teacher as being "more personable." This researcher’s mother was reluctant because she still believed that he was the smartest kid in school, but aren’t mom’s supposed to feel that way. So while sitting in the principal’s office, in walked an enormous, burly man with a mustache that was so long it blended with his beard, and the whole slew of hair was then neatly cut just above his collar. After a brief conversation, the man said he would take care of this researcher. And he did. He was an advocate for this researcher. He pushed just the right way, making sure that successes were experienced and celebrating them often so confidence would improve. The remaining school year was finished with an “A” in geometry and an “A+” in confidence. As a high school student, this researcher went through school getting straight A’s” in every math class and feeling regret if even a point was missed. This researcher then went to college and, of course, became a teacher in high school math.

As a silent student, this researcher was dependent on math as a crutch. It was familiar, and successes in math came often. While in college this researcher studied a more advanced geometry called Non-Euclidean Geometry. This course took the very fact that was believed about math and tossed out the window. This researcher now had to grasp the concept that a square was no longer a square in two-space. The sides of the square had to bend into three spaces to make ends meet. The researcher found himself thinking: “how dare they take this consistency away from me? Who comes up with this stuff? Am I the only one who does not understand? How do I even grasp this
concept, does that mean if we plot a course in space with no proof of a third right angle in a square that we may be thousands, no, millions of miles off course? Then – I wonder – does time bend as space does? What next?” Those were the thoughts of a teenager who was not used to having confidence, was too shy to ask questions, and tried hard just to “accept” what the world gives him.

Three years of building confidence in problem solving, initiated by a high school geometry teacher, were now tethering by a thread because of, ironically, another geometry class. This researcher was distraught for days and fell behind in the work and failed the next test. This researcher was eighteen years old and lived away from home. The crutch, so often used, was stolen away and the self-confidence that had finally been building had been taken away: As the professor went over a test, this researcher, still a student himself, angry from the feelings of having something (confidence) taken away, found the words and asked how this could be. His heart was pounding; he could feel the blood rise to his head, and the anxiety was so high that he felt as though he might faint. Looking back, it had to be amusing for some, but heads were nodding in approval of the questions. Yes, his questions. The anger that this researcher was experiencing ignited in such a way that his silence was broken. To his surprise the other students had the same questions, but they were afraid ask.

Imagine how all ages and all levels of intelligence may experience new knowledge every day and how easily a student, even a previously confident one may develop the inherent desire to be silent. This book will discuss who some of these students are and why they became silent, ways in which we can help them be heard,
and the impact that might arise from teaching them to communicate with confidence.

There are students in our schools who are not able to tell us what they need in order to be successful. They are the "silent ones" and the causes of their silence vary as will be detailed in the following pages. The reader should also note that many chapters end with Questions for Discussion. These questions are designed to explore the understanding and ability of the discussants to effectively work with silent students.

Interaction among students and teachers is critical when looking at improving the achievement levels of individuals with respect to their learning potential. Jones and Gerig (1994) stated, "Research has shown that many types of classroom interactions can lead to higher achievement and more positive attitudes" (p. 170). They note that teachers often select only a few students to participate in classroom discussions, and only a few students choose to participate in whole class discussions. In these whole class discussions particularly, teachers tend to focus on talkative members of class and may assume that quiet students are not as prepared, are not as interested, or possibly are not as sharp as their outspoken peers. Teachers depend on the outspoken students to pace the class. We are reminded by Jones and Gerig (1994) that 33% of the 4th through 8th graders in their study tend to be silent and that 25% did not participate at all. Clearly, the number of silent students is quite substantial. Schultz (2009) states that often, teachers simply do not have the time or energy to worry about students who do not talk when other students are asking for immediate responses to their ideas and questions. Teachers also often do not have time to
identify learning preferences of their students nor to address student anxiety with the tools they bring to the classroom (Schultz, 2009).
Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

Martin Luther King
Who are they? And why are they silent?

The silent are everywhere. They are teachers who are afraid to speak out about controversial subjects. They are minorities in a dominant culture that disallows and discourages other voices. They are administrators who see questionable practices being done by their superiors but do not have the courage to speak. They are secretaries who see all and hear all but have no job security. They are students who will not speak out. They are the gay and lesbian individuals who exist in an unaccepting society. They are those who have been abused and too often blame themselves for the abuse. They are females who in classes with dominate males. They are/were silent as youth, and they are/will be silent as adults unless changes are made.

Instructional design, examples to address curriculum goals and teaching resources often embrace the customs of the dominant culture, sometimes with little regard for other cultures that are represented in the classroom and school (Giroux & Simon, 1989; Wexler, 1989). Students from traditionally marginalized groups often lack voice and are at times almost invisible within the educational setting. Yet, an evaluation of assessment data typically finds an overrepresentation of students from traditionally marginalized groups falling in the lower tiers of student achievement creating achievement gaps (Cohen, Gardia, Apfel, & Master, 2006; Haycock, 2001; Johnston & Viadero, 2000).

To address these achievement gaps, educators develop improvement plans, conduct extensive curricular alignment activities, and develop instructional strategies in an effort to remove or at least minimize the identified achievement gaps.
Nevertheless, it seems that too seldom do these efforts include infusing the curriculum with ideas and examples that are more easily understood by the less-dominant cultures. With seventeen years of experience in education, this researcher has learned that too seldom do improvement strategies focus on creating a greater understanding for marginalized cultures, providing voice for the silent (Dotson-Blake, Foster, & Gressard, 2009; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001a; Wright, 1964).

The focus of this research is to identify groups of students that have been silent for too long. On-going case studies focusing on these students will allow researchers greater understanding of the internal and external factors that help determine the students’ success or failure.

Whitehurst (2007, p.55) states, “Very often, the thoughts of young people with learning disabilities are not included because professionals do not have the resources or experience to conduct the interviews.” These students must be empowered with voice. They must be equipped with appropriate tools for complex communication. This may include complex uses of technology and an interpreter who is trained and sensitive to the student’s voice.

Schools throughout the United States (U.S.) provide a variety of services to students to ensure that all students receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). While services offered to special needs students are essential to many students’ success, this researcher has noticed that at times there are some unintended consequences, times when ‘regular education’ students treat students with special
needs differently, and isolation occurs. These unintended consequences may partly be a result of instructional strategies used by educators.

In this research, providing voice means implementing practices that are intentional and ensuring that the ideas, needs, and concerns for all students are heard. For a long time, the silent voices, as was thought prior to the mid 1990s, were those students who had special needs. Some were autistic, some had speech impairments, and some had a variety of disabilities. Limiting the discussion of silent voices to students with special needs constrains and confounds the purpose of this research.

One delivery method, resource classrooms, is used for some special needs students and often involves removing the special needs students from regular education classrooms and placing them in a separate room for their instruction. This educational method isolates the students and limits their ability to connect with their peers. Although it helps improve their confidence, this researcher has found that it is only temporary and they typically revert to silence when they reenter the larger classes. As an alternative, many educators advocate for inclusion that tends to support a less restrictive environment.

Inclusion takes on a variety of formats and at times necessitates a regular-education teacher carrying out the requirements of the students Individual Education Plan. This may be limiting, depending on the skills of the regular education teacher (Whitehurst, 2007). Another form of inclusion involves a regular education teacher collaborating with a special education teacher and both teachers provide instruction to all students. But this form of inclusion has its detractors who consider that regular
education classrooms are more often designed for the skills of the majority with less attention given to individual student needs (Bateman & Bateman, 2002).

This researcher posits that the disposition of the teacher also influences the student’s perceptions and actions, either inviting or discouraging class participation. McCarthy (2006) found that some teachers suggest that students with special needs have a negative impact on the pace of instructional delivery. In some cases, especially those instances where student teachers were used as the primary instructor; fear of the unknown predetermined what is known as “planned ignoring.” Worst of all, the teacher’s temperament was reflected in the general student population’s attitude and the problem was exacerbated (Alerby & Elidottir, 2003).

While it must be noted that special education provides critical services to students with special needs, educators must be cognizant of unforeseen negative consequences of identifying students as special needs and include strategies to eliminate or at least minimize these consequences. Pollard (1999) noted that the interactions between students and teachers can promote or inhibit student voice. In her research, Pollard compared teaching methods used in the United States with teaching methods commonly used in the United Kingdom (UK). She noted that classes in the UK do not embrace one particular method of teaching. Teachers encourage open discussion in large and small groups with writing as a precursor in the United Kingdom.

She compared the UK classroom with what she often found in the US classroom where students were asked to come in, sit down, and be quiet. Discussion
in the US classroom was often limited and discouraged the free exchange of ideas. Teacher interactions were most often with the more talkative students, which generated a perception that quieter students were under prepared or did not understand the content of the discussion. Therefore, instructional strategies, teacher dispositions, and classroom activities can promote or inhibit student voice. Whitehurst (2007) states, "Very often, the thoughts of young people with learning disabilities are not included because professionals do not have the resources or experience to conduct the interviews" (p. 55). Whitehurst goes on to say that students must be empowered with voice. They must be equipped with appropriate tools for complex communication and an interpreter who is trained and sensitive the student’s voice. Schools throughout the United States provide a variety of services to students to ensure that all students receive a free and appropriate public education. While services offered to special needs students are essential to many students’ success, at times there are some unintended consequences, times when ‘regular education’ students treat students with special needs differently, and isolation occurs (Whitehurst, 2007). These unintended consequences may partly be a result of instructional strategies used by educators.

In a research study by Katherine Schultz (2010), she sought to determine the productivity yet limited meaning of silence in classrooms. Her research focused on literacy practices in a multicultural school during the students’ senior year and the first two years post-graduation. The second phase of her research focused on
discourse between race and race relation in a multicultural, Caucasian-dominated middle school.

Schultz (2010) relates silence in schools to a cultural disconnect between students' success and teachers' attention. She notes that as teachers are constantly evaluating students' understanding through a collection of formative evaluations, student talk becomes the catalyst for delivery and pacing leaving the silent students as casualties in a gamut of successfulness that extends far beyond high stakes testing. Teachers' role in this oversight certainly causes concern for the marginalized students whose success or failure has significant impact on educational gaps created by additional cultural concerns.

Silence is interpreted incorrectly by educators more often than not. Schultz (2010) believes the typical educator's perception is the student either does not know the answer, is intrinsically shy, or he/she has made a conscious decision not to participate. Silence, Shultz continues, can indicate, among other things, resistance, boredom, thoughtfulness, or strategic timing. Silence may manifest simply as it is; a complex phenomenon.

Schultz (2010) encourages teachers to put an emphasis on learning to listen to silence and practice inquiry methods to gain an understanding of students' silence. With careful listening and practicing teachers may better serve the educational needs of every student. Furthermore, teaching the use of silence in the classroom shall help the students, especially the silent ones, learn to communicate their needs more effectively.
When Schultz (2009) discussed the paradigm of a classroom in this way, it raised the question: Are the educational practices of the day meeting the needs of the individual to cope and compete in a society dominated by instant worldwide communication? She concluded that we are cheating many those silent students. In fact, she points out that the “sit down, shut up” method of instruction encourages shortfalls in the individual’s accomplishments, increasing the educational gap between the students who “get it” and those who fall within marginalized groups. Furthermore, the efforts of students who formulate what they have to say more quickly than others will dominate a classroom and discourage the slower thinkers from responding, thus encouraging further silence (Shultz, 2010).

Shultz (2010) concludes by noting how a teacher must learn to listen to silence by observing when a student chooses silence when other louder students dominate discussion and by observing gestures. Most importantly, she emphasized that once a teacher begins listening to silence and tries to change silence she does not assume silence is a form of rebellion.

It is essential for educators to recognize that being silent does not equate to negative educator perceptions. Townsend (1998) noted in *Silent Voices*, “Students who are quiet during class discussions may be doing important mental work” (p. 76). They may be intrigued by the discussion as it may be a new topic to them. Townsend (1998) continued by noting in one of her case studies that Anne, a reserved student would write during the discussion. She would have questions, but she would later refer to her notes and get her answers there. Students like Anne are typically able to
be engaged at another time under different circumstances. Students like Anne are engaged more effectively with topics in which they are more familiar. In Anne’s case, she was doing substantial mental work both during and after class. Anne’s method allowed her to organize her thoughts prior to speaking, thus giving her the confidence she needed.

Rex was an average student, but like many students he would withdraw into silence. Townsend found that Rex was confused by Hamlet (the content being discussed) and did not want the teacher to think he had not completed his homework. The work was too difficult for him and in his desire to not disappoint his teacher he tried to become invisible. When a student hides in silence, such as Rex did, it is important for a teacher to understand what he is saying in his silence. Rex respects his teacher and would work hard to please her. A problem exists if the teacher misunderstands the silence, for example, she could see the action as defiance, her reaction then could erode the relationship that she has made with Rex and he will then withdraw further, sinking into a position where his grades may even begin to suffer.

Townsend’s (1998) third example of silent students included a discussion of Angela. Her case was different from the others’ in that her course load was heavy. She felt that in order to be successful in her coursework, she had to allocate time for each subject. On the day of Townsend’s (1998) observation, Angela was steadfastly taking notes but not participating in the discussion. The night before she was concerned about another subject and dedicated her time to that. Angela knew that Hamlet was time consuming and that getting involved in the reading meant an
emotional involvement. There was not enough time to prepare for both. Angela’s silence was a result of a conscious decision to make the best use of her time.

Townsend’s (1998) three scenarios are examples of students who are conscientious of their work ethic and made temporary choices to become part of a larger problem. Their decision to avoid classroom participation, although temporary, positioned them among the silent.

In her book *Rethinking Classroom Participation: Listening to Silent Voices*, Katherine Schultz (2009) wrote about and identified additional concerns that could result in a lifetime of silence. Her work, which is discussed in detail beginning with Chapter 3 of this research, pioneers the effort to seek out the silent students and help give them voice. She gives specific questions that an elementary level teacher can use to help identify silent students and why. The questions which should be considered include:

- Were the students who chose not to speak aloud just shy?
- Did they lack the knowledge or skill with English to participate in the group conversation?
- Were they following cultural practices that guided them to speak only when they had something meaningful to add to the conversation?
- Did the students who enacted silence act out of control or were they simply daydreaming (pp. 10, 11)?
Why Are They Silent?

Differences among and between students, their peers, and their teachers often impact the voices of the silent. These differences may include socioeconomics, race, sexual orientation, academic abilities, and any number of demographics that too often are used to segregate students.

Effective Schools’ correlates include a *Safe and Orderly Environment*. Providing a culture where students are safe to optimize learning requires structure, organization, and a relatively relaxed atmosphere (Lezotte and Snyder, 2011). The absence of such an environment can lead to students seeking shelter through silence. Lezotte and Snyder (2011) add that the damage that can be done by not giving enough attention to this correlation can be observed in the individual and the school through both short and long-term effects.

Teachers teach by example. Methods courses through professional development and teacher education programs provide alternative styles to reach students. Without providing educators with alternative methods, they repeat unsuccessful strategies and get the same results. If a teacher quietly accepts a system that is stifling her students, students learn to “get by,” and to accept defeat (Books, 2003). Pollard (1999) cautions, “Conversely, you cannot create the same sort of educational and social mobility as we do when you insist that everybody meet the same standard: not only speak, but have command of the same language, and learn the rules of the same game” (p. 66) This researcher has determined that this brings to attention a cultural confounder that occurs frequently in the American public school
The regulations set in place during administration of standardized exams do not take into account differing levels of ability due to the student's background. It seems paradoxical to require students to meet specific standards assessed through these exams when confounders such as language and culture differences cannot be accounted for due to the enforced rigidity of the test proctor.

Another perpetuator of student silence is bullying. In 2008, Kentucky's General Assembly tackled the bullying issue and passed House Bill 91. "The Golden Rule," more commonly known as the "Bully Bill," was written to prevent actions that intimidate students that lead to silence. Although bullying is a bigger problem than discussed here, prejudice is a prime motivator when bullying occurs.

Prejudice may focus on race, religion, socio-economic standing, gender, sexual preference, gang affiliation, or any number of other characteristics used to distinguish individuals into groups. As society becomes more diverse, schools become more diverse. As these changes occur and more groups emerge, without a culture of respect and acceptance for all, bullying will continue, students will be shunned, and silence will become the norm for too many students.

Throughout civilization there have been a number of factors that have divided us and created misunderstanding, mistrust, and doubt. We continue to segregate ourselves based on race, socio economic status, political interests and religious beliefs. This self-imposed segregation exacerbates the problem of silence and suspicion. Lester (2008) noted, "One of the ironies of racial segregation was that it prevented the best and the brightest in the black community from sharing their
intelligence and creative gifts with the wider society” (p. 537). Sometimes silence is brought about by one’s cultural underpinnings.

When the society in which our students live and our schools exist tend to discourage voice and participation, moving students beyond this expected silence can be difficult. Joann Barber, Vocational Evaluator at the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Training Center in Thelma, Kentucky, studied students in Eastern Kentucky, focusing on the issue of student silence (personal communication, November 25, 2010). Her research led her to suggest three main reasons for student silence in Eastern Kentucky. The first, she explains, is socio-economics.

There are several characteristics that socio-economic status can contribute, but here in Eastern Kentucky we see, for example, if the affluent parent takes their child to the doctor and the doctor asks ‘What are your symptoms?’, the child is expected to respond. If the doctor asks that question to someone from poverty, typically the parent will answer for the child. This happens in more than just that situation. Once this behavior begins, it becomes the expected behavior, thus silence is learned. (Barber, personal communication, November 25, 2010).

The next, as J. Barber states (personal communication, November 25, 2010), has to do with the beginning letter of their last name. She explains:

Teachers traditionally put students in their seats according to alphabetical order. Often this puts the same kids in the back of the
room. Teachers have a tendency to spend more time with the kids up
front and the ones in back, over time, become silent (Barber,
personal communication, November 25, 2010).

Barber's last inference is one of deep insight. She discussed a rich Kentucky history
back to the days of Daniel Boone.

Kentucky's population grew tremendously fast in those days due to
the land policies, the saltpeter mining, the logging and eventually the
coal mining. This led to herders and small companies who became
self-sufficient. This customary behavior led to feelings of mistrust of
outsiders. People in these clans would rather do for themselves or do
without before asking for help from an outsider. The conduct of their
parents became a learned behavior, a tradition, passed from
generation to generation and sometimes shows itself in the schools
of Eastern Kentucky as another silent child (J. Barber, personal
communication, November 25, 2010).

In a small group, discuss the following "warm-up" questions, and share your thoughts
about silent voices.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Who are among the silent?

2. What consequences may children face if the silence is not broken? Discuss
   short and long term effects.
3. Discuss this long-term silence of students and in what ways does it have negative impact on attaining their full potential?
Chapter 2

One has to be observant of the silence, which has an oppressed voice, and to identify it, in order to either learn from it or, if possible, make the voice be heard.

Alerby and Elidóttir (2003)
Silence Unattended

They are often overlooked in our schools, but are over-represented in our dropout rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The percentage they account for in the general prison population is greater than the percentage they account for outside of prison (Bailey & Hayes, 2006; Western & Pettit, 2010). Seemingly too many are identified for special needs services (Whitehurst, 2007) and too few are tapped for gifted education (Fong, 1987). Although they have names\(^1\) like Alice and Pedro and LaTasha and Bill, too few educators in the schools can call their names. Though they all have voices, rarely are they heard.

Some refer to these students as those who 'fall through the cracks' (Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, Solorzano, and Blackerby, 2006). How is this possible since they walk the same hallways and have the same teachers as other students who do not 'fall through the cracks?' Some studies (Jones & Gerig, 1994) suggest that these students are as bright and as capable as their more noticed peers. So why are they less successful (as measured by most school-sanctioned metrics) in their academic careers? Could it be that the curriculum over which they are tested fails to link with issues important to them (Chapman, n.d.; Dotson-Blake, et al., 2009; Knaus, 2009)? Could it be that they think differently than their teachers and therefore are dismissed too quickly (Neal, McCray, and Webb-Johnson, 2001)?

In an effort to provide Alice and Pedro and LaTasha and Bill a voice and to help ensure they do not become "crack fallers," via this research project, we begin a

\(^1\) Names have been changed to protect the students.
journey of discovery. The few miles traveled thus far have brought us face-to-face with our own prejudices and biases. It has captured our imagination as we see what is and dream about what may be. It is a journey that will set our pace for several years to come. Nevertheless, we are determined to establish milestones along the way: times of celebration, times when we hear the voices of the once-silent and times when we ponder the lessons learned.

When providing voice to the previously unheard, it seems likely that those whose voices now ring clearly may believe that these additional voices will minimize or lessen their now-dominant voices. Certainly, it is likely that the tenor of their voices will change. As previously mentioned, Jones and Gerig (1994) reported that one third of the fourth through eighth graders were silent and twenty-five percent did not participate in any way. Jones and Gerig (1994) note that those numbers stay consistent until these silent students reach an age that the legal system allows them to dropout.

Consider this analogy: imagine looking through a multi-paned window with most of the panes covered. While the view might be interesting, it certainly would not be complete. However, remove one of the coverings from a pane and the view becomes greater. Then, as additional windowpanes are uncovered, the view becomes more interesting and there is a more-complete understanding of the surroundings. Providing voice to the silent is somewhat like removing the window coverings. As additional voices are heard, there is an improved understanding amongst and between
all. But, it is not until all the panes are uncovered, not until all the voices are heard, that optimal understanding is realized.

Research suggests that many teachers’ education programs too seldom address this issue (Alerby & Elidóttir, 2003). As a result teachers and administrators do not have the tools or the confidence to consistently address these students; or they may notice outward behavioral manifestations of the silence that is often a cover-up for the real problem (the cause of the silence). These students need differing levels and types of support to help them succeed not only in school, but also in life.

“It is important to understand silence in the process of reflection in relation to teaching and learning,” says Alerby and Elidóttir (2003, p. 42). Since silence can say so many different things and be interpreted so many different ways we must not only receive the message, but also, to best serve the student, understand what is being said. There is no better way to learn the meaning of silence from an individual than to build a relationship and learn from him or her.

Knaus (2009) quips “No Child Left Behind’s definition of highly qualified teacher does not include teachers ‘being themselves’ or anger management, and while the focus on knowing the student may be abstract, many educators have long argued for ensuring teachers care and know their students” (p. 135). Knaus (2009) observed that teachers were well aware of the students’ apparent apathy, but they were unaware of how to engage them. This belief was evident in students whom Shultz (2009) was observing. The teacher left alone the groups who were quiet, possibly for fear of the student acting out. This reaction may be summed up in the simple cliché: Let the
sleeping dog lie. Knaus (2009) also points out the students’ extreme dislike to rote and drill methods in education and their reaction is classroom disruptions, walking out of class, a glazed-over look, or their reaction may be as drastic as dropping out of school.

Lastly, as we begin to examine the intricate details of students’ silence, it is important to note that categorizing characteristics is to help parents, educators, or even the silent, themselves, to recognize these qualities; determine if they are detrimental to the silent student’s ability to reach his or her full potential and to provide ideas to compensate or correct an existing problem. The categories are not intended to be definitive in the sense that there may be multiple causes of a student’s silence and thus many methods of assistance may need to be employed.

Let’s begin the journey.
It is important to note that to be able to be silent, one must at the same time have something to say. The loss of voice is not the same as to keep silence [...] a person keeps silence only when he/she can speak. We can elect to be silent, but in some situations silence is imposed, as one cannot find words to respond.

Alerby and Elidóttir (2003, p. 42)
Silence as Resistance

Marcus hated when the teacher would ask about his family. His older brothers were not necessarily role models for him, and the legacy they left behind was one that he spent much of his first two years in high school trying to live down. He did not like to get in trouble. When Marcus was in class he very rarely offered an answer. Occasionally he would give everyone else a chance to respond and if they were not correct he would proudly speak the answer. Marcus admittedly was quiet. He felt that being quiet had as many positive outcomes as negative outcomes. He knew he was not a good reader, but it helped him listen better. He also felt that it helped his observation skills which, by watching others get in trouble he would learn what not to do.

Marcus was an extremely caring individual and was exceedingly self-conscious at the same time. He felt sorry for kids whom others made fun of and sometimes wished there was something he could do, but he was afraid that he would be the bully’s next target. As he got older, he realized that it was the same in the classroom; he did not want to answer wrong because the attention would be on him and others would laugh at him. In fact, he would not even ask questions for fear that the teacher or classmates would laugh. Marcus intentionally wanted to keep his business to himself. Anytime a stranger came to the house he became even more on guard and found it impossible to exchange greetings, much less be courteous. Often this behavior was seen as a child being withdrawn, but Marcus was afraid that he would say or do something wrong.
Marcus spent much of his time as he was growing up watching others and learning what not to do. He said that is what kept him out of trouble. Rather than learning the right way, to behave, Marcus learned how to avoid getting caught. He felt like that was what he did in a classroom too, he knew how to hide the fact that he did not understand or did not have the work finished.

Finn and Cox (1992) discuss the importance of students feeling success in their early years of education. They say that those students who do not build their confidence early begin to engage in behaviors that are designed to elude failure later in years. Marcus displayed many of the characteristics of silence as resistance. His fear of being made fun of was primarily a manifestation of a fear of being wrong. He had a fear of failure and together those concerns exacerbated a lack of self-confidence in Marcus. Like many silent students, Marcus had characteristics from more than one category. He also carries in a characteristic of silence as protection, whereas he does not want people to know about his home life. Silence as protection will be discussed, in chapter 5 in detail.

In a study by Jones and Gerig (1994), 50% of the students interviewed who were silent chose to remain silent primarily because they had a lack of self-confidence. They frequently confirmed that they were afraid to be wrong in front of their peers or the teacher. They were fearful that everyone was watching them, and when they were called upon, they felt their answers were subpar to what others might say. In Jones and Gerig’s (1994) research, they discovered that nonsilent students initiated interactions over seven times as often with the teacher than silent students.
They quoted one student's self-analysis, "I don’t talk much in class discussions. I really don’t want to share myself. I just keep to myself what I think because I’m shy. I think I don’t know things well" (Jones & Gerig, 1994, p. 176).

Selective mutism is one possible interpretation of silence as resistance. Although is it rare in occurrence, selective mutism can have a significant impact on schools, (Cleave, 2009). This can manifest itself as a behavior problem. Selective mutism should first be addressed with a behavior management plan before placing the student in a special education program, which is occurring far too often. Selective mutism is a disorder that is widely misunderstood as it is an inability to speak, rather than a refusal to speak. Many times the inability is caused by anxiety and can be corrected (Selective Mutism Foundation, 2012).

In Chapter 1, we discussed Rex from Jane Townsend’s (1998) work. Rex had put a substantial amount of time and effort in to his homework, but he was still unable to understand it. His concern was that he would let the teacher down because she might think he did not try. "Why certain students do not speak out in classroom discussions is complicated," says Townsend (1998, p. 78). This resistance may take the form of silence, or it might be reflected in the choice to sit in the back of the classroom talking to peers, through the instigation of loud heated debates, or any number of other stances (Schultz, 2009). Often, resistance linked to silence appears to be a form of passive aggressive behavior.

Fred has been chewing tobacco since he was seven years old. Now, nine years later, Fred still chews, often while he is at school. Fred is a good kid but his
grades are not the best. In fact, he has failed a few classes every year. Fred does not say much in class. He never volunteers for anything because as Poppy says, “You learn that you should never volunteer son because once you do, folks will want you to do everything.” During Fred’s sixth visit to the office for disciplinary reasons, he was asked when he would understand that chewing tobacco in class will always get him in trouble. He responded, “If I can spend three days in ISS and not have to play that stupid game that she (the teacher) uses to review for the test, I’ll take ISS every time.” “What game?” the principal asked. “The Jeopardy thing, she gives you an answer, and you have to make up the question. It don’t make no sense to me. Sometimes I can figure one out, but it’s never right, and I’m not sitting around all day just to be wrong. I mean, why do we even do that? She is not gonna give me no answers on the test.” Laughing, the principal tried to clarify something he said by asking if he intentionally got caught every time they played Jeopardy. He said that he did every time after the first.

The principal spoke to all of Fred’s teachers that day and it was the same story every time. If they were going over homework or seat work, Fred would either have the unique excuse why he did not finish or he would create a disturbance that would land him in the hall or the principal’s office. Most of the teachers said that this behavior was so predictable and disruptive that they would intentionally skip over him when reviewing their work just so he would not act out. Upon reflection, the principal realized that the reason he was sent to the office so often by his substitutes
was because they did not know him. Other teachers have built a relationship simply
because their trial and error has helped them learn to help him overcome this anxiety.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are the characteristics of silence as resistance mentioned in this chapter?

2. Can you think of other characteristics that fit in this category?

3. Keeping privacy rights in mind, share some examples of students whom you
   have had who you perceive as being silent by resistance. Make note of any
   interventions that you tried whether or not they seemed successful (often we
   plant a seed that may not have an immediate effect).
Spiteful words can hurt your feelings but silence breaks your heart.

C.S. Lewis
Silence as Power

Often, when silence is used as power, the students’ actions are perceived as resistance or even reluctance simply because they are engaged as a listener. Other times the silence may be a play of power as the student is angry maybe because of racial issues. Another reason for students to use silence as power is to draw attention to their inactive participation to say they are uninterested or bored.

Thomas moved here a year ago and culturally speaking he feels we are a decade behind his hometown. The clothes here are old fashioned, there is nothing to do, and school is lame. He has not made many friends and wants to go back home. While observing Thomas in a few of his classes, I noticed that he acted disinterested in what was being said. He often sat with his eyes looking down doodling in his book or on paper. He would only look up at critical times, when the teacher was writing on the board, or when the concept being discussed required some student input, but he rarely answered. He would only watch as someone else answered. Later, in history class, I observed the same behavior until we reached another pivotal moment. No one in the class could answer the teacher’s question. Thomas dropped his head, resumed his drawing, and softly called out the answer. The teacher recognized that Thomas spoke out and commended him for his accuracy while Thomas pretended not to hear.

This behavior continued through the first several weeks of class until classmates acknowledged Thomas as a leader. Thomas does not consider himself as silent, yet, when I explained what his teachers and I saw occurring he grinned and explained further. He said that when he acts like that (like he knows all the answers,
easy and hard) but only answers sometimes, that everybody thinks he knows them whether he does or does not.

As noted previously Schultz (2009) was a pioneer related to the research on the topic of silent children and provided educators and researchers a foundation to continue to influence and equip the silent in an effort to assist them to reach their full potential. Schultz observed a student whom she calls Luis who was the student who always sat in the back of the classroom. For weeks, the students had been talking about J. Edgar Hoover when he was the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The students had been on the subject long enough that they had formed strong opinions, and they were especially passionate as they competed for the floor and the classes' attention. Often the excitement would cause one student to try to over talk another. Luis sat quietly for the entire discussion, and near the conclusion of the lesson he finally spoke to the class.

When he spoke, Luis delivered a powerful indictment of the growing consensus in the class, reminding everyone, including the teacher, of the film they had recently viewed which revealed Hoover's anti-gay stance. In a rare moment of silence, his classmates listened carefully to his words. His statement changed the course of the conversation, which resumed with renewed energy and emotion when he finished speaking, (Schultz, 2009, p.33).

During the entire discussion Luis intentionally kept himself separated from the debate while he remained attuned to his classmates' point of view. He seemed to
have calculated a way to convey a point that had been brushed over and gave it the power to validate his importance. "There is not a simple or even a single explanation. The effect of his decision, however, was to draw his classmates' attention to his comment, which allowed him to use silence as power" (Schultz, 2009, p. 34).

Luis's strategy to use silence as power was enhanced by his ability to wait until just the right moment. Schultz (2009) reminds us that silence as power can be revealed through anger, indifference and apathy. Jensen (1973) identified silence of this type as a way to communicate scorn, hostility, defiance, seriousness and hatred. He also recognized that one could communicate compassion, trust and respect.

Outside the classroom, Manuel was often silent, but occasionally he would get loud and draw attention to himself. Often this was because he was participating in activities that would get him into trouble. In the classroom, he seemed to have the same characteristics, but after working with him for a few months, this researcher found that he used anger and disruptions to change his environment. Manuel, for example, would intentionally act out in class if he did not have his work, did not want to take a quiz or test, or if he felt uncomfortable with the seat work, by doing so, the teacher would send him to the office. He would get out of doing the work, the other students would not know that he could not do it, but he thought they would see him as a tough guy.

Manuel wanted people to believe he was a tough guy. He felt uncomfortable in a school where there were so many white students, and he felt that everything was
racially related. His actions in crowded hallways were to intimidate those around, but
it was masking the fact that he wanted to attract the attention of nearby adults.

Manuel's play for power was merely a cry for help. Fortunately, the school
principal recognized this and began a slow process of gaining his trust and then
building his self-confidence. Now, ready for graduation, Manuel has become
moderately successful in the classroom and is finishing his senior year on the bowling
team, a feat that would have been unimaginable two years earlier simply because of
the inappropriate behavior.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Silence as power is often mistaken for resistance and occasionally leads to
discipline referrals. When I think of silence as power, I think back to some of
the films like Stand and Deliver, where the teacher has the tough guy in class
and how they were able to accommodate the student without compromising
the reason for the silence or embarrassing the student. Discuss some
characteristics of students you have taught or known who fit among the
students in this category.

2. Discuss some strategies to utilize the characteristics from above in your
classroom that could augment the lesson. Consider your strategies in cases
where this student is a positive power and what you might do if he’s a
negative power. Do not allow this discussion to blend into discipline as the
student who uses inappropriate behavior for silence is probably within a
different category, maybe protection. How could your examples help that student, in time, break the silence?

3. How in the example with Manuel, using misbehavior as a play for power, could you as the instructor, work to change this behavior without causing more anxiety, and thus more misbehavior?
Chapter 5

It is not how much we talk, but what we say that is important. Also what we say in the silence by being silent. The real meaning often remains behind expression, or, as in the case, it often lies in the silent space between the words or behind the action.

Alerby and Elidóttir (2003, p.48)
Silence as Protection

Some students want to remain invisible. Some students want to hide abuse. Jones and Gerig (1994) tell us that one student’s reason for being silent is a choice made because of the pain she experiences: “I’m shy because we move a lot, and every time we move I have to start over with making friends, and I’m just tired of it” (p. 176). Other students in the Jones and Gerig (1994) study sought to control what happened to them by choosing not to participate in class discussions. Choosing to remain silent gave the students a sense of control. Although minute, they could maintain control over the lesson content, the timing of their input, and even of their teacher and their peer’s responses. The need for these students to maintain control over their environment is beneficial because they think they must avoid competing with other students, they must avoid taking risks, and they must maintain their security through privacy.

In a class where participation was required, Professor Mary Reda (2010) was surprised to realize that many students who wished to remain silent seemed extremely adept at raising their hands just the right number of times with casually insightful comments. These students are also adept at raising their hands at just the right moment to get noticed, but not called on. Students in Reda’s (2010) class were prompted to write about current issues, which could lead to students’ silence. These topics included bullying and school safety. Reda (2010) found that her silent students were reluctant to write about these topics because they claimed that no one would listen to them. She found that if the silent students were emotionally removed from
the topic, then they were more inclined to participate at a higher level. She also noted that often the silent students would conclude their statements with a defensive response such as “It’s just my opinion.”

Students strategically use silence to protect themselves, to buy time, as a form of expression, and as a way to participate in a conversation (Schultz, 2009). Schultz reported the story of Zakiya who stated that she did not have money that week for a pencil. Her teacher replied, “Well go and babysit then to earn enough money to buy one.” Zakiya worked for childcare nearly every afternoon, and like many of her low-income peers, she was not paid for this work. She answered the teacher with silence and a scowl. Zakiya was failing her eighth grade year and dropped out of school not long afterwards. She seemed to impose a stance of silence to protect her family and community life, which was not well understood by the school community. Schultz (2009) says, “Socioeconomic stress is a significant variable in the academic success and psychosocial health of children” (p. 41). Students who live in poverty are reported to experience higher rates of violence (Dryfoos, 1990 in Schultz, 2010) and substance abuse (Walsh, Buckley, & Howard, 1998 in Schultz, 2010), as well as lower rates of academic success. They often do not receive adequate food, health care, or housing. Additionally, and more specifically, they receive lower scores in reading and math (Schultz, 2010).

This silence is a measure of protection for these children and is intentional. It gives protection to those children who are afraid that their secrets may be discovered, and it is the place where painful memories may be stored. The boundaries that these
students draw around themselves are created by surrounding themselves in silence and responding with silence. They seek this shelter to avoid ridicule and to avoid talking about the "unspeakable." Student's silence may be a faint cry for help or cause for real concern, but it must be recognized and understood by the teachers (Schultz, 2009).

I reflected upon a young girl in seventh grade. She would have been considered as a student with a silent voice. Her grades were barely passing. She missed school a lot. Occasionally, though, she was out of control. Her story taught me about "The Parent Voice," a term given when teachers use that voice on children who have the parenting responsibility at home. When the parent voice is used on them, the students become resentful and often exceedingly defensive. Brittney\(^1\) was 14 years. She had brothers of 4, 9 and 12, and sisters of 11 months and 2. Brittney could not stay after school for tutoring, nor could she come to Saturday School tutoring. Brittney would get off the bus and take over the parenting chores until she had to get on the bus the next morning. If she was not at school, it was because her relief did not come home or could not be waked up. Social Services had an open case, but they never found reason to take action. Brittney dropped out at 16 with a child of her own. She did not want anyone to know about her home life.

Marcella\(^1\)

Marcella was identified by her teachers as a silent student early in her sophomore year of high school. The teachers noticed that Marcella would not make an effort to speak out and when she was called on to answer she almost always
responded by saying “I do not know.” If Marcella was given an opportunity to work one on one with a teacher, she would often get the right answer, but it took a lot of persuading to get her to be confidence enough to say or write the answer. This seemed to be a classic example of Silence as Protection. Because Marcella was afraid she would be wrong, afraid to let her teacher down, afraid to let her guardian down, and most of all afraid to be laughed at, Marcella found ways to avoid answering.

As Marcella entered her junior year her methods of withdrawing became even more complex, and with every new technique she tried the effort to differ and get her involved became almost impossible. Early that year Marcella found ways of getting into trouble that would border, but would not cross the line, requiring disciplinary action. Her efforts would involve other students in some “high school drama” that could ignite into a full-blown fight. Nevertheless, Marcella was smart enough to stop the escalation right there. She would quickly seek an adult for guidance and counseling, and as she had planned from the start, miss the class where she was expected to speak.

Midway through the school year teachers and administrators had caught on to the fact that Marcella was deliberately instigating these situations to miss class, but without the education and expertise, they were unaware of the reason why Marcella trying to get out of the room. Despite their inability to understand why, teachers made a heightened effort to keep her in the room. This was the actual pivot point for understanding Marcella’s needs because as the teachers’ efforts were increased, Marcella had to step her game up another level and her need to be out of specific
classes became far too evident. Marcella began to disregard rules and her methods of creating drama would cross the line. She would taunt others until they would threaten her or until they would fight. Then, in a meeting with that person she would quickly and sincerely apologize all the while knowing that she missed another class and evaded another opportunity to speak out in class.

Entering her third trimester of her junior year, Marcella had been in more trouble than she had been in during her entire time in high school. The school was on a trimester calendar and new classes started fresh every twelve weeks. That gave teachers and administrators the opportunity to help her gain confidence in many situations that she had never had before. Courses like Conflict and Progress, Intro to Drama and Dance and online coursework in math and language arts allowed Marcella to learn new skills while reducing the stress from being required to speak out in math and English classes.

Marcella returned her senior year almost unrecognizable. Emotionally, she seemed to have advanced five years. She was remarkably well groomed, clean clothes, hair neatly fixed, and she wore a smile constantly. In our first meeting, Marcella showed me her engagement ring and a picture of the man. She told me about her plans for college and his plans for employment. She thanked me for standing by her for her early years, and she said all of this as she emitted an air of confidence that I had not seen come from her until that day.

A few hours later Marcella returned with a short paper on which she had written about herself. She handed the paper to me and said that she had never shared
this information with anyone (with emphasis on “anyone”) ever before. As I read her article, and fought the tears, I realized that this girl’s lack of confidence was not from her inexperience but because of her experience. Her paper spoke of a time when her parents would get high and lock her in a closet. It spoke of the abuse, verbal, physical and sexual that she had endured. It spoke of her understanding, and choosing to remain silent for over ten years. I fought back the tears she told me that she wanted me to know about that because she wanted me to share it with others who care about kids so they can help give them voice too.

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Discuss some characteristics of students in this category and why the students may want to remain silent.

2. The category of silence for protection is populated, mostly, by students who need to have some control. Often, they have no control over the reasons why they are silent and school can become their safe haven. Discuss some times in your career that you have faced a situation that a student needed that control. What steps could be taken to allow them to maintain their control, but still become an active participant in the lesson?

3. Select one lesson from a group member; discuss ways to change the delivery method so that the entire class’s formative assessment process meets the needs of this silent student. Can you think of a method rich enough in this type of formative assessment that other students are denied their fullest experience?
There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds.

Laurell K. Hamilton
Silence as Response to Trauma

Marcella had written her deepest and darkest secrets on a piece of paper that she handed me long after we had built a trusting relationship. The letter contained everything that a researcher would need to show silence as a response to trauma. She had suffered physical, sexual, and emotional abuse to such a degree that as I read the page, tears filled my eyes and anger filled my heart. But this young woman found a way to manage. She would seek silence. Marcella began her survival with silence as a response to trauma, and by creating that relationship with me, and then her teachers, she regained voice. It was the confidence that she had knowing that no one would ask, and no one would push to find out the rest of her story that provided security and the ability to speak out. This confidence was not there when she was younger. In fact, it is this part of Marcella’s story that exemplifies the belief that silence does not always occur in only one neatly packaged category. When Marcella was young her parents received a visit from the Division of Social Services (DSS). Marcella being highly intuitive realized that these people wanted to take her from the home. Although we as educators might agree that would have been what’s best for the child, there is no denying the love a child has for his or her parents. Marcella quickly learned what to say and how to say it to push the workers off their tracks. Her parents then explained to her that she could not talk about this to anyone at school or DSS would be back to take her away from her family. Marcella’s silence from that point could have been classified as a response to social conformity. Her next transition was not as straightforward or as clear-cut as the first, but at some point Marcella’s desire
to not "let anyone in" became essential. She was no longer silent because she was told to be. She was silent because she wanted to be protected. She found protection in her silence, and at age 18 she told her story of abuse. She realized that she was a student at risk and she appreciated the mentoring and positive relations that had developed over her years in high school. She made it a point to thank many of us for fighting for her and for not letting her drop out.

To identify characteristics of one who is silent as a result of trauma, it would seem that two prominent features advance. First, the silence may be in protest, in Marcella’s case a protest or dislike for the abuse as well as a protest against discussion. And second, her silence was for protection, making sure she did not give up family secrets. Often, especially with a small child, there is an inability to find the words to describe the trauma that has been experienced, (Shultz, 2009). For some, silence is a container for painful memories, and for some it is a place far removed from society. For others, silence may be somewhere between the two, but for all who are silent due to trauma; silence is protection and a means to safeguard their secrets. Those surrounding themselves in silence and responding in silence are creating a boundary, a shield, to keep out all of the people. Often they use the shield to protect them from ridicule and others use it to protect themselves from the need to talk about the unspeakable. Student silence might be a cause for concern (Burbules, 2004) or a practice that educators need to learn to comprehend.

Silence is a language of its own. Silence can offer acceptance or denial, agreement or rejection, kindness or hatred. If communication is to be successful,
meaning the entire message is sent, then the entire message must be received. Silence must be heard and understood, and we must recognize that there is silence in every word. The message may be in the form of nonverbal signals such as shrugs, raising the eyebrows, or even a change in the sender's stance, (Shultz, 2009).

In Jones and Gerig's (1994) study, one student explained her silence remembering a traumatic experience; “I talk just a little in class. I'm afraid that what I say, someone will not like. When I was in the second grade, we were going to have a Thanksgiving dinner thing and students were going to be Pilgrims. I raised my hand and said I would like to be an Indian and would wear my hair in braids. Nobody said anything, and the teacher just went, 'Um hum,' and it was embarrassing" (p. 177). It has been four years since that event took place, an event that many including the teacher may not give a second thought. But for Karen, the humiliation has remained and her desire to volunteer for anything is gone. This scenario demonstrates how a student may feel if she recognizes that she does not possess adequate social skills to “fit in,” which is particularly intimidating and will make her seem withdrawn or shy.

Often, immigrant families struggle with stressors emanating from conflicting cultural differences between home and school (Espinoza-Herold, 2003, in Schultz, 2010). These differences and expectations create an event that is extremely traumatic, leading to silence in the student and disconnects among the family. Another stressor for the immigrants may be the difference in socioeconomic status, especially if it is significantly lower than the average of their community. They may be silent because
they have been isolated to an area due to their particular language or even because of fear and anxiety due to an undocumented status (Valdes, 1996, in Schultz, 2010).

In the years that this researcher has been in education, it has been observed that it is not uncommon for many youth to have experienced some sort of trauma. Youth today have to deal with abuse, poverty, and issues raised by immigration. As technology makes our world get smaller these types of trauma become ever increasing. Stress from a job market that is shrinking and requiring higher forms of education may cause unforeseen trauma in everyone. The stress for illegal immigrants who are trying to find work to provide for their families is great because as the job market becomes global, more and more educated workers are doing the jobs that don’t require the higher education. Also, increases in the use of technology may cause a reduction in the workforce. Separately, each could be the cause of trauma in the child’s life, but these can all work together in a cyclic manner and have the ability to affect many children in generations to come. Their silence may be caused by trauma, their desire may be to protect themselves, or they simply may not be able to find the words to describe what they had experienced.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Students who have suffered trauma and as a result are silent usually blend into other categories of silence. Discuss some ways from your experience as educators, that you have discovered that a student has suffered traumatic experiences and how you helped that child.
2. How would you recognize problematic dissociation and what can you do to minimize the occurrences? Discuss the following:

a. Reassuring the child that he is safe (remember dissociative behaviors stem from fear, rage, shame, helplessness, loss, confusion, and other difficult feelings; not willful manipulation or laziness)

b. Responding empathically (e.g. “You look scared, I’m sorry the siren scared you”)

c. Suspending confrontation until a child is more present

d. Allowing the child to quietly go to a ‘designated safe space’ within the classroom (e.g. reading corner or a spare table)

e. Accepting the child’s feelings even if they do not make sense to you by letting the child know that all his feelings are accepted by you (even if you don’t understand why the child is responding the way he is at a given situation)

f. Encouraging the child to utilize more appropriate ways to express difficult feelings (for example, scribble or draw, put feelings into words in a journal, squeeze a squeeze-ball, go for a run in the gym or engage in some other physical activity which safely discharges intense feelings)

g. Avoiding telling or asking for the ‘positive part’ of the child

h. Allowing the child to visit the counselor or sit in the principal’s office to calm down, and calling the supportive caregiver
i. Presenting consequences for undesirable behavior only after the child has calmed down (see item #f)

(International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation, 2011)
Silence allows people to hold onto time and space for reflection and contemplation, using silence to retreat from conversation and interaction.

Schultz (2009, p. 117)
Silence as a Space for Creativity and Learning

Jones and Gerig (1994) collected a series of quotes that aid us in conceptualizing students who use silence for creativity and learning. These students do not fall victim to the silence which engulfs others as it prohibits the children from reaching full potential. The silent that are among this group are often among the top in the class (Schultz, 2009). Their grades are better than average, their attendance is regular, and they have remarkably few, if any, discipline referrals. Examples of their statements include, “I like to listen to the teacher.” “I really care about my grades.” “I pay attention to my work more than I talk.” “I only talk a little in class because you have to learn and listen” (Jones & Gerig, 1994, p. 176). These students recognize silence as an opportunity to further understand and reflect. Silence is a time for them to be creative or to absorb the communication surrounding them (Shultz, 2009).

Students in this category are often doing significant intellectual work (Townsend, 1998). These students are reflecting about what they are hearing from the instructor and classmates. They are digesting the material and generally will not speak out because their minds are stimulated with new knowledge and ideas. They comprehend that the reality is that understanding through communication begins by observing and that learning consists, above all, of listening to words and silence.

Sometimes, these students use this time to reflect if they are trying to learn a new language. They may have a brief moment of reflection as the search for the correct word or phrase, or they may take a longer while they continue to consume from the environment and process it. The members of this category are adept at
observing appropriate social behaviors and then employ those behaviors acceptably (Schultz, 2009).

This group, though they may not slip through the cracks, merits some consideration as we may learn from them. Alerby and Elidóttir (2003) asks “Does speech really slip away as soon as the conversation is over?” And is silence nothing more than no longer speaking?” (p. 43). Through his thought-provoking questions, Alerby and Elidóttir (2003) leads his readers to the realization that there is more to communication than the simple words delivered. The well timed pauses, which provide the receiver time for reflection, stimulate a deeper, more meaningful message than the simple words that are spoken. Alerby and Elidóttir (2003) believe that senders use this silence for what he calls “Internal Silence,” a time to reflect upon their own thoughts, an experience which is personal and private and which this particular group of students may be quite skilled at handling.

Layla was extremely quiet. She seldom had difficulty in any class. She was skilled at listening and note taking, and she would rather figure out her questions on her own than to ask a peer or the teacher. Layla’s written work was typically best in her class and her teachers would say that it demonstrated a high level of thinking. Layla’s ability to reflect on the content of her classes and the creativity she put in her written work would make an educator believe that she required no help whatsoever. She never asked a question, and her grades were always A’s. When asked, Layla said she would hang on every word, student’s and teacher’s, in classes that were really difficult. In classes that were easy, she did not want to speak because she didn’t want
her classmates to think she was smart. Most of all, she did not want to speak at all in a class unless she knew and trusted her teacher.

Algebra was her worst subject, and Layla had a difficult time figuring it out on her own. She would do whatever she could to get an A, but looking back, she doesn’t feel that she got much from the class. Often, her solution would be the result of following specific steps that she memorized, but she had no understanding of why she was doing what she was doing.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Could a student like Layla slip through the cracks? Reflect on whether a student like Layla might not reach her full potential.

2. Teaching students to be silent so they can reflect on learning and develop creative thinking may be a difficult task for many reasons. Initially, classroom management may be a problem and taking time to teach the skill may add stress to an already crowded schedule. Discuss advantages, disadvantages and any ideas to overcome the disadvantages from incorporating silence for creativity and learning.
The stupendous reality is that language cannot be understood unless we begin by observing that speech consists, above all, in silences.

Ortega y Gasset (1957, p. 50)
Silence as a Reaction to Social Conformity

In Townsend's (1998) research for her work on *Silent Voices: What Happens to Quiet Students during Classroom Discussions* she interviewed a girl from the school she used in her study. The girl replied in a way that exemplifies the damage and its irrevocability in some children. She said

"Kind of, yeah, but in some classes, I really do not talk much, just, I've decided it is because, first, I've always been shy and second, I think it is like public school background 'cause you are not supposed to, you know? ... I think it is just from my background and just personality kind of (Townsend, 1998, p. 77)."

Within her statement, this student's eye opening revelation, she says that it is (being silent) what you are supposed to do in a public school. That perception is prevalent at every grade from kindergarten to senior year in U.S. Schools. Pollard (1999) elaborates on the effects of this paradoxical event. She tells us that in British schools, when the bell rings to begin class, the students are moving around the room collecting their notebooks and discussing what we refer to as bell ringers. They are given about ten minutes to answer the questions that prepare them for the upcoming discussion. Whereas in U.S. classrooms, students are in their seats when the bell rings, they are expected to be quiet and answer the questions to prepare themselves for the ensuing lecture.

Books (2003) provides another great example of the societal conformity principle. She writes,
About forty-five minutes into the End of Grade test, Eli raised his hand. ‘Ms. Glenn, I cannot figure this question out. I’ve been looking at it for ten minutes, and I cannot get it.’ That was it. That one difficulty started it all- a student’s frustrated plea for help during one of the most important days of his academic career (Books, 2003, p. 62).

Ms. Glenn was faced with an ethical dilemma; as a teacher, should she answer his question with proper leading and guiding questions so as to promote his learning? Or does she have to ignore the question leaving him with a feeling of disparity and an undesirable attitude toward education in general? By law, she is not allowed to offer any advice on this test, but not only did Ms. Glenn miss out on a perfect teachable moment, but she was made to abandon her student to conform to the rules. When this type of dilemma occurs in schools teachers have to decide: Is education about teaching, whereas even the assessment methods are utilized as teaching tools, or is it about competitive grading and a comparison of how quickly each child should learn? According to Pollard (1999) there exists a cultural difference in public schools which creates this paradox that can push students into silence. By requiring students to meet the same standards, speak the same language, and follow the same rules, the educational system fails to provide equal mobility, educationally and socially, that it is intending to do.

Alerby and Elidóttir (2003) labels “Oppressed silence” as the condition when one is forced into being silent for different reasons (abuse, ignorance, exercise of
power) and where the 'oppressed' believes that he or she does not have a voice or would not be heard. In Marcella’s case, she felt that her family’s unity would be dissolved if she spoke. She felt (or was made to feel) that someone would come and take her away, and she would never see her parents again. "Oppressed silence" can also occur when there is too much talk. When silent students are in a classroom full of talk, the reasons for their silence is often compounded, forcing them to be silent. Occasionally, too much talk will provide the silent student a concealed level of confidence and one may actually see that as a time to speak as he or she may actually believe that no one will actually hear. The next problem created by “Oppressed silence” is that no time or space is given for reflection, which is detrimental to learning of not only the silent, but every student.

Some use silence as an opportunity to withdraw. Some use silence as a request for help. Some use silence as a place to hide their feelings and emotions. And some use silence as a place to reflect. But some are plunged into silence by rules, regulations or expectations from someone other than themselves. This type of silence removes the individuality of the student and erodes their desire to learn, their willingness to try, and it can often lead to failure or drop-out (Alerby & Elidóttir, 2003).

**Dropouts and Silent Students**

In the study site for this research, this category emerged as the dominant category from which many drop-outs occur. Three years of dropout data was
collected and reviewed to find commonalities among the 76 students who withdrew from school during that time frame.

The first area that stood out was that age did not really matter as the dropouts were equally distributed among 16, 17, and 18 year olds. It was interesting to note that there were 18 more dropouts who came from split or merged families than there were from homes where the families were still together. Nevertheless, the most interesting element that was discovered was the amount of silent students who were among the dropouts. The school counselor and teachers from each department were given the definition of a silent student and asked to try to remember the students and make a judgment based on the definition. If they did not know the student, or they were not a silent student, they were to ignore the name and move on. After eight teachers and the counselor had reviewed the names, the silent were recorded and if the names appeared on more than one list, they were considered a silent voice. Although this method is subjective, the numbers are so staggering that further examination and more attention should be given in a follow-up study. The group of educators identified 65 students (85.5%) as silent. Of the eleven students not identified, two were considered to have a voice while the educators could not recall the other nine students well enough to make a decision.

As we look at social conformity, many additional reasons for silence begin to emerge yet being socially chastised for speaking out can go back many years. Richard Wright (1964) writes, "I'm saying that the situation of their lives evokes in the man almost unconscious tendency to hide their deepest reactions from those whom they
fear would penalize them if they suspected what they really felt” (p. 670). Wright’s example also fits as silence of resistance due to the individual’s fear of failure. Staying in the context of the book, Wright is demonstrating social conformity between races in the 1950’s.

D. E. Foley’s (1996) review of Native American students in a school with white teachers found that White teachers perceived the “silent” stance of the Native students as indicative of their lack of motivation, and responded with low expectations that further exacerbated the negative interactions and silence. The less the teachers expected the more the students seemed to withdraw (Schultz, 2009). This misjudgment is an example of how educator actions can encourage societal conformity causing Native Americans to be silent as a result of their cultural teachings and expectations. Because the white educators misunderstood them, it is likely that their education suffered as a result.

Knaus (2009) reflected on his own experiences in school to help readers understand another form of social conformity. Knaus recalls his “acting out” behavior as a method to get attention of his teachers as he sought help with personal issues of violence and molestation in his home. He explained that no one asked him what was wrong. Instead, teachers and administrators punished him and assigned him to the counselors for anger management. Knaus says that schools typically ignore these circumstances and because students often see schools as irrelevant, dismissive and disrespectful (Knaus, 2009). Knaus was forced to conform to school rules like “shut up and listen,” which happens to be the title of his book.
Through his examination of students in an urban high school in California, Knaus (2009) found that these students who had been through the juvenile justice system believed that schools had given up on them. Jones and Gerig (1994) indicate that as a low achieving student becomes less involved the teachers will involve them less. The feedback the student then receives is terminal, allowing little to no reflection. They are rarely praised for their work. This then becomes a paradox in that if the student is a poor achiever he or she will develop characteristics of a silent student out of fear of being wrong and chastised. On the other hand, a silent student will typically become a poor achiever, or will not realize their potential because of the pattern of behavior the teacher may develop. Thus, the cycle perpetuates into a downward spiral until the students fail or drop-out.

Effective schools' correlates include a *Safe and Orderly Environment.* Providing a culture where students are safe to optimize learning requires structure, organization, and a relatively calm atmosphere (Lezotte and Snyder, 2011). The damage that can be done by not giving enough attention to this correlation can be observed in the individual and the school through both short and long term effects. The effects, as outlined in the case studies and the research presented above, caused by an environment where students feel unsafe can and often do lead to those students seeking asylum through silence.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
1. Pollard did an extensive study and comparison of British and U.S. schools. Discuss the barriers that may exist in your classrooms that prevent the method she describes as occurring in British classrooms. Can those barriers be overcome? Discuss if those methods would improve learning or hinder learning.

2. Discuss ways that silence in your classroom has been used that may have hindered learning.

3. Discuss ways that silence in your classrooms is used to enhance learning.
I'm saying that the situation of their lives evokes in them an almost unconscious tendency to hide their deepest reactions from those who they fear would penalize them if they suspected what they really felt”

Richard Wright, in White Man Listen! (As cited in Knaus, 2009, p. 133)
What can we do to help the silent be heard?

Occasionally a child's silence appears to fit perfectly among one of the categories. In this researcher's experience, more often than not, the silence fits in two or more categories, but is also masked by other factors. And even though the effect of their silence may be similar, the cause can be much different. Therefore, it is imperative that as these areas are addressed, it is understood that categorizing is only a process to organize thoughts, methods, and possible outcomes. These categories blend into others in one case and into others in another. It is not the intention of this research to illustrate these areas with specific methods or a "Best fit." Rather, what is intended is to give the reader information to increase the awareness and understanding of silent voices and offer a number of methods to support giving them voice.

This chapter contains methods gathered from research to offer a tool ultimately to provide a voice to the silent. A common thread among studies is that the individuals who are silent will do better at attaining or using their voice if a trusting relationship is formed to help the student gain self-confidence. The organization of this chapter is not meant to infer that one method is more effective than another. It is from the researcher's experience though, that many of these students have had "fly-by" support (adults who were unable to finish what they start) which compounds the problem. Therefore, if one intends to help the silent, be prepared to go the distance. This researcher also found that the stronger our relationship got the more the student
wanted to share. Going the distance often meant calling the Division of Social Services. Some call this “Tough Love” and it is sometimes difficult to do.

**Build Relationships**

How does one build relationships with students, especially those who have been labeled as ‘difficult’ by many? In gathering background information for this research, a retired teacher who worked several years with students who were not being successful in their regular classroom setting was asked, “How were you able to teach the In School Suspension\(^2\) (ISS) class for so many years and never have a complaint?” The retired teacher responded,

The first year I had many complaints. In fact, I asked to go back to the regular classroom the following year. It drove me crazy. There was way too much negativity to deal with every single day. During that year when I was not working in the ISS, I would lay in bed every night wondering what I did wrong and what I could do differently. I asked to go back to back to the ISS room the next year. I have been able to spend the last eight years in ISS living by one rule, and it is simple: treat every child as if he or she is your own. If a parent has any questions and you are able to look them in the eye and tell them that even if it is not what they would have done, they

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\(^2\) In School Suspension is a class used to house students for minor misbehaviors that disrupt the learning of other students. Students are assigned to ISS as a form of punishment for a period of one class period up to three days depending on the severity of the misbehavior. Students must complete their class work and depending on the misbehavior the student may also have an intervention course to complete as well.
still understand and are supportive (Clyde Mays, personal communication, Fall 2004).

The purpose of personalizing and developing a trusting relationship in student interactions is a good first step in encouraging voice amongst all students. “Students do not care how much you know until they know you care” (author unknown). That phrase has been around a long time and is used in many different school settings from classrooms to locker rooms. Knaus (2009, p. 135) also explains the key to helping students is that teachers must care. The following traits of a “good” teacher may not be part of teacher education programs. At times, it’s apparent that the cyclic reaction that is passed from teacher to teacher occurs as new teachers to react to classroom situations and they remember what they saw from their own teachers, often modeling the behaviors that cause silence. In the voice of his students:

- Ask about and remember us.
- Know how to calm me down.
- Know how to calm my friends down.
- Be yourselves.
- Do not get angry with me.
- Do not take crap from other students. (Don’t make a difference because of who they are)
- Do not take crap from other teachers or the principal. (Don’t assume we are in the wrong because of who we are)
• Know when I come to class bleeding on the inside.
• Trust us!, (Knaus, 2009, p. 135)

Listen to the Silence

Often listening is taken for granted, like breathing as may be considered natural. There are many factors that go unattended when silent students are involved. The educators and students must learn how to listen effectively; the students must have confidence that their voices are being heard; and the students must be taught how to overcome anxiety associated with speaking in public. Schultz (2009) states, “Without understanding students’ uses of silence in the classroom, teachers risk missing much of the participation and learning that transpires” (p. 118). Without understanding and giving validation to the importance of Shultz’s statement, an educator would have much greater difficulty reaching every student.

Knaus (2009) uses a number of strategies to provide voice to her students. She reports that most of her students are predominately African American or Latino and most have a history with juvenile hall. She acknowledges that many of her students have not been successful in school, creating disruption and receiving various forms of discipline. Knaus (2009) uses her own past to connect with her students. She reflects, “No one ever asked if I was being molested. None of my educators gave me the space to talk about what I was reacting to. In essence, I was disciplined rather than taught how to deal with my pain” (p. 134). She reinforces the need to foster awareness and confidence in order to provide voice to students.
Establish Predictable Classroom Procedures

- **Create “Seams”:** Some students will not interrupt the teacher or other students. This is a difficult problem to observe, especially when classroom discussions have excited thought and response in students, becoming unpatterened and unpredictable. Mehan (1979), in Townsend (1998), called the “seams” in a classroom discussion that period of time where one can appropriately interject a remark.

- **Multiple Response Questioning:** With this strategy the instructor asks a question with multiple possible answers and the gives each child an opportunity to add a response, thus getting everyone involved without singling anyone out (Schultz, 2009).

- **Adding Silence -- “Check In”:** One of the teachers in Schultz study used a routine in her classroom called Check In. She brought the students into a circle on the rug for a “Check In” for a variety of reasons, including the desire to respond to an event that disturbed the rhythm of the classroom, to rebuild community when there were bad feelings among the students or simply to gather the class together as a group in order to refocus the students’ attention. The teacher created several routines that included silent reflection. In addition, with Check In, she set up a routine during which each child was given the opportunity to speak or “graciously decline.” Silence surrounded the talk as children were encouraged to contribute to the discussion without judgment or
evaluation. They were expected to listen to one another in silence (Schultz, 2009). This method called Check In provided the instructor with valuable teachable moments and added to the rich educational environment that had already been established in the school.

- **Planned Silence** – Planning and providing time for silence allows students time for reflection. By planning silence, the teacher can strategically connect the student into a time and place with a significant concept. This may be an extraordinarily useful tool when learning vocabulary or a foreign language. This type of silence can sometimes give children a chance to withdraw, but it also gives a silent child an opportunity to signal for help from the teacher or peers. Teachers integrate silence into their teaching and students’ learning by developing routines that incorporate silence, and sometimes the silence must be broken to encourage more talk. Silence allows teachers to create openings in their classrooms and curriculum to invite more students to participate in activities.

- **Organization:** According to Schultz (2009), silence organizes interactions in classrooms. Teachers can use silence to transfer control to the students allowing them to determine when and how to share their assignments. Teachers also seek silence as a form of control, alternatively worrying about times when there is too much silence.
• **Seating Arrangements:** J. Barber, (personal communication, 2010) reminds us that, "Teachers traditionally put students in their seats according to alphabetical order. Often this puts the same kids in the back of the room. Teachers have a tendency to spend more time with the kids up front and the ones in back over time, become silent." Plan to periodically change the way students are seated to include rearranging the room.

**Erase Boundaries**

Perhaps one of the most rampant causes of silence among students centers on race and ethnicity. A number of studies have been conducted (Books, 2003; Cohen et al., 2006; Dotson-Blake, et al., 2009; Jones and Gerig, 1994; Knaus, 2009) that examine the influence that the dominant culture has on the curriculum, instructional strategies used to deliver the curriculum, and what is deemed to be acceptable or unacceptable student work. Giroux and Simon (1989) note, "popular culture represents not only a contradictory terrain of struggle, but also a significant pedagogical site that raises important questions about elements that organize the basis of student subjectivity and experience" (pp. 237-238). Wexler (1989) continues the discussion of tension between established curriculum and curriculum that may align more closely with the challenges and influences faced by today's students. He notes, "The general cultural interest asserted is one of restoring 'the Great Books,' 'the Tradition,' the culture of 'the West' to college, and then to all school curricula" (p.
The influence of the dominant culture on pedagogy, classrooms, and students cannot be overstated. Fine and Weis (2003) see the silencing of voices within the school setting as reflective of ideological and political forces. They suggest, “Silencing removes any documentation that all is not well with the workings of the U.S. economy, race and gender relations, and public schooling as the route to class mobility.” They continue, “Quiet student voices of difference and dissent so that such voices, when they burst forth are rendered deviant and dangerous” (p. 15). Thoughtful school leaders should test the veracity of the ideas of Fine and Weis (2003) by examining not only the expected student learner outcomes, but the instructional materials, course activities, and examples provided to teach the content. Are all students represented or is there a propensity for over-representation by one or two groups of students?

Clearly, many schools are not being successful in working with students of color. When one considers that, “African-American males born into poverty have a 1 in 4 chance of being incarcerated and a 1 in 17 chance of getting a college degree,” the question moves from ‘How?’ to ‘When’ (Holliday, 2011). When will righteous indignation awaken in our society and say, “No more?”

Eliminate Privilege Talk

There is silence in every classroom. Often, the silence is interlaced with talk. Always, it is filled with meaning. Some have argued that we allow privilege to influence how schools are seen. Privileged occurs in many ways (Barnett, et al. 2010) describes many ways that privilege occurs. One of the most prolific ways is in class
scheduling. Teachers expect their own children to receive favorable scheduling and the best teachers. Coaches and the heads of the departments expect certain planning periods to make their day go a bit easier. Is this the same expectation for all? Is it fair? If equal and fair are not the same, then which one prevails?

One has to know that privilege may occur by a teacher in a classroom every day, and without consciously knowing. Many times students who are active and speak out are the ones who sit nearest the front of the room. It is common that a teacher will learn that child's name quickly. Additionally, the teacher may call on that child more often, and use that child's name. On the other hand the child in back may be called upon, but without the use of their name.

Then there are situations that privilege goes beyond the school day such as extra-curricular activities. As an example the cost to train cheerleaders in gymnastics and dance inevitably eliminates many participants. To require cheerleaders to be able to perform skills that require extensive training prior to making the teams suggests, without saying, if you are not wealthy you don’t make the squad.

Teach Learning

It is important that an emphasis be placed on teaching the discipline of learning. Speaking initiates thought and theory, silence allows for reflection and the creation of new ideas, but neither may happen unless that space between speaking and silence is consumed with skillful listening. Graff and Birkenstein (2007) offer a method in their book They Say/I Say to allow students to see their voice in
conjunction with their peers as a way to build confidence in speaking and improving listening skills.

Providing silence is essential to learning. This time of reflection allows one to organize one's thought, develop new thoughts, organize and store the data, and enrich one's self worth. Alerby and Elidóttir (2003) notes,

For some, a moment of silence can be used to explore the inner self, and as such, be an essential part of professional and/or personal development [...] we can also use silence to help us 'make sense' of thoughts, emotions, actions and the context in which these are embedded (p. 42). For these reasons, teachers must be reminded that because a student does not speak out it does not mean that learning is not taking place. Alerby and Elidóttir (2003) confirms this premise by saying,

It is important to stress that even though a person does not speak, remaining silent does not mean that the mind is not working and thinking. We, therefore, emphasize that in teaching and learning, silence in the process of reflection, has to be valued and respected as an essential part of pedagogic practice (p. 49). From personal experience and from the teacher education programs this researcher has found that if the instructor wants to further the learning process, then methods to augment the process must be taken. Today, we call this differentiated instruction. In the research by Alerby and Elidóttir (2003), teachers were observed giving the
students multiple ways to express themselves as they reflected on their lesson. “The children had the chance either to write their thoughts on the computer pages, which were embedded in the program, or just talk to the teacher and have it written down for them” (p. 48).

Self-reflection

Knaus (2009) uses critical thinking and critical writing skills through self-reflective expressions that are culturally-rooted and are embedded with skills of appropriate listening techniques. Each class begins with a 10 minute free write which often provides points for conversation. Classes are ended after closure is placed on the conversation by Knaus, and a reminder to the students that sharing voice is emotional work.

Create a School Climate that Welcomes and Educates the Community

Delgado-Gaitan (2004) and Schultz (2010) emphasize the importance that school counselors must embrace the cultural diversity and try to build partnerships that will foster respect between the schools, families, and the community. This partnership must be carefully assembled so that it becomes a perpetual system of collaboration where all parties maintain ownership in the important decisions. Often this type of collaboration requires a host of cultural liaisons to improve communication between the school and the key members of the community (Schultz, 2010). Educational programs are an essential piece of this puzzle as well. Teachers should receive professional development in areas focusing on promoting cultural competence. Furthermore, programs should be established for families to provide
training in areas such as language and the objectives relating to homework. Schools should also provide information to the families explaining what resources are available. In summation:

- Create a Welcoming, Collaborative Climate
- Identify Cultural Brokers and Community Leaders
- Plan Intentional, Structured Opportunities to Interact
- Bolster Investment Through Community Engagement and Reciprocity
- Reflect on the Success and Effectiveness of Partnership Efforts (Schultz, 2010).

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is a key to giving the silent child voice according to J. Barber (personal communication, November 25, 2010). She says that classrooms are crowded, and teachers are challenged by the daily requirements, so it is essential that the parent takes the initiative. It takes a team effort to make this a success. J. Barber claims that parents should meet with the teacher and have positive interaction. “Many times parents meet with teachers to point fingers and place blame. That behavior is negative and makes a teacher defensive. When that occurs it becomes very difficult to communicate the concerns and the needs of the child.” Meeting with the teacher and assuming a support or team role helps the teacher to personalize the effort needed for the child. The parent must continually follow up with emails, notes and checking
Infinite Campus the parent and teacher team together to help the child gain their voice.

**Differentiation**

According to Schultz (2009), there was a renewed focus in teaching styles in the 1990’s and early 2000’s, whereas the pedagogy of preference was the “Stand and Deliver” method. The advocates of this later style believed that all students would have uniform and predictable experiences. Those classrooms were often dominated by teacher-initiated talk and student silence. Teachers who move away from this style of teaching seek to include all students in learning, shaping their practices to reach the range of students in their classrooms. One of the most common methods to reach every child used by the teachers is differentiation. This is a method when the instruction is tailored to the individual’s specific learning style and builds of his or her skills and strengths. Differentiation is a strategy to improve participation. By getting all students involved at their ability level, they become more comfortable with the content as they gain confidence from their successes. A variation that may be added to differentiation that will continue to help give the silent a voice is to place students in small groups after the instruction and differentiation exercise and allow them to discuss their findings. Additionally, the exercise can be followed with individual writings. It is very important for all students, especially the silent to receive swift and worthwhile feedback on the writing. Anything less and the student may perceive the exercise as unimportant and it may contribute to and validate the silence further.
Capitalize on Teachable “Silent” Moments

Often in a classroom, situations arise, that can go unnoticed that give a teacher an opportunity to teach something that would be difficult to teach otherwise. Other times unpredictable moments create an atmosphere that can make the explanation much more clear and understandable. Still other times the students themselves are able to reflect and share thoughts that are new to others and promote deeper thought among peers. It is imperative that teachers learn to listen to silent voices and then develop a procedure for the class to investigate the silence. There are situations where the investigation of silence can be beneficial to everyone including, but not limited to, a majority of students who do not understand the concept or if they simply need time to let it “soak in.” Maybe a concept that has an influence by cultural understanding and the lesson is being lost in the misunderstood thoughts, or even a “carry in” problem that if a teacher took the time to address, better learning would take place.

One particular method to capitalize on a teachable silent moment is described by Schultz (2009). She observed in one of her studies a teacher who asked students to describe in writing a silence that they had experienced. The students were to explain fully with as many details as possible when and where it was, what it looked like, what it sounded like and what it felt like. By asking students to focus on the details, the students were not only learning how to listen to silence, but they were also learning how to add to the silence appropriately in their communication.

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3 A carry in problem may be that a fight is planned and students are concerned. Another example may be a pep-rally or dance, anything that can distract the majority of class.
Shultz (2009) explains a situation she observed in one classroom. During class the students got abnormally quiet at a time when the teacher needed some participation to get to the core of the concept. The teacher quickly put the students into small groups for discussion and presented a question which had multiple correct responses so everyone could get involved. The teacher asked, “How did Helen feel?” By doing this, the teacher “jump started’ them into a discussion which built interest and confidence. The students were brought back to a large group discussion by asking individuals what they had discussed in their groups.

Bring Lessons to Life

Lester (2008) tells the story of his seventh-grade teacher who brought voice to the silent in a different way. His school was in Kansas City, Kansas where the streets were alive with history. Each day the teacher told stories of the old-town, about the Indians and the riverboats. Students were told of the battles and the heroes sparking interest in all who listened. Lester, only a seventh grader then, learned to listen. He heard the voices of the dead through the words of his teacher. As many passionate educators have a reason or background which brought them to their profession, Lester saw the value of providing a voice to the silent.

Inspiring students with real life experiences, invigorating students’ imagination with ideas hidden in the silence, and embracing their silence with opportunities to express their thoughts on paper, tape recorder, video recording or any other form will build self-awareness and confidence.
Effective Assessment – Summative and Formative

Classrooms today have many kinds of formative assessments. Helping silent students to be able to express themselves with techniques that encourage them to be successful is imperative to attaining the true depth of the student’s understanding. Combine a nurturing environment through appropriate teacher interactions, as well as teaching appropriate student interactions, and many of the silent will gain self-confidence. These interactions involving speech and silence are valuable tools in the education process. Building confidence and keeping the students from feeling as if they are being put on the spot are two more significant methods that Jones and Gerig (1994) describe as being integral steps in providing voice to the silent. Communication between teachers and students is imperative to giving the students a sense of correctness (Jones & Gerig, 1994). Nonetheless, the communication must be done in a way as to teach and inspire the student to achieve at a higher level.

Small Group

Jones and Gerig (1994) identify cooperative learning in a small group setting as a viable method to help the silent students become active learners and give them voice. They also say that the classroom must be a warm, accepting socio-emotional climate where the teacher and students value ideas and emphasis is not on just the right answer. “However, it is likely that, even if teachers change the instructional environment, there will still be shy, quiet students [...and that] meaningful learning involves listening, reading, or working with manipulatives” (Jones & Gerig, 1994, p.180). Conversely Reda (2010) noted that using small groups may build confidence
and get silent students to speak. She comments that a student in her study stated that it was easier to speak out in a large classroom setting than a small one because in the large class no one actually listens.

**Methods of Writing for Overcoming Silence**

Several years ago, many schools adopted a “writing process” approach with its journals, “literature logs,” portfolios, and peer evaluation. Teachers were sent to be trained by the Writing Project (Pollard, 1999, p. 4). These writing projects were helpful in that they not only brought focus to the need to improve writing and reading skills, but encompassed writing across the curriculum, a piece of the puzzle which would improve reading skills in other content areas. Townsend (1998) suggests some designs which may be beneficial when attempting to give voice to the silent and simply to understand the silent. In one scenario, she discusses a student whom she observed vigorously taking notes. The student then would use the book and her notes to answer her own questions. She learned to overcome the fact that she was silent, through reading and writing, and to be successful as a student.

Marilyn Nelson (2006), in her article, *The Fruit of Silence*, discusses three specific writing strategies that she uses to help students overcome their silence. She begins every class with a drill she calls contemplative practices. Students are given approximately 15 minutes for mediation followed by one of three journaling methods designed to bring out their innermost thoughts. The first method is journaling where she has the students focus on and complement the mediation experience; the second method is free writing, which comes close to recording inner speech; and lastly she
teaches clustering as a method to teach students to use the right-brain functions of creativity and intuition, to see the big picture and not just parts, and “to think in complex images rather than sequential order” (Nelson, 2006, p. 1735).

Other methods using writing to encourage students to have a voice are to generate questions they care about and ask them to bring to the next class, in writing, and present their own topics for discussion. Townsend (1998) believes that before a discussion, the instructor should have the students write down their reactions to their reading and, after the discussion, ask them to assess the influence of the class talk on their thinking.

Method versus structure – allows “on task talk”, assign multiple writings of different length and have a discussion on the writings (Pollard, 1999). The teacher should be moving throughout the room giving individual attention and encouragement during small group discussion and writing time (Pollard, 1999). Occasionally, the teacher should plan five to ten minutes to write individual responses to each other’s questions. Plan a series of opportunities for students to write about their developing thinking (Townsend, 1998).

Use a Recorder

Townsend (1998) discussed the benefits of using a video recorder to capture the lesson. She noted that allowing three students to watch the video of the lesson after class gave them an opportunity to absorb more of the content and allowed them to pause the tape and clarify any misconceptions that arose. Townsend (1998) states:
Although all of the participants I interviewed had some trouble remembering much about the previous day's discussion when I first asked about it, after looking at a bit of video, memory usually flooded back. Rex participated more in the next class discussion of *Hamlet* that we talked about, and he told me that with the help of the *Cliffs Notes*, he understood it 'a little bit better (p. 72).

Townsend (1998) shared that another student, Rex, was the silent student that many teachers might label as a discipline problem. During their study of Hamlet, Rex would become frustrated and talkative. Rex used disruptive techniques to keep from being called on and possibly even to be removed from class. His lack of understanding with regards to the language of Shakespeare caused Rex to feel bored and disinterested. After watching the video of class and having a chance to comment, where he would not feel ridiculed, Rex developed confidence and participated more the next day. Rex's understanding paid off as he scored a B on the quotes test (Townsend, 1998).

**Time for Reflection**

Wait Time

Giving voice to the silent began with studies of teachers' acts of silencing students and analyzing the negative consequences of teacher imposed student silence. Since the early years of school, teachers have used silence as a method of maintaining order in a classroom. The method is effective in maintaining discipline and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to hear what is being spoken.
Wait time allows teachers to intentionally add silence to the classrooms (Rowe, 1986; Schultz, 2009). Wait time is used to give all students an opportunity to reflect on the question. The moments that are silenced during wait time allow even the silent a chance to process and think of the correct answer (Alerby & Elidóttir, 2003), but also enough time to build the confidence to speak the answer. Some variations to the wait time method are to ask everyone to write the answer allowing the teacher to walk through the room assessing understanding; or through the use of "Clickers" which enter selections of multiple choice questions.

**Popsicle Stick Method (Undesirable)**

The challenge of defining and measuring participation is intensified by the fact that teachers at all levels have few ways to establish whether or not a student is learning the school curriculum, and they tend to default to written assessments and measures of verbal contributions to classroom discussions (Schultz, 2009). Assessing the can be a challenge. One method that gained some popularity some years ago was the Popsicle stick method. Unfortunately, this method can be one of the worst for the silent. These tools increase the number of people called upon in the discussion, and it gives the instructor a tool for evaluation; still, it does not necessarily give voice to the silent nor does it help to identify the reason for the silence (Schultz, 2009). Often, the silent are still overlooked as they will find ways of avoidance, but it also increases

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4 Clickers are the hand held devices used by individual students which allow a teacher to ask multiple choice type questions, give every child an opportunity to answer, and keep who answered and how confidential.
anxiety as they not only wait to be called upon, but also for fear of missing the question.

Other Methods

Other methods of using silence for reflection would be to allow five to ten minutes at the beginning of class for students to collect their thoughts or skim the assignment.

Organize a small group or paired talk to generate discussion questions such as open-ended questions that invite multiple perspectives about a reading. After a reading exercise give questions to the students and allow time for reflection. Request that everyone explain his or her responses with reference to the text under discussion. Give students a chance to rehearse their thinking by talking with a congenial partner. Know that discussion does take time and talk explicitly about the problem with students so no one unconsciously and unnecessarily forces closure.

Often the end of the class period forces closure to a discussion. This situation can be used to the instructor’s advantage. By allowing “run-overs” and continuing the discussion of an issue from one class to the next, the silent students have an opportunity to reflect on the topic and gain confidence for the discussion the next day.

Lester (2008) states “Bring the lesson to life.” If the instructor can give it meaning not only will the student retain it better, but the student will be more apt to take interest in the assignment. Apply the lessons to real-life or to what interests the students (Lester, 2008).
Observe Interactions

If a child from wealth goes to the doctor and the doctor asks what is wrong, the child responds with the symptoms. If the doctor asks that question to someone from poverty, typically the parent will answer for the child. This happens in more than just that setting. Once this behavior begins, it becomes the expected behavior; thus silence is learned (J. Barber, personal communication, November 25, 2010). This behavior is observable by the classroom teacher, and the most effective way to help the silent is to listen carefully, detecting patterns and observing cues in their body language (Schultz, 2009). Even the cues sent by their family and loved ones will help teachers learn how to hear and understand the silence. Conversely, a teacher can ask students to write or draw a portrait of a student who typically enacts silence as a prelude to a variety of conversations. Students can be asked to describe a time when there was silence, to write what it looked, sounded, and felt like (Schultz, 2009).

Special Needs

In her work, Liberating Silent Voices, Whitehurst (2007) provides a number of strategies to help ensure the voices of children are heard. While Whitehurst’s (2007) research focuses on special needs students, her suggestions are useful in encouraging the voice of all children. She says, “Obtaining the views of students with profound and complex learning difficulties arguably requires more meticulous planning and implementation, greater consideration of ethical issues and enormous care with interpretation of findings” (p. 6). She tells us that continuing to allow this group to be silent allows us “to do unto” them. We are then dictating their education, dismissing
their questions and their feelings, and not meeting their intellectual and biological needs.

Whitehurst suggests that allowing ourselves to be limited by our own intellect is elitist and unwise. To ensure voice for all, Whitehurst (2007) posits four areas of change citing the work of Detheridge (2000). These include:

- Appropriate communication mechanisms
- Sensitive interpretations
- Power relationships in the exchange
- Attitudes established over time

**Selective Mutism**

Selective mutism can be puzzling for classroom teachers, counselors, and a student's peers. It is often incorrectly perceived as an act of defiance. So what is the best approach? There is a variety of therapies that are appropriate for students with selective mutism, including behavioral therapy, family therapy, and psychopharmacological therapy. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor or SSRI's (anxiety treating medicines) have been shown to be helpful to decrease anxiety and effective in getting children to speak in as little as weeks. These treatments have been used with students as young as four years old, and the medicine does not typically need to be used for a long duration of time, perhaps a few months or a year. Still, communication between home and school and an intervention plan can make progress even without the therapist (Manassis & Tannock, 2008). Nowakowski et al., (2009)
found, in their study, that children treated with selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors showed more improvement in speech outside the family than children who were not medicated.

Summary

Good teachers recognize that many of the strategies noted above encourage student-centered teaching. Similarly, Blankstein (2004) in *Failure is not an option* and Reeves (2004) in *Accountability for learning: How teachers and school leaders can take charge* restate one of the most critical and effective of all teaching strategies; **teach the student not the content.** Build trusting relationships based on positive feedback and positive interaction. Be a solid role model, and show kindness and compassion.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. The vast majority of the research that has been done for this book shows that building meaningful relationships with students is the most important step in giving the silent a voice. Often the students who are silent did not become silent overnight and they may be much protected when you start trying to build a relationship. Discus ways that these relationships can be built and maintained.

2. Discuss the non-verbal cues that should focus your attention to and beg you to listen to the silence.
3. Discuss how developing classroom procedures can help those without voice to be heard.

4. Are there commonalities between privilege talk and boundaries? What can be done in classrooms/schools to minimize or eliminate either?

5. Discuss the methods, other than building relationships, which may work in your classrooms.
When you become aware of silence, immediately there is that state of inner still alertness. You are present. You have stepped out of thousands of years of collective human conditioning.

Eckhart Tolle
What changes can we expect if the silent are heard?

"There are potentially grave consequences for students when teachers do not understand their silence as a form of participation" (Schultz, 2009, p. 5). Those students may disengage from school learning, withdraw from the classroom community eventually drop out of school, and for many of them, end up incarcerated (Schultz, 2009).

Morgan knows she is silent, and she has always wanted to speak out. Nevertheless, she has had difficulty doing so for much of her life. Morgan identifies herself as being silent because she lacks the confidence to share her thoughts and she feels as though she is being judged with every word. Her parents knew she had difficulty speaking up for herself so they tried exceedingly hard to be her voice. They did not want her to fall behind her peers. She recognizes how this has helped her, but also she can vividly tell someone how it has hurt her.

Morgan’s biggest concern as she got older was that her parents progressively advocated harder and harder for her. She recalls one particular time that her parents pushed an issue even when she begged them not to, and they sensationalized the entire ordeal. She stated that she regrets the day she said anything about the situation to her parents. She spoke about how a situation of bullying was handled so sternly that the boy would regret his actions for the rest of his life. She was deeply saddened because, although the law did not see him as a minor, she felt that his thinking and his actions were that of a minor. Worse yet, she knew that the conviction would be on his record forever.
Morgan counts her blessings every day. She is well aware of her surroundings and quite cognizant of the way people treat each other. She values the friendships and the love of her boyfriend. She is mindful of the support she has received from teachers and administrators at the high school, and she recognizes that her experiences have made her much wiser.

Morgan’s story took a turn for the better a short time ago. She was able to open up to friends who helped her through an extraordinarily difficult situation. Without that first attempt at speaking up for herself, she may have never known the feeling. Now, she recognizes the need, not only for herself to speak out, but others too.

Schultz (2009) reflects that without understanding students’ uses of silence in the classroom, teachers risk missing much of the participation and learning that occurs. Meaningful silence occurs in every effective classroom. The obligation to meet academic standards that are measured by high-stakes testing has caused the education process to evolve (some may believe the term should be regress) to a point that we must constantly remind ourselves to “Teach the child not the content.” This reminder is not intended to dismiss the importance of the content but to enhance the importance of teaching the individual child. Pushing forward to cover a specific amount of content, in a specific amount of time, creates a dilemma and often requires teachers to pace themselves in a way that may overlook the silence of some students. However, it is the times when silence occurs during instruction that can be used as a moment where the teacher can become the student and learn to embrace the silence
for what it means, and begin to improve instructional methods that will address their learning styles.

Student voice is essential in the formative evaluation process that occurs in classrooms each day. Once students have a voice, the teacher can pace lessons more appropriately and evaluate students’ understanding much more easily, ensuring that each child has grasped the concepts. Jones and Gerig (1994) tell us about the importance of giving formative assessments in a whole class setting. They mention that the interactions among students and teachers reveal how well the class as whole picked up a concept, but also how well individuals understand and if re-teaching is necessary. An outcome that is expected if participation is high is that the class will begin to function as members of a team and strive to achieve their common goals. They will work together to solve problems, all the while showing consideration to and encouraging those without a voice.

Camahalan (2006) describes her understanding of silence by realizing that when her whole class stares at her in silence, she needs to rephrase her question. When a student pauses while reciting, she knows some concepts she has taught are not clear. When a student does not say anything, but smiles sweetly, she knows her ideas made an impression. When students are engaged in a lesson, they will think reflectively. This process may be prompted by the teacher, but it usually occurs in silence. To maximize the results, teachers must show students how to use reflective silence (as described in chapter 7, *Silence as Space for Creativity and Learning*). Students feel more confident about their ability to cope, and more empowered as a
learner after mastering this technique, which allows them to respond more thoughtfully and less emotionally.

Townsend (1998) recalled a student named Anne whom she worked with for a brief time. Anne was reflective in her silence, as was proven by the notes she took in class. Each day she would write the question posed by the teacher and scribe a few points of her own. Anne lacked the confidence to speak; nonetheless her notes demonstrated her ability level was equal to other students. Anne began reading ahead of her class and making notes in the margins. By doing so, she was more prepared and more confident so when the teacher asked questions, Anne was ready. She remarked, “I could not believe I was so talkative” (Townsend, 1998, p. 76). In her next interview, Anne commented that class was more intriguing because she was able to share her thoughts with others.

What Impact Can Be Expected if the Silent Speak Out?

In the fall of 2010, the teachers were asked to identify students who were silent. In just a few days, more than 150 different names were sent. The list was compiled, and if a name was submitted more than once, then that student was considered as a candidate to be a silent student. There were 85 names that were cross-referenced among the lists and found to be silent by more than one teacher.

One of first goals was to establish a meaningful relationship with each student. Building a relationship meant, simply, getting to know them by using Knaus’s (2009) list (found in chapter 9 of this book) as a guide. During the “Getting to know” them stage, questions were asked, such as:
• Who has been your favorite teacher? Why?
• Who has been your least favorite teacher? Why?
• If you could change one thing about this school, what would it be?

The questions were asked to get the students talking and to feel that what they had to say was valuable. Interestingly, one somewhat unexpected result occurred when the favorite teachers were notified that they had touched the lives of these specific students, and an instant bond was formed between the two. Unintentionally, another adult was placed in the students' lives, and another meaningful relationship was formed. Limited resources, primarily time, allowed for focusing on 50 of the 85. For the next two years, meetings involving this researcher and the silent students were held nearly every two weeks. These meetings allowed for discussions that might resemble conversations at the dinner table between children and their parents. Discussions of grades and expectations of improvement were always met with resistance, but they always loved talking about their significant others or their favorite hobbies. As trust was built, not only were the reasons for their silence exposed, but stronger relationships were formed, and the students began to realize that someone genuinely cared for them.

At the end of the two years, the grade point average (GPA) of the 50 students was compared to the GPA from the onset. The GPA of the students had improved an average of 14%, from 2.54 to 2.9, while the GPA of the 35 students who did not receive bimonthly interviews dropped slightly, about an average of 0.04%, from 2.61
to 2.51. This improvement strategy suggests that relationships are especially significant not only because the GPA of these children improved, but only one of the original 50 dropped out of school. Thankfully, the relationship that had been established carried beyond the school walls, and with just a few phone calls and some encouraging words, the student received his GED only months after leaving school.

The credit for the improved GPA must go to the teachers. They built relationships, talked to each child to learn why they struggle, found out what teaching style they liked, asked how they felt most comfortable in class participation, and then they used that information to plan for the upcoming lessons.

When a heretofore-silent child is given voice, there is not only an impact on that child, but on all within that child’s sphere of influence. J. Barber, (personal communication, November 25, 2010) provides an example from her years as a teacher/researcher through her experiences and the impact made when a child receives voice. We can consider the immediate impact on the child, and then the impact on the classes that child shares with the other individuals in that class. Lastly, if the silent voices are heard, then we can look at the impact other groups including clubs, organizations, or an entire school.

J. Barber, (personal communication, November 25, 2010) shared an illustration about a child who lived in her service area. Devin was a silent child. He always sat as far back in the room as the teacher would allow. He was unusually quiet, never offering an answer. If called upon he would politely decline to speak. Teachers often felt this refusal to answer questions was in opposition to their request
and that would lead to trouble. His parents had high expectations and his family knew how intelligent he was, but no one had the answer to “get him out of his shell.” Barber began reading about this type of student, and shared her research with the family. The first thing Devin’s mother did was meet the teacher. She bragged on what a good job of educating Devin the teacher had done so far. His mother shared that she had a problem keeping him focused, and the teacher agreed. Together they decided to keep him in the front half of the class. His mother also told the teacher that he had problems speaking out when he was at home and that she (the mother) was going to try some strategies to provide practice for Devin. The teacher said she would do the same, and by starting him in small group work, he slowly acclimated to the class.

His mother and the teacher had bonded for a common cause. Together they worked with Devin all year while their plan took shape. By mid-year Devin had joined the school’s academic team and became a member of the quick-recall team. The summer between fifth and sixth grade, Devin began playing soccer. As sixth grade started and the academic team began practicing, Devin’s teachers noticed a significant change. He was more talkative. He had become quite competitive and was extremely goal driven. Midway through his sixth grade year, Devin had proven that he was now a “straight A” student and was promoted to the eighth grade quick recall team. For about two weeks, Devin reverted to the silent boy he had been earlier. However, when his teacher spoke to him about his recent accomplishments and his future as a school leader, Devin emerged again. Devin finished eighth grade as team captain on his middle school academic team. He competed in two subjects at the state
level, was ranked first in his class of sixty-five students and he played soccer all through high school.

Devin’s family has shared with Barber that according to the other parents, Devin has become one of the most liked kids in his class. Birthday parties, trips to the movies, and many other social activities became commonplace for Devin. He was invited to play with two bands at different churches. But most of all, the other parents tell Devin’s mother that they have noticed that Devin has challenged their children to better themselves. Their children are among the few elite who competed for valedictorian. Devin’s enthusiasm, competitiveness, and friendship carried their children to the top with him.

It is evident what giving voice to Devin has done. It has also built a more positive, more competitive atmosphere for his classmates as they strained a little harder to be valedictorian. The school had experienced some success, but the best was yet to come. Devin’s notoriety for his musical talent brought some attention from parents and students. His competitive, fun personality helped bond his soccer team into a cohesive group who cared for one another on and off the field. His personality, and knowing what it was like being silent, helped boost students’ awareness and acceptance of differences and erase lines that once existed between the school’s subcultures.

Devin graduated from a small school in Eastern Kentucky. Through the concerted efforts of his parents and teacher, Devin’s was able to attain a voice early in
middle school. By the time he graduated his voice impacted the school and the students in many ways.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Discuss how hearing the silent can help the individual reach his or her potential.

2. Discuss how hearing the silent can improve the learning environment and the culture of your classroom and school.

3. Discuss your thoughts on how or if helping these silent students will improve state test scores and accountability and help to close the gap.
In the End, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

Martin Luther King, Jr.
The End of the Beginning

In society, there tend to be many issues that become cyclic in nature: poverty, disease, addictions, abuse, and the list is ongoing. We often hear the inspirational stories of the one person who broke free and ended the cycle. Can we compare silence to problems that are cyclic? And if so, can the cycle be broken?

This researcher, in 17 years of education and 3 years of researching, has found the dialogue in academic circles about silent students has not emerged until recently. Some research surfaced in the 90’s which addressed various situations about students with special needs and the importance of giving them voice. Then a few other research projects arose that noted students’ silence for various traumatic reasons. But it was the work of Katherine Schultz, who has been quoted frequently in this book, who started putting all of these concepts together.

Schultz (2009) gives thought to the origin of silence in the classroom and how to align one’s expectations with their need for understanding silence, along with attempting to determine why the silence is considered beneficial or detrimental. During her study, Schultz (2009) noticed that many students had effectively participated in the lesson, but there were still a few whose papers remained blank. Many educators would be curious as to why. Was there a reason they intentionally left their papers blank? Did the students lack the knowledge or the confidence to write their answer? Do the students not possess the skills to communicate through writing?

To assess these silent students, an educator must first recognize who is silent, build a relationship that will provide support and allow a close enough interaction to
understand why, and later take steps to instill in them a voice.

Hearing the silent must be taught through teacher education classes, professional development courses, and peer communication. Silence can indicate resistance, boredom, thoughtfulness, or reflection. One may be able to recognize the silent and to determine why, but to help the silent have voice takes a concerted effort. Through this research and the work of Schultz, it is apparent that these students are silent for many reasons. Still, there is one commonality among many silent students; they typically are “tuned in” to other forms of communication such as body language and changes in speech patterns. (Shultz, 2009) explains that during the communication process the silent focus more than others do on body language and changes in voice. This silent communication is centered on volume, pitch, and rate of the speaker, as well as body positioning, hand, and head gestures. The silent will make quick adjustments in their delivery if they believe the listener is disengaged. The same could be said for the instructors if they also learn to hear the silence in that way.

Teachers must not only understand the rules of communication with the silent, but also the pace of their own classroom. It is driven by those with confidence and who have voice, while those without a voice get only further behind and sink deeper into silence. It seems that this becomes a problematic pattern as it begins in a classroom that is driven by the students who speak out. This limited participation presents as the initial problem because the verbal message that the instructor gets is that everyone understands the material.
Classrooms require order to enhance the teacher’s ability to assess and aid the silent. Some classes seem as though they are merely controlled chaos and others are militantly managed. Whatever the environment that best suits the teacher and the student, Schultz (2009) points out the silence allowed by one student can enable the voice of another student. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers know who is predominantly silent, why they are silent, and various methods to encourage them to participate.

After an understanding of pacing and environment is established, teachers must learn new ways of engaging the silent. Some of the most popular ways are “Wait Time” and the “Popsicle Stick” method. These methods are designed to get all students involved by providing a moment of silence for reflection and stimulating all students to think of the answer with anticipation of the teacher calling on them. These methods are also designed to hold students accountable as a formative type assessment.

Conversely, a teacher may not accurately assess the silent student’s understanding due to the anxiety associated with the panic of being called upon to speak in front of the entire class or of being made fun of for an incorrect or incomplete response. Consequently, the teacher’s misinterpretation of the silent student’s reaction to anxiety may further exacerbate the silence if the student feels they have failed and caused the instructor to reteach the concept to the class.

Another example from Schultz (2009) is a strategy where the teacher divides the kids into small groups to reflect on a question. The goal is to build
confidence in the silent student and eliminate anxiety so they can gain experience speaking in front of the class. Although this method seems to have merit, the anxiety of reporting is no different from that of the “Popsicle Stick” method. In some cases, it creates even more anxiety. In a debriefing with the students, they admit to feeling as though they were speaking for a group of students and if they were wrong, they would be letting the whole group down, and that is too much pressure. The Black Swan\textsuperscript{5} was that the debriefing between the students and teacher provided valuable insight and led to a better understanding of causes of silence among all parties.

Studying these interactions will help with understanding the silence and also make it much easier to incorporate the silent in classroom participation. This awareness from the teacher enables the silent to begin to reach their potential as their participation furthers the others’ understanding. Thus, the impending academic and social growth curve becomes an upward spiral since one component depends upon the other until one breaks down or until it reaches its full potential. Schultz (2009) cautions about the difficulties a teacher has in keeping up with what is being said, much less what is not. She encourages various methods of integrating the silent students into classroom participation so new horizons can be opened allowing the expansion of their knowledge.

Changing the dynamics of the classrooms to include silence can bring common ground to the silent students and the students with a voice. With this new

\textsuperscript{5} The reference to a black swan is in regards to Nassim Nicholas Taleb’s theory of an event that caused an enormous, yet unexpected outcome.
arrangement, participation becomes an intrinsic cooperative experience occurring between students and instructors that develops into a rich educational experience. One of the difficulties that may develop is identified in Daniel Pink’s book *Drive*, in which Pink describes how intrinsic motivation is hindered by reward (Pink, 2009). Elementary schools use reward to encourage effort. Giving consideration to this concept, middle and high school educators must rejuvenate intrinsic motivation prior to teaching.

Moving away from extrinsic motivation can be extraordinarily difficult. For a period of time, it puts strain on teachers, parents, and students by adding stress to an environment designed for education that bases the school’s validation and accreditation on high stakes testing. Therefore, teachers feel pressured by the amount of material that must be covered and the time constraints to which they must adhere. This combination of stressors can be detrimental to the teacher’s desire to add another element to an already full curriculum. Fortunately, once this procedure is in place, the discussions will be even richer with content, and offer lessons in establishing teamwork and respect for others.

Sadly, as educators are forced into a system of accountability that requires a response to extrinsic stimuli and creates fear of change in methodology. We default to written assessments and classroom contributions verbal in nature, which privileges a certain student population and rewards compliance (Schultz, 2009). The effects of conceding make it even clearer that teachers must find ways to provide equal opportunities through changes in routine. Use of written expression and pictorial
routes of expression are among the simplest methods for teachers, and they can be employed as systems of formative and summative assessments. Schultz (2009) says, “Providing teachers and researchers with a set of tools or making sense of a range of types of participation that include silence will, in turn, broaden their methods of formative assessment” (p. 11).

Scott Momaday (1997) describes the meanings of silence in his American Indian community:

Silence [...] is powerful. It is the dimension in which ordinary and extraordinary events take their proper places. In the Indian world, a word is spoken or a song is sung not against, but within the silence. In the telling of a story, there are silences in which words are anticipated or held on to, heard to echo in the still depths of the imagination. In the oral tradition, silence is the sanctuary of sound. Words are wholly alive in the hold of silence; they are sacred (p. 16).

The silence by the Native Americans was perceived, as a sign of strength. That silence has perpetuated to a drop in the academic success of the Native American students who attend public schools and chose to remain silent (Foley, 1996).

Rather than focusing on the definitions of silence, scholars such as Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) encourage educators to pay attention to how silence works in a classroom:

Seeking to nurture, to educate, to inspire, silence in educational
settings may reach places that speech can, at best, only evoke. The difficulty is first to identify and call attention to the various kinds of silence in the public context of the classroom and then to create spaces that nurture, challenge or enrich these silences (p. 203).

Often in the classroom, teachers use student voice as a way, to gather information to determine student understanding and as formative assessment. Conversely, Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) are suggesting ways to “level the playing field” by providing an environment in which the silent can be successful and in which the vocal can experience the value of silence.

Silence has been in classrooms for as long as this researcher can remember and probably much longer. There have been efforts made through a variety of methods, as mentioned earlier in this work, but the silence still dominates most classroom environments. The use of silence as discipline and as a method to try to deliver the same message to all students, has been used for so long that it serves as an unintentional model for students who aspire to be teachers. This researcher has noticed that beginning teachers, who often lack confidence in their classroom management skills, default back to what they remember from their school teachers, hence promoting silence and making the whole concept cyclic. Educators must break the cycle that encourages silence and provide methods for those students who are silent to have a voice.
Closing the Gap

The author’s examination of the reasons for silent students and methods to hear the silent is on-going. Often, amidst this project, the author was confronted by situations where immediate action had to be sought through outside agencies. Nevertheless, it seems apparent that the underlying theme of why many students are silent is one of misunderstanding, timidity and distrust, and/or lack of meaningful relationships. Some argue that the underlying theme has less to do with the tolerable explanations noted throughout this book and align more closely with suppression of memories and/or dominance whereas the silent student needs to have some sense of control over his or her environment. Regardless of the triggering factors, many of these students are suffering academically and need assistance. As many of these students fall in subgroups of poverty and minorities, it seems clear that if educators are serious about closing the achievement gap between their students, then providing voice to all students is a critical first step.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Methods to formatively assess students often include verbal communication between the teacher and students. This method is favorable to teachers who are under constraints of time to complete units of study. As emphasized in this chapter, that type of assessment may not be the best method for all silent students. Discuss methods to adjust these types of formative assessments so the silent students may be included and appropriately evaluated for
understanding.

2. This chapter ties it all together and begins to explain the cyclic nature to which we have unknowingly bound ourselves. Discuss the validity of that statement or how you have been able to break that cycle; include in your discussion assessment procedures, different cultures, intrinsic and extrinsic stimuli, and methodology.
Reference Lists

Executive Summary Reference List


**Capstone Reference List**


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**Bibliography**


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