

### **Toelichting “Silences in Teaching and Learning” (Betsy Warland)**

In deze bijlage vind je ervaringen vanuit het perspectief van docenten en studenten over hun onderlinge interactie tijdens colleges. Centraal daarbij staat de beleving, de sfeer, de chemie tussen studenten en docenten tijdens een college. Naast bekende didactische middelen als doelbepaling, voorbeelden en herhaling kunnen stiltes en het welbewust creëren van verwarring worden ingezet als middel om te komen tot diep leren. Wat moet je je daar dan bij voorstellen? Deze bijdragen geven voorbeelden van de kracht van ‘silence’ en ‘confusion’ als aanjager van intellectuele ontwikkeling in het onderwijs.

Silences in teaching and learning  
Les voix du silence dans l'académie

Edited by / édité par Betsy Warland

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**editor's note**

Language evidences our separateness.  
Silence evidences what we share.  
—Betsy Warland, *Only this blue*

Every languaged moment tells us something specific. Every silent moment holds all meaning, all possibility. As teachers, we are the recognized guardians of language. Yet, in the classroom, when we find ourselves standing at the threshold of deep insight or reverence – and fall silent in awe, or relinquish the seeking to the class itself – our students learn more in those moments and minutes than they do from the entire language-directed course.

This is why we, and they, are there: in the academy. Each and every one of us hungers for insight that seizes us to the core. It may feel tender; it may feel terrifying. This is the underlying impetus for *Silences in teaching and learning*. As the book's editor, I have encountered in the editorial committee's quest for how to faithfully realize the book, as well as in the writers' texts of inquiry, a kind of reverence that has often been lost in education. In the array of silences addressed in the book – from moments of elation to those of profound replenishment to those that are deeply troubling – the necessity for respect is central.

*Silences in teaching and learning* is a groundbreaking book that has stepped outside of traditional academic writing, research, expertise. The very nature of silence

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and its resistance to language; the fact that this is a nascent topic within the academy; the editorial request that the writers write in an unconventional form and style; and the uncertainty of colleagues' responses also make this a risk-taking book. As a teacher, writer, and editor, I am grateful for this book. And I want to express my deep regard for each writer, each editorial committee member, and my copy editor (and poet) Ellis Carpenter, who brought this book into being.

**Betsy Warland**  
Editor

## abeyance

I had a teacher who understood synapses.  
She used timing like a trapeze artist.

Every class began and ended in silence.  
At nine o'clock she turned on the slide projector,  
walked up the tiered steps,  
locked the auditorium door.

The watchful eyes of 200 students,  
sitting at wooden desks, followed her return to the screen  
where she stood, an eerie silhouette,  
in front of a 12-foot image.

At first we hated her for  
    taking our time  
    locking the door  
    insisting we sit in silence.

We felt sent to our rooms,  
punished with the click of heavy metal lock  
the slap of her leather shoes on concrete  
her faceless profile in front of the slide.

“Dracula’s wife!”

“Frankenstein’s’ daughter!”

We hissed to each other.

“It’s only a 100-level survey course!

No wonder she’s single!”

In the dark room her voice  
hushed in the glow of Gothic windows,  
caressed the draping of Michelangelo’s *Madonna*,

wavered with Van Gogh's uncomfortable skies  
quietly urged us,  
"Art cannot speak for itself,  
its language must emerge within us."

And posed carefully sculpted questions  
that invitingly hung in the silence.

By midterm she had taught us  
to pause wait connect  
image to retina, brain, heart:  
medium texture colour shape  
size content symbol  
context personality health and family of artist  
politics meaning.

Our minds  
sorting through  
every strategy designed  
to expand our knowledge, our love  
of art.

At the end of the hour she returned us to silence:  
a final slide  
an invitation to  
read, think, wonder then  
the slap of shoes, click of  
door unlocked.

She always thanked us for  
honouring the artists who made her class possible  
as we left.

**Clarissa P. Green**

**Susan Drain**



I think I will start my writing classes from now on with a new assignment. Write your obituary.

In studying and writing obituary, we will confront the master narratives society prescribes for all its historical and cultural accounts, narratives still often gender- and class-bound. In other words, obituaries are fiction: selected, shaped, and crafted to tell a story, and to make that story the authoritative one. These little human accounts are the last word spoken to, against, and into the great silence that our culture maintains is death. In universities, we are doubly challenged to speak of death. For all the media evidence to the contrary, young people cannot imagine it as ever happening to them, while we elders feel it looming, and look away. We think of death as *happening* to us, not as something we *do*.

Unlike death, however, dying is not silent. Dying is articulation.

I have watched how the dying assert themselves, if we let them: they question, if we listen; they explain, if we attend. They engage not only in the articulation of speech, but in the articulation of relationship: it is not a linguistic coincidence that to remember is to reconnect the members of that entity. Against the looming silence, they articulate their own narratives of individuality and community with words, sometimes with photographs.

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Sometimes they assemble mementos of work or passion. They reweave threads of family. If reconciliation is not possible, acknowledgement may suffice; loose ends are often an inevitable part of the fabric. As they articulate their own dying, their family and friends are prompted to compose and revise their own narratives.

Being a palliative care volunteer is as great a privilege as teaching, and even more humbling. Rare is the teacher who names that silence, yet without it, our world will chatter itself into oblivion. That silence demands, not *what*, but *why* are we learning. What will last? What will matter?



**Kathy Madjidi**



In considering potential applications of silence in higher education, I propose that the solo could be incorporated as an integral aspect of student development.

In many indigenous cultures, making space for periods of silence and reflection is an integral part of education. One of the most significant examples of this is the “vision quest,” a traditional rite of passage to mark important life transitions such as moving from adolescence into adulthood. The vision quest is a sacred ceremony, a time for isolation, fasting, and the seeking of direction. Practices vary according to each culture; however, the vision quest is generally preceded by a period of intensive preparations.

As described by Black Elk, the Lakota quest begins with an *Inipi*, a sweat lodge purification ceremony. The individual is then led out to a sacred spot, and a circle of stones is placed around him or her. For the next two to four days, with little or no food or material protection, the individual must stay within this circle. Moving through emotions such as boredom, hunger, fear, acceptance, peace, and even ecstasy, each individual embarks upon a journey into the silence of their own “inner space.” Some are visited by spirit guides and offered a vision; others find new meaning and direction for their lives. For some, the meaning of this quest will not be fully understood for years to come.

**Rebecca Nowacek**



**My first semester** as an assistant professor. The third week of class. Tuesday, September 11th. I have just watched the first tower fall. Amidst general alarm I fear that I have watched my friend Alyssa die. I shuffle to my classroom. Take a seat and sit silently with my students. I don't know what to say. They are all there, looking to me. I talk for a little while. Words that I won't remember tumble out of my mouth. A few students respond. Then one takes a deep breath and disagrees with me. I realize that she is right and tell her so. She nods her head. We fall back into silence. No one seems to want to leave. Then we begin to write. All I can hear is the scratching of pens on paper and the occasional snuffle. We sit together. And write.





**David Grimshire**



**Shhh! Be quiet.** I'm listening to the teacher. I hardly notice my classmates as they listlessly squirm in their seats. Like a good typist, the teacher speaks rhythmically, pausing to reinforce every idea. Clickety-clack, clickety-clack, pause, clickety-clack.

The teacher has stopped talking! A familiar terror builds as time slows. The inevitable question is sure to follow the silence. Maybe someone else will get picked. Eyes downcast, I wait. I can spew back exactly what the teacher said but what if I have to think? Can I marshal my thoughts to provide the answer the teacher expects?

I have been asked the question.

A calm follows. I am in control of the silence, delay my answer to emphasize the difficulty. But maybe I should blurt it out to show just how much I know? Like a jigsaw puzzle, the pieces of my answer are fit together. Right or wrong, my answer will elicit a response: then the cycle starts again.

Silence fuels our communication, evokes emotion. Motivates.



Despite the silence in classrooms, talk for its own sake is curiously regarded not only as the best indicator of learning, but of a student's abilities! A significant portion of a student's grade may be assigned on this basis. But most students remain trapped; they succumb to the ritual of silence. After class, I sense their relief as they approach the door. They can be themselves again.

Today, the teacher gathers up his papers. He seems tired. And I wonder: can silence signal comprehension, just as much as talking out loud can? Why does it take more effort to think about what should not be said than it does to think about what could be, or should be, spoken aloud?

The teacher scribbles on me – sometimes with great passion – dissolving chalk into the membranes that sustain me. He wipes me clean to ready me for the next time he displays his mastery. Then he does something unexpected. He writes with a loving hand:

“No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies [silently] half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge.” (Gibran)

He reflects for a minute. Then he walks out the door.

Next time, will he listen more?

**Arshad Ahmad**

**Work Cited:**

Gibran, Kahlil. (1923). *The prophet*. [[www.kahlil.org/thoughtforday.html#023](http://www.kahlil.org/thoughtforday.html#023)].

**Clare Hasenkampf**



Strategic silence allows us to manage the cacophony, allows the possibility of symphony. It allows ideas a chance to resonate and echo in the chambers of our worldviews. Strategic silence gives new ideas a chance to emerge, old ideas a chance to develop a vibrato in the student's mind.



**Robert Campbell**



My faith does not keep silent. It is the subtext that informs my lectures and constructs the real take-home message of the course, a message that is in part about not losing a sense of self in a pluralistic society. The maintenance of personal identity is not about the condemnation of others. However, I cannot force students to be tolerant. I can inform them about their own religious traditions as well as those of the many different people they encounter on a daily basis. I can demonstrate openness and acceptance, curiosity and interest, wonder and awe. However, it is only through silence that I can instill all of this with integrity and genuineness. This is what my students are looking for and this is what brings them back to class day after day. I can only do this because I am silent about my faith, and it only works because my faith is not silent.



grasped by the camera for the human eye, we turn to a brief description of how colours are created on the computer screen, and of just how many colours the computer can actually reproduce.

Now the class moves to the central point and I circulate Juan Ramón Jiménez's poem "Primavera Amarilla (Yellow Spring)" to the students. They indulge initially in a silent reading of the poem. Here it is, in my own translation:

April arrived full of yellow flowers . . . .  
The stream was yellow, the path was yellow,  
and the hill, and the children's graves  
and the orchard where love used to live.  
The sun anointed the world with the yellow  
of its fallen rays. There were gilded lilies  
and aureate water, warm and sparkling.  
Yellow butterflies perched on yellow roses.  
Yellow garlands climbed yellow trees.  
Daylight was a gift of golden perfume  
in a glistening awakening of life.  
Amongst the bones of the dead,  
God was opening his yellow hands.

For homework, the students are requested to take scissors and cut swatches of yellow from their *¡Hola!* magazines. These swatches are then to be ordered from light to dark and placed around the outside of a Bristol board in roughly the same sequence in which we find them on a computer colour template. Next, the students centre the poem on their Bristol board, in Spanish, side by side with one or more English translations. Then I ask

them to attach a thin thread from each of the 16 occurrences of the word *amarillo*, or its synonyms (gold, golden, gilded, aureate), to the colour on their swatches that they imagine it to be. Next day, in class, we create an art gallery on the classroom walls and we walk around it in silence, contemplating the variations in colours and designs. When I re-ask the initial question – what does *amarillo* mean? – I no longer get the same answer. Light breaks where no light shone, and smiles light up the classroom.

“Intelijencia,” Juan Ramón Jiménez once wrote, “dame el nombre exacto de las cosas,” (Intelligence: give me the exact name for things). From here, if the moment is ripe, we can move to the poet’s search for *le mot juste*, *la palabra exacta*: the right word in the right place at the right time. This, in turn, can lead into a discussion on the current poverty of language and the need for students to develop language skills in their own mother tongue.

This search may take us to the logical positivism of A. J. Ayer and on to Bertrand Russell’s ideas on the meaning of meaning. Or, it can be followed by an introduction, however brief, to the philosophical roots of early twentieth-century Spanish literature. We may discuss the influence of Western philosophy as it flows from Plato, Aristotle, and St. Thomas Aquinas to Leibniz’s “being who is capable of action” and the *l’humain se faisant* of Bergson, from whom we arrive at the “possibilities of being” of those Existentialist philosophers (Scheler, Jaspers, Heidegger) for whom humans, rather than simply exist, do and create.

This act of creation, or, in the case of Juan Ramón Jiménez, the poet's recognition of, and attempt to recapture, the creations of the divine creator, leads back to the old Platonic idea of the participation of the Supreme Being in the structure of universal beauty: a theme which is omnipresent and ubiquitous in the creative work of Jiménez, winner of the 1956 Nobel Prize in Literature.

But the key to all of this is silence: the silence of meditation; the silence of reading to oneself; the silence of contemplation; the silence of the gap between the two extremes of metaphor where the wings of the mind flutter back and forth; the silence of the classroom's narrative gap from which – and I have living proof of this in the form of the art work created by my students, at [<http://www.stu.ca/~rgmoore/posters/posters.htm>] – creativity, in its many wondrous forms, finally comes forth.

***Roger Moore***