The Pedagogy of Silence: What Students Can Gain by Not Trying to Understand

By

Matthew Gut

A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements
For the degree of Master of Teaching
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

Copyright by Matthew Gut, April 2015
Abstract

This research project aims to give voice to the use of silence as a pedagogical tool. In a world such as ours in which information and visual stimulants can be absorbed uninterrupted, it is crucial that we allow students the time and space to explore the ocean of knowledge flowing within their own stillness. As a practice, silent pedagogy is focused around two main tenants: reserving judgement, and acknowledging our shared ignorance. As a space before opinion but after recognition, silence can help students experience the emotions of reverence and sympathy without having to dissect or explain the phenomenon before them. In this space, ignorance becomes a reality that we all share, not a liability to mask or overcome. By acknowledging ignorance, students can approach the suffering of others with compassion; in silence, students can again look at the natural world with awe and reverence. And most of all, by overcoming the discomfort of silence, students can gain a better understanding of their own emotional vicissitudes, desires and fears. Through a review of literature, this study will show how education and silence have always been intimately connected. Through interviews with two practicing educators (a classroom teacher and a Chaplain) concrete examples will be provided regarding how silence can be interpreted; how teachers can gather information on student silences; what the obstacles to silence are; educational strategies for the practicing of silence; and what students stand to gain from participating in silent practices.

Key Words: silence, awareness, compassion, emotional development, educational strategies, meditation, reflection, reverence, spirituality
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my family for supporting me through all of my education. I thank them for putting up with the moodiness and irritability that I tend to unfortunately embody while engaged in academic purists. I would like to thank my mother for driving me to the subway to get to class, and to my placements so I could teach. Every positive quality that I fleetingly possess I owe to the example set by my parents. I would like to thank my interview participants for mentoring me and providing such wonderful insights that were a joy to reflect on and write about. I would like to thank my research supervisor, Arlo Kempf, for scaffolding this journey for me. His support and directions were instrumental in coralling my many interest into a more focused research project. I would like to thank my colleagues from the Master of Teaching program, we have shared many joyous and difficult experiences over the past two years, all of which will live with me forever because of the love and commitment displayed by my brothers and sisters from cohort 132. In particular, I would like to thank Natalie Hajduk for listening to my rants, pointing out my contradictions, and living the passion and creativity that she so eloquently champions.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the Research Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>6-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the Researcher</td>
<td>7-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freire and Silence: Enlightenment and Limitations</td>
<td>11-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence in the Modern Age</td>
<td>14-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“To be everywhere is to be nowhere”</td>
<td>17-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerning Silence: Critique of Critical Pedagogy</td>
<td>20-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence and Reflection</td>
<td>24-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence and the “Other”</td>
<td>25-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching with Reverence</td>
<td>28-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>31-32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>32-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>33-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Review Procedures</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitation</td>
<td>34-35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of Silence</td>
<td>36-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles to Silence</td>
<td>42-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies for Practicing Silence</td>
<td>47-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Benefits of Silence</td>
<td>54-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications as a Researcher</td>
<td>61-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications as a Teacher</td>
<td>62-64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>64-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further research</td>
<td>65-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>67-68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>70-71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Research Study
This research study is about silence in the classroom. Through an analysis of relevant literature and research, and two interviews with practicing educators, I will show how silence can impact the experience of students and teachers. In an age of unlimited access to information and the constant streaming of digital messages, I thought it would be important to explore the potential of silence to enhance knowledge and understanding. However, the way this study conceives knowledge and understanding is not by the amount of information a person knows. For this study, knowledge and understanding represents an individual's emotional awareness and ability to compassionately observe the experiences of others.

But is there space for silence in the classroom? How will teachers assess what students know if they are silent? How can silence prepare young people for the social responsibilities of adult life? I pose these questions because I understand silence has its limits, but I also understand that something is needed to mediate the endless noise that pervades the lives of today's youth. I grew up in a time, not too long ago, when silence was still possible; a time before instant messaging, smart devices, and the endless pursuit of visual and audio pleasures. Today, information can be gathered, dissected and shared at the blink of an eye; but still, our youth claim boredom. We are driven to implement teaching methods that are more interactive, loud, and bustling; but still, our youth have trouble staying engaged. With so much unexplored space for young people to traverse, how can they be bored? Why is engagement such an obstacle?
The world is too seldom a mystery for many youth. Every fact, figure, image and sound is just a click away; there is nothing left to explore or feel, as an Ipad will explore and feel for us. Through this study, I aim to share examples from the literature, research and the experiences of practicing educators of how silent spaces can be used to inspire wonder and awe in students. By stressing the virtue of reserving judgement and speech, students can be challenged to explore the more intuitive aspects of being human; because for me, it is in our intuitive nature that emotions like reverence, fascination, and sympathy for others resides.

**Purpose of the Study**

The significance of silence in the educational setting is certainly not a new consideration. Education often requires a fine balance between listening and talking; observing and participating; sharing and absorbing. Teachers can often find themselves shifting between the need for silence and the fear of limited participation; teachers are often puzzled as to why some students are more silent than others, and whether or not the display of silence is a signal for intervention or independence. Through this study, I hope to show how educators of past and present have approached considerations of silence in the classroom. I aim to help alleviate the discomfort in silence some teachers may have, and inspire teachers to keep an awareness of silence in all areas of their teaching practice.

**Research Questions**

The main research questions for this study are structured under four themes:

- How do teachers interpret student’s silence?
- What are the obstacles to the practicing of silence in the classroom?
What are some strategies that educators can use to incorporate silence in their teaching?

What can students gain by participating in silent practices?

The complete list of research questions that were used in my interviews with two practicing educators can be found in Appendix A.

**Background of the Researcher**

As I trace the history that has led me to this point in my life, I am struck by the booming presence of silence that encompasses my narrative. My first love was basketball. I still remember tightening the bolts with my father in the garage on the new net and poll I bought with the money I received for my tenth birthday. From then on I practiced, I never played, I practiced: daily, for hours, in all seasons. I would turn away people my age who came to play, “Sorry, but I need to practice.” So I dribbled and shot, dribbled and shot, in silence. To an extent, my solitary work effort paid off. I played competitive basketball in high school and for the city of Mississauga. I had some great games, many forgettable ones, and the rest somewhere in between. But I’m left wondering, did my silent practice help me reach my potential on the court, or did it prevent me from seeking out better players to test and enhance my skills?

As I entered university, hoop dreams long deflated, I struggled to find my stride. The classes seemed pointless. The pain of research, study and writing went unmediated by any conception of a future career. One day, looking for any excuse not to go to class, I came across the campus athletic room. In an unconscious substitution of basketballs for metal weights, I took to strength training with the same silent intensity. Results came quickly, the amount I could push and pull rose steadily, and the school work, though still pointless, was completed with a little less pain. But alas, pain still found me: in my
muscles, in my joints, in my knees, in my hips. I pushed my body to its limits until finally it pushed back. I may have thought I found my silent refuge but the injuries were far from noiseless. Again I question, did I collapse into myself too much? Did I risk permanent damage for the sake of the stillness I was seeking?

My procrastination and resistance forced me into a fifth year of undergraduate studies. However, something changed within me early in the first semester. One evening, in silence, I was reading the novel Night by Elie Wiesel for a course on the Sociology of Genocide. The novel is part fiction, part autobiography as it depicts the confusion and horror of a young Jewish boy navigating the chaos of Eastern Europe in the 1940’s, a reality which was also lived by the author. Up to this point, I had studied the Holocaust many times, I knew about the atrocities but I had never felt them until this moment. In one scene, the young narrator gives voice to his vision as he watches another young boy beat his own father to death in a scramble for a piece of bread off the floor of a railway car. I stopped reading, I saw myself in the story, I struck my father with the same desperation, I felt shame, anger, and a compassion for those who had, and still have to, live such experiences.

My approach to academics changed after that. I no longer saw the readings and assignments as pointless but instead as my opportunity to learn about injustices past and present. My future became a little more clear: to work to alleviate those injustices. With a direction in mind, my enjoyment and success in academics grew substantially. I read more than I had to, I raced through assigned readings so I could get to others that touched my curiosity. It took five years, but I finally started to see the benefits of higher education.
After graduation, with my thirst for the knowledge of injustices still potent, I began my own course of study. I read in silence for six to ten hours a day; newspapers, fiction, non-fiction, classics and radicals; I jumped from Al Jazeera to the New York Times, from Malcolm X to Soren Kierkegaard, from Jane Austin to Eldridge Clever, from Franz Fanon to Franz Kafka, from Chinua Achebe to Ivan Turgenev. The list could continue, I had only one discriminating factor and that I found in Edward Said’s (1994) description of the intellectual as someone who “speaks truth to power.” For me, speaking truth to power meant not confining ones beliefs or perspective to institutional, national, religious, or political boundaries, and was manifested in writers who condemned the injustices performed by people like them as much as, and in some cases even more so, the injustices performed by others.

With all the reading, and silence, I started to feel a disconnect to the world around me. After quitting a fairly lucrative job as a restaurant server, I started to volunteer full time at various non-profits across the GTA: a soup kitchen, a shelter for homeless youth, a distress call centre, an activist group for Palestinian Human Rights, and a homework club run by the Canadian Centre for victims of Torture. I also traveled to South Africa as part of an international volunteer program. These social endeavours were a change from my habits of solitary pursuit but only on the surface. Despite my honest eagerness to help, words escaped me when positioned in front of those who lived the injustices I only read about. What could I say to a marginalized youth who has never experienced the safety of a permanent home? How could I soothe a distressed single mother with quotes from Charles Dickens? Could I truly understand the pain of Palestinian landlessness by reading news articles? I quickly realized that I could not. So I fell back on what was
familiar, I became silent; I listened to the stories around me, I watched how people interact, I watched and listened to those who knew what to say, when to say it and how to say it, and I was surprised to find that they were silent much of the time as well.

After a time, I re-entered formal academics to achieve a Master Degree in African History. Though the experience was fulfilling intellectually, I did not feel any more equipped to face the lived realities of suffering and oppression.

It was with these experiences that I entered the Master of Teaching program at OISE. To me, teaching seemed to be the most effective way I could transform my drive towards intellectual inquiry, and action in reality, into a career.

Overview

Chapter 1 includes the introduction and purpose of the study, the primary research questions, as well as how my experiences have lead me to an interest in this topic. Chapter 2 contains a review of literature that I believe reflects crucial aspects of silent pedagogy. Chapter 3 provides the methodology, procedure and limitations of this study, as well as information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. Chapter 4 includes an analysis of the two interviews with practicing educators, along with an explanation regarding how the data provided by the participants corresponds, contradicts or enhances the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Finally, Chapter 5 includes what I gained from this study as both a teacher and a researcher, recommendations for the field of education based on the findings of this study, and suggestions for further research or study.
Freire and Silence: Enlightenment and Limitations

With the publication of Pedagogy of the Oppressed in 1968, Paulo Freire made one of the greatest contributions to educational philosophy of the twentieth century. For Freire (2000), silence was a tool used by society’s dominant group to negate and pacify the humanity of subordinate groups. The cornerstone of Freire’s philosophy was his denunciation of the banking model of education, in which, the student is perceived as an empty vessel, open for the teacher to make deposits of knowledge. This act of depositing knowledge is rooted in the duality of dominance and subordination: the dominant subject (the teacher) implants knowledge that he or she alone possess into the minds of the pliable objects (the students). The teacher and the students are positioned as opposites, as the learned and the unlearned; the classroom represents, in microcosm, the oppressive realities of the macrocosm, society, where those with political and economic power are the keepers of truth, while the “others” are expected to accept that truth as universal and unchangeable (Freire, 2000, 72-4).

In its efforts to protect its reality and promote its ideology, the dominant group values and propagates the silence of subordinate groups. What Freire perceived in education, and then passionately denounced, was the homogenization of narration (Freire, 2000, 70).

The oppressor-oppressed duality that sprouted from Freire’s educational philosophy is best understood by looking at the soil that nourished it. After a military coup in 1964, Freire was arrested and was exiled from his home country of Brazil until
his return in 1979. The decades leading up to Freire’s exile were marred by political
instability, military coups and counter-coups, and the militarily supported suppression of
dissident voices (Freire, 1998). As an educator who strove not only to teach the illiterate
poor how to read and write but also to raise their consciousness to include an awareness
of their oppression, Freire was bound to feel the wrath of the system he sought to upset.
The years of exile weighed heavily in Freire’s writing right until his death in 1997
(Freire, 1998). He felt, in a very direct way, the pain of imposed silence. Forced from
his home, Freire was still able to write and educate around the globe but he was
prevented from reaching out and dialoguing with the people who inspired his
revolutionary outlook. Freire’s denunciation of the “theme of silence” was rooted, in
part, in this personal experience of exile, in addition to the silencing of his fellow
Brazilians, whom he wished to liberate from the shackles of the oppressor’s ideology and
education (Freire, 2000, 106).

To combat the dominant group’s preferred “culture of silence,” and the
subsequent banking model of education, Freire (2000) prescribed an education grounded
in the mutual exploration of dialogue, which he termed “problem poising education.” (p
79-81). In problem-poising education, the gulf between student and teacher is filled, the
role of the student is transformed from docile listener to co-investigator; and the teacher,
for her part, is no longer the sole possessor and creator of knowledge, but a partner with
the student in the pursuit of knowledge (Freire, 2000, 81).

Freire believed that partners in exploration must bridge the distance between them
with dialogue; for dialogue was how human beings came to realize their significance
Within the dialogical encounter, the subjects (teachers/students) approach the object of reflection (recognizable phenomena that make up their reality) with the intent of naming and demystifying the elements that influence their experience and understanding of the world (Freire, 2000).

Again, to understand the primacy of dialogue in Freire’s educational philosophy, one must look at the historical and social context of his time. Though the influence of Freire’s work has affected all stages of education, most of his philosophy emerged through his work in adult education with a rural class that was poor, illiterate, isolated, and uninformed about the systems of power that limited their experience of life (Freire, 1973). These disenfranchised people were intentionally kept in silence by the elite so as not to illicit the revolutionary demands of a liberated consciousness. Freire thus viewed silence as the enemy - as the veil that shrouded human beings from reality and thus self-realization. This campaign of silence by the dominant group was achievable because the methods of information distribution at the time were limited. Absent most of the information outlets of the modern age, the powerful minority of Freire’s time was able to monopolize and homogenize facts and truths about reality because they controlled what little printed information that was available. Today, with the sophistication and reach of media outlets, the threat is no longer of one elite structure homogenizing facts, but numerous competing elite structures vying for support and followers through an overwhelming crusade of information and messages.

While great gains have been made towards the freedom of human beings through Freire’s critical pedagogy, the modern age has presented educators with entirely different
obstacles to humanization. After participating in a Master of Teaching program at a leading institution in the field, I can attest that the banking model of education is far from the currently proscribed model of education. Prospective teachers today are being challenged to dialogue with their students, to allow space for student-directed learning, and to promote collaboration and critical thinking over dictation and regurgitation. However, if it can be conceded that the aim of liberatory education, as outlined by Freire, remains the same—that of demystifying reality in order to transcend it—then it must also be acknowledged that new forces of mystification have emerged.

**Silence in the Modern Age**

If the culture that Freire desired to transcend was marked by silence, then ours is marked by information. Today, students and teachers are inundated with a constant stream of interactive information: in the classroom, at home, from the morning glow of the sun, to the evening radiance of the iPad before sleep. Whatever the medium (text messages, Youtube videos, video games, trending topics, curriculum requirements, etc.) messages are being consumed in a continuous flow.

However, to compare one generation's grip on reality to that of an earlier generation is a limited endeavour. What is significant is the current reality and how educators need to approach it in order to move closer to the ultimate goal of enlightenment and inclusivity. One of the most, if not the most, salient aspects of the current reality is the ubiquity of technology. Students of any age need to be trained on how to operate the latest technology, and shown how to act responsibly and securely within the digital universe.
The website dailytech.com reported in a 2013 study that 95 percent of teens between the ages of 12-17 use the internet, while 81 percent of teens use social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. The Pew Research Center in the United States reported in 2013 that 78 percent of teenagers have a cell phone, and almost half of them own smartphones (2013). The Pew report also states that 23 percent of teenagers have a tablet, which is comparable to the percentage of adults who own one (2013).

In a policy statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the average eight to ten year old spends nearly 8 hours a day engaged in a variety of different media, while the number of hours increases to almost 11 hours a day for older children (2013, p. 958). The study also states that despite the amount of time young people spend with digital media, parents are often unaware of their children’s habits (p. 959).

Globally, accessibility to technology and digital media has increased due to the rapid growth and production of smartphones and tablets (Ernest et. al., 2014, 183). While the type of intense access referred to in the present paper is still limited to the minority of young people who are surrounded by enough material stability to allow for it, as cheaper technology becomes available more children globally are being raised in the digital universe.

In defining the aims of Medium Literacy, the Ontario Language Arts Curriculum states:

Students’ repertoire of communication skills should include the ability to critically interpret the messages they receive through the various media and to use these media to communicate their own ideas effectively as well. Skills related to high-
Tech media such as the Internet, film, and television are particularly important because of the power and pervasive influence these media wield in our lives and in society. Becoming conversant with these and other media can greatly expand the range of information sources available to students, their expressive and communicative capabilities, and their career opportunities (The Ontario Curriculum: Grades 1-8, Language Arts, 2006).

A curriculum that does not address the above would surely limit a student’s ability to adapt to technological trends and then utilize these trends for material gain. However, exclusively considering technology through the lens of future careers and material stability dangerously undermines the influence technology has on the whole person - the intellect, the emotions, and the spirit. For instance, if the whole child approach to education is to be implemented, it is not enough to simply cite the “power and pervasive influence” of media but the effect this power and pervasiveness has on the brain must also be considered. Along with how best to teach technology and utilize it in the classroom, whole child educators would serve their students well if they also explored the hidden consequences of technologies ubiquity: How does the rapid fire nature of information presentation through technology affect the brain? What functions of the brain are being ignored or under used as we become more engrossed in technology’s reach? Is more and faster necessarily better when it comes to the receiving and processing of information? And how does technology influence a human being’s intuitive potential and connection to the natural world? Fortunately, one does not need to search far and wide to begin exploring such questions.
The above words were proclaimed by the Roman philosopher Seneca over two thousand years ago. In his Pulitzer Prize nominated book, The Shallows: What the Internet is doing to our Brains, Nicholas Carr (2010) cites Seneca’s words to supplement the findings of cognitive neuroscientists that the multitasking inherent in Internet usage diminishes our ability to think creatively and deeply (p. 140-1). Carr’s motivation for writing his book was the change he experienced within himself concerning his ability to think creatively and deeply. Musing on how his approach to reading lengthy books or articles has changed, Carr (2010) states, “...my concentration starts to drift after a page or two. I get fidgety, lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do...The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle” (p. 5-6). Throughout his book, referring to numerous scientific studies and personal testimonies, Carr (2010) makes the case that Net usage is changing the way our brains function.

Carr (2010) cautions against only consider the content that comes through a technological medium, and challenges us to also consider how the medium is affecting what is going on inside our heads (p. 3). He uses the term “intellectual ethic” to refer to the “message that a medium or other tool transmits into the minds and culture of its users” (Carr, 2010, p. 46). As an example, Carr (2010) explains how the introduction of time-keeping technology spawned the intellectual ethic of tighter scheduling and greater regimentation of time allotted for work, leisure and prayer (p. 42). For Carr (2010), technologies are not neutral, once they get dispersed into a population they change the way that population functions and thus the way the individual brain functions. The issue
is not whether or not the changes in the brain caused by a technology are good or bad, the issue is control and how much control we desire to have over the functioning, depth and flexibility of our brains.

To better understand the intellectual ethic of today’s technology, one can simply scroll through the most popular mediums and assess how messages are presented. For example, the popular video watching and sharing website Youtube is distinguished by the connectivity and quantity of the videos it recommends the viewer to watch. Up to twenty related videos can appear directly beside the one the viewer is currently watching. Add in the advertisements and endless parade of viewer comments and what results is a cacophony of information and messages to be absorbed, processed, stored or discarded. This deluge of information is also the cornerstone of popular sites like Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and Wikipedia.

To open a chapter aptly titled “The Juggler’s Brain,” Carr (2010) states, Dozens of studies by psychologists, neurobiologists, educators, and Web designers point to the same conclusion: when we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning. It’s possible to think deeply while surfing the Net, just as it’s possible to think shallowly while reading a book, but that’s not the type of thinking the technology encourages and rewards (p. 116). It takes a disciplined mind to resist the temptation of each link and app, and for young people today who only know of the world as a place filled with links and apps, such discipline is difficult to garner. As educators, it is our duty to mediate the influences of the Net, to model and reward behaviour that is counter to the “cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning” that pervades digital media.
In simple terms, Carr (2010) explains that with internet usage the neurons in the prefrontal cortex of the brain fire at an intense rate; thus, brain activity that requires quick thinking and rapid compartmentalizing can be strengthened through online exploration. However, the subtler aspects of the brain, those that involve concentration, calmness, empathy and the contemplation of outward or inward phenomenon, are suppressed the more online thinking becomes one’s dominant mode of thinking (p. 122-3).

Furthermore, Carr (2010) also describes how the influence the internet has on the brain does not cease when the user puts down the device.

The influx of competing messages that we receive whenever we go online not only overloads our working memory; it makes it much harder for our frontal lobes to concentrate on any one thing... thanks once again to the plasticity of our neural pathways, the more we use the Web, the more we train our brain to be distracted - to process information very quickly and very efficiently but without sustained attention (p. 194). Distracted thinking and difficulty concentrating will not only make the school experience harder for students but it will also hinder their ability to cope with stress, empathize with others, consider the long term effects of their actions, and explore the greatest and most sophisticated piece of technology, themselves.

By becoming aware of the findings presented by Carr and other researchers and scientists, educators can better prepare their curriculum and lessons to include activities and Big Ideas that present an alternative to the constant stream of messages and information that make up the digital experience.
In his critique of critical pedagogy, Kevin Kumashiro (2000) states that knowledge about oppression is not the sole goal of critical pedagogy and anti-oppressive education (p. 37). Instead, Kumashiro (2000) argues that critical education should include both knowledge of oppression and “thinking skills that students can use to formulate effective plans of action” (p. 37). While Kumashiro does not explicitly list the type of thinking skills he envisions, it is safe to assume they would, at least in part, correspond to the concentrated empathy and deep thinking that Carr (2010) believes is being underused the more we prioritize digital learning over methods of deliberate, self-reflecting contemplation. As a first step to realizing an alternative to the haphazard assault of information presented by digital communication, students need to be reintroduced to, and once again made comfortable with, silence.

Children and young adults who have not experienced a world without today’s technology often view silence as something to be avoided (Trahan, 2013). In addition, from the perspective of teachers, silence from a student can indicate rebellion, internal reflection, delayed intellectual development, emotional instability, or a failure on their part to effectively vocalize the demands of the classroom (Trahan, 2013). In an analysis of teacher recommendation letters for university acceptance, Jaworski and Sachdev (1998) found that articulateness and eagerness to talk were more often than not cited as desirable qualities, whereas reluctance in speech and quietness were “played down” or referred to as areas in need of improvement (p. 86-88).
For Ollin (2008) and Forrest (2013) it is the mysterious, internal nature of silence that makes it difficult, and all the more important, for teachers to interpret. In a survey of teachers’ perspectives and readings of silence, Ollin (2008) found that the participants tended to explain the reasons for silence in a myriad of ways: as listening, cognitive process, emotional process, or emotional withdrawal (p. 272). In the same study, some participants even listed the teacher’s own voice as a limit to his or her capacity to read non-verbal cues, referring to the need for teachers to be silent sometimes in order to absorb and reflect on what the students are experiencing (Ollin, 2008).

For Forrest (2013), the paradox of silence in education is that teachers often vacillate between valuing quiet and discounting it, between lamenting that students need to “listen” and concern when no one is responding (p. 610). Forrest (2013) problematizes the perception that silence automatically means listening as silence could indicate the listening of an interior monologue, or the presence of any number of hidden pathologies that limit attention and vocalization. (P. 611). All in all, what the research points to is that on an individual level teachers need to be aware and open to a variety of interpretations of student silence; and they must be conscious, as in all areas of teaching, of the myriad of life histories and stages of development that students possess.

Exploring the greater structural approach to silence, Hao (2011) and others (Zembylas and Michaelides, 2004; Li Li, 2002; Jaworski and Sachdev, 1998; Belanoff, 2001) consider the domination of verbalization over silence in Western educational settings. Ollin (2008) insists that when researchers consider the practices and attitudes of silence in the classroom it is helpful to understand the distinction between vocalization
and verbalization. Vocalization entails language rendered into speech, whereas verbalization includes vocalization in addition to the verbalizing activities of writing or typing into a technological device (Ollin, 2008). When considered through this lens, it becomes evident that the majority of school tasks are directed towards the practice and display of student verbalization. With the ubiquity of social media and instant messaging through technology there emerges a predominance of verbalization over silence in the lives of students, both in and out of the classroom.

For Zembylas and Michaelides (2004), the constant presence and expectation of verbalization in the educative and personal lives of students makes the need for teachers to consider the transformative, self-reflective potential of silence all the more urgent. The two writers make a clear distinction between the art of being silent and the act of silencing someone. Through the work of critical theorists such as Freire and others (Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1999, 2007) the negative power relations that emerge when voices get silenced has been described and illuminated. However, Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) also critique critical pedagogy by cautioning against perceiving silence in the classroom exclusively through the lens of hierarchal power relations.

Echoing Zembylas and Michaelides (2004), Hao (2011) states that by bestowing supremacy to the word and the individuals capacity to articulate reality, we marginalize those who do not, or choose to not, articulate well. Hao (2011) does not agree with the critical pedagogues when they separate silence and agency as opposite experiences. If properly initiated and compassionately monitored, silence can be a gateway to lasting, expanding agency (Hao, 2011). By limiting agency in a classroom to a student’s
willingness to voice his or her lived experiences, critical pedagogy privileges a distinctly Western way of thinking and understanding of the Self (Hao, 2011).

Referring to Li (2002), Hao (2011) attributes the perception of silence as holding limited pedagogical potential to the Western educator’s conceptualization of learning as a linear process that starts with speech, is mediated by a hypothesis, and closes with the evaluation of verbalized conclusions. Granted, theoretical and practical advancements have begun to emerge in teacher education programs to counter this narrative. From my own experience as a Master of Teaching student, I can attest to the progress that has and is being made. As prospective teachers, we are being challenged to widen our perspective regarding how we can assess our students; we are constantly reminded of the Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1993) that students possess and how it is our responsibility to adapt to the students’ needs through awareness and sensitivity; and the meditative techniques of Mindfulness (Schoeberlein, 2009) are being openly discussed and explored as a valuable tool to have in our future classrooms.

Furthermore, Hao (2011) and Li (2002) acknowledge that professional education programs have recently made great efforts to curtail the sage-on-the-stage style of teaching in which teacher verbalization is dominant, and instead advocate for more student directed and collaborative inquiry. It has also been well documented by research, and thus infused into teacher education programs, that slowing down speech and increasing the silence in between questions and responses can greatly enhance the acquisition of knowledge in the classroom (Jawarski and Sachdev, 1998). These can be
viewed as positive developments for those who wish to see silence reintroduced as a pedagogical tool.

As Hao (2011) states, “One way to reframe critical pedagogy is to consider silence as an active performance of human subjectivity, agency, and voice in other cultures.” (p. 276). This show of “agency” or “voice” through silence can be a sign of student respect for an elder/teacher, the stillness of internal reflection, an aversion to speaking before the thoughts of others are considered, or just a general desire to listen. Hao (2011) goes on to say that in many cultures student silence does not necessarily equate with the banking model of education, and that the critical pedagogues who approach silence as such need to evaluate how their views privilege the Western conception of learning and thought over others. For example, in the Hindu tradition, the Satsang represents a pedagogical device in which a Self-realized guru or teacher expands upon the realities of existence and methods to achieve a deeper understanding of Self, while their students listen in contemplative silence for as much as three to four hours at a time.

Silence and Reflection

Through etymological dissection, Pat Belanoff (2001) connects the words reflection, mediation and contemplation to one descriptive origin of single pointed, sustained attention, or prayer. Today, however, reflection has come to represent the secularized form of mediation/contemplation (Belanoff, 2001). Inclusively, reflection, mediation, and contemplation can be defined as the action of paying attention to inner speech (Belanoff, 2001, p.409). Belanoff (2001) refers to Birkerts (1994) notion of “deep
time” – a momentary or longer period of withdrawal from the linear sequence of time to examine ourselves, others, or existence itself – as the prerequisite for reflective thought (Belenoff, 2001, p.410-11). Belenoff calls for teachers to create an atmosphere in their classroom where “deep time” can resonate as a recurring and normal community endeavor. And as the Western world has become more secularized, and the technological predominance of verbalization has become more ingrained, the school may be one of the last havens in which “deep time” can be experienced.

**Silence and the “Other”**

Much has been said in educational literature about the importance of teaching about the Other (Kumashiro, 2003). With the rapid pace of globalization, and the increasing communication of diverse perspectives in both the classroom and the larger society, students need to be taught the critical skills necessary to read the world with empathy and respect for experiences of life other than their own. Kumashiro (2003) cites two forms of oppressive knowledge that work to limit our understanding of the Other: what society defines as normal; and the individual stereotypes and myths that we use to rational the experience of Others (p. 39-40). The two types of oppressive knowledge often operate implicitly in our judgments, reducing the Other so they can fit into our limited range of definitions and experiences. When the limits of our understanding are left free to direct our conclusions about the Other, the oppressive realities of society get further ingrained and normalized. To combat these harmful forms of knowledge, Kumashiro (2003) recommends that educators expand the curriculum to include specific units on the Other, and to integrate topics about the Other throughout the curriculum (p.
Through this approach, students can begin to expand their knowledge of the Other and thus develop appreciation for the struggles and triumphs of those they would not typically identify with. Though well intended, this approach is not without its limitations. Kumashiro (2003) cautions that when teaching about the Other teachers must remain cognizant of the potential to “dominant” the narrative of the Other’s experience (p. 42). The risk of dominating the narrative of the Other rises when individuals believe complete knowledge of the unknown to be achievable. Through verbalization, the Other’s experience can be intellectually realized, based on written accounts or oral testimony but the emotions and feelings of the Other remain elusive to those who have not experienced them directly. This constant unknowability extends to all situations and experiences that we have not felt directly; it is unknowability that unites those that are seen as Others in a given society with those that experience unwarranted privilege. Silent pedagogy aims to open up a space in which our shared unknowability can be felt and lived; it aims to bridge the gap between intellectual comprehension and emotional ignorance.

Silent pedagogy acknowledges that many things in this world, and beyond, are unspeakable. Foremost in the realm of the unspeakable is the experience of the Other’s suffering. Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) refer to how silence can be used when teaching about the atrocities of the Holocaust when they state,

The suffering at Auschwitz, for example might be ‘wronged’ by any effort to reduce its meaning to narrative. An educational philosophy of silence in this case becomes a call to innovation and a call to respect that certain experiences (of the Other) can be sensed, but cannot be expressed (p. 207).
In an educative atmosphere in which the deep time referred to above is practiced, students can be given the opportunity to extend their understanding of the Other beyond intellectual reasoning. Instead of just rationalizing what it must have been like to suffer in Auschwitz through language, students can be asked to silently meditate on how such oppression might feel. Undoubtedly, such an experience cannot be felt second hand, but it is in this unknowability and ignorance that Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) see the value in silent educational practices:

A philosophy of silence as a philosophy of otherness is also relevant to ‘teaching with ignorance,’ because it is through silence and ignorance (unknowability) that one stops laying claim to another’s experience and begins to be receptive to the Other. This becomes possible when we abandon acquiring “knowledge” as the ultimate goal of education. Valuing silence in the classroom means admitting our ignorance about the Other and fulfilling our ethical responsibility to the Other. Embracing silence, ignorance, and unknowability offers hope as we attempt to become more compassionate (p.207-208).

Of course, silence alone cannot further one’s knowledge of an event one has no awareness of occurring. It is still the teacher’s responsibility to be mindful of where students are at, and to present material conducive to greater intellectual understanding. However, as expressed by Kumashiro (2003) and Zembylas and Michaelides (2004), there are inherent limitations in trying to teach about the Others experience. By embracing silencing, and challenging our students to do the same, we embrace our ignorance and the Other’s unknowability.

Whether we are asking students to consider God, historical or current tragedies of human suffering, or the driving forces within themselves, we must rejoice in our shared
ignorance. Ignorance is not typically a quality teachers or students wish to identify with, but in reality it is our primary connection to the Other. When we strive to “know” the experiences of another through language we unknowingly “bend” (Belanoff, 2001) their true images to fit the limits of our experience and acquired knowledge. This bending of the Other is an important component of education that helps students gain experience and develop the habits of critical thinking. But there are limits to critical thinking. Some things in this world are simply inexpressible; some things cannot be reduced to words or concepts. While the inexpressible may be difficult to evaluate or quantify, it does not mean that students and teachers cannot greatly benefit from the humility and wonder that arises when the inexpressible is contemplated in silence, without conclusions, without rationalization, but with great reverence.

**Teaching with Reverence**

Rud and Garrison (2012) define reverence as “the comprehension of human limitation, imperfection, and our appropriate place in a community with others arising from feelings of awe and emotions of respect, shame, and humility...” (p. 3). The authors go on to cite a few examples of topics that can inspire moments of reverential thinking in the classroom:

...the preciousness and frailty of life, justice, meaning and truth, ideas, ideals, love, death, nature, the creation, creativity, possibility, and human potential. Examples of “someone” include various notions of a Supreme Being, a hero or heroine, or an ordinary human whose capacity for noble acts exceeds the ordinary, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., or Mother Teresa (Rud and Garrison, 2012, p. 3). It would be difficult, even for a very savvy and intellectually sound teacher, to tie any of the above topics into neatly woven packages to be digested and repeated by students.
However, in a classroom that is familiar with the deliberate, contemplative practice of silence, students can begin to see the beauty of the world’s mysteries with awe and attention, absent of the traditional educational obligation to dissect the world for utilitarian purposes.

Dale (2012) relates the general acceptance of the “busyness” and “noisiness” of modern life to the lack of opportunities for reverential thinking in the modern school. Teachers and students view school as places for “getting”: getting information, getting grades, getting a degree, getting a job. Dale (2012) sees this philosophy of “getting,” “getting through,” and just “getting done” to be present in all levels of education. To mediate such a utilitarian perspective of education, teachers need to allow space for silent contemplation, they need to create moments free from the expectation of getting, but instead immersed in the reverence for life (Dale, 2012). As an example of reverential teaching and how it can help breech the distance of Otherness in the classroom, Dale (2012) expands on the short story “The Anointed” by Kathleen Hill, a required text for his course in teacher education and educational leadership. The narrator of the story, a twelve year old girl, explains her resistance and confusion regarding her music teacher, Miss Hughes, practice of playing pieces of classical music for extended periods while the students are expected to listen in complete stillness. Miss Hughes’ insistence on musical reverence transforms into reverence for the suffering of the Other when one of the student’s father passes away. Indifferent towards her schoolmates suffering outside of class, the narrator feels a disconnect within when Miss Hughes stands in front of the bereaved student for the duration of a piece, and in silence afterwards. Ending her silence, Miss Hughes proclaims to the class:
We cannot see into the mysteries of another person’s life... We have no way of
knowing what deaths a soul has sustained before the final one . . . [Yet] I tell you
this so you may not forget it. We may honor many things in life. But for someone
else’s sorrow we must reserve our deepest bow (Hill, 1999, 89, as cited by Dale,
2012, 59).

What a classroom can learn and feel through silence is immeasurable. By resisting the
urge to figure out and dissect, by pausing to appreciate what is, students and teachers can
enhance their awareness and share their sameness before the mystery of creation.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This qualitative research project incorporates a review of relevant literature, and two interviews with educators, to explore teacher interpretations of silence and the use of silent practices in the educational setting. This chapter outlines what occurred at each stage in the research and the limitations of the study.

Procedure

Literature Review

Prior to the primary data collection, a literature review was conducted to identify themes and to help shape my interview questions. The literature review supplemented the data collection by providing a theoretical framework in which the participants responses could be situated in. Sources used during the literature review process included academic journal articles, books and research polls.

Participants

The participants were selected based on my experience working with them as an independent volunteer or teacher candidate. Based on my observations of the participants educational practices, I assumed that they would be able to contribute much insight regarding silent pedagogy.

Cat

Cat is currently a grade 8 teacher at a Catholic Elementary school in Mississauga, Ontario. She has over ten years of experience as a classroom teacher. All of Cat’s teaching experience has been at the junior/intermediate level, in both full and split grade classrooms. She has additional qualification in religious education, media studies and
integrated arts. I had the opportunity to volunteer in Cat’s grade 4/5 classroom two years ago. She displayed great classroom management and organizational skills, and her students showed great respect and a willingness to approach her for emotional guidance.

Mike

Mike is currently a Chaplain at high school in Mississauga, Ontario. He has three years experience as a grade 6 teacher, five years experience as a high school teacher in english and religious studies, and eight years experience as a Chaplin. I worked intimately with Mike for one month as part of my studies in teacher education. During that time Mike and I lead and participated in day retreats at food banks and schools for adults with special needs, an overnight retreat with grade 11 and 12 students, and provided emotional and spiritual guidance for students on a daily bases. The guidance that Mike provided was largely of a silent nature. In my observations of how he interacted with students, I was struck by Mike’s commitment to non-judgmental listening. Mike did not give specific advice to the students, unless when asked directly. In informal conversations with Mike, I learned that he believes that many students are capable of uncovering the answers to their own problems through open and honest reflection.

Data Collection

After reviewing the relevant literature, I composed twelve research questions. Mike and Cat were asked the same questions, which can be found in Appendix A. Cat requested that I send her the questions through e-mail so she could type out her answers. Not conducting a face-to-face interview with Cat was significant for two reasons: I was not able to ask her any follow up questions within the framework of my general research questions; and the answers she was able to provide were much more detailed as she had
the opportunity to reflect on each question in depth. These two factors worked together to reduce the significance because Cat’s response were so thoughtful and insightful that there was not much need for clarifying questions on my part.

Through a face-to-face, semi-structured interview I asked Mike the same questions as I did Cat. I provided Mike with the questions before the interview. I encouraged Mike to take all the time he needed to answer each question. We were interrupted twice by students seeking to talk with Mike, each time I paused the recording device until the student and Mike were finished, refreshed Mike’s memory as to where we left off, and then proceeded with the interview.

Data Analysis

As stated above, Cat provided me her answers through e-mail correspondence, thus I did not have to transcribe her responses. After receiving her responses, I read through them several times looking for information and personal experiences that aligned with or contradicted the literature. I then sought to organize Cat’s responses into various themes. Initially, I organized Cat’s responses using over a dozen themes. However, after conducting, transcribing and analyzing my interview with Mike I was able to narrow down my themes to the following: teacher interpretation of silence, obstacles to the practice of silence, strategies for practicing silence, and the benefits of silence. After analyzing the data provided by Mike, and identifying the commonalities with Cat’s responses, I was better able to organize the data around general themes as opposed to many specific ones. For instances, the data included in the theme “benefits of silence” was originally divided by a theme for each benefit (increased self-esteem, emotional regulation, spiritual exploration, and knowledge of Self). By condensing these codes into
one theme the presentation of the data was much more connected, and I was better able to show how the benefits interacted with each other and contributed to the general well being of students.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

Prior to the interview, the research participants were asked to sign letters of informed consent (See Appendix B for consent form). Before the research questions were provided to the participants, they were informed of the purpose of the study and the confidentiality in which their responses would be treated. Additionally, each participant was made aware that they could review or revise their answers or change their mind about the use of their data at any point in the research process. To keep the anonymity of the participants, the use of pseudonyms were used in place of their real names.

**Limitations**

The nature of this research project yielded some limitations. The sample size of two participants is much too small to draw general conclusions about the data gathered. The data collected is a reflection of the views, beliefs, and experiences of the participants and is not an account of the views, beliefs, and experiences of teachers broadly conceived. However, this limitation did not impact the aim of the study, which was to give me the opportunity to explore an area of interest in education through a combination of past research and interviews with practicing educators.

Also, by selecting participants that I personally knew valued the pedagogical potential of silence, a bias was created before the interviews were even conducted. While it would have been interesting and informative to have analyzed the perspective of teachers who have not thoroughly considered the value of silence in the classroom, the
purpose of this study required that I seek out participants that could assist me in spreading the awareness of silent pedagogy.
Chapter 3: Findings

Introduction

This section illustrates the overall findings from the data gathered in two semi-structured interviews (one through e-mail correspondence and one through a face-to-face interview). The two participants are referred to by the pseudonyms Cat and Mike. Responses from the participants are categorized into four major themes: teacher interpretation of silence, obstacles to the practice of silence, strategies for practicing silence, and the benefits of silence. The two participants occupy different vocations within education (Cat is a grade 8 teacher, and Mike is a Chaplin in a high school), thus their responses according to the four themes are addressed in separate sections. Finally, there is a brief description of each theme prior to the responses being considered.

Interpretation of Silence

As the theme indicates, this section outlines the participants’ responses that address their interpretations of silence. This section is informed by the works of Ollin (2008), Trahan (2013), Forrest (2013) and Jaworski and Sachdev (1998) who wrote about the myriad of interpretations teachers can have concerning student silences, how teachers can gather information on student silences, and the overall approach teachers have when it comes to silence in the classroom.

Cat

When asked how much variation she has observed between students as far as degrees of being quite or reserved, Cat was very precise and explicit in her response:

Every group of students is different. Some years, I have had classes where 60-75% of the students are outgoing and enjoy participating both in small group
and whole class discussions. In other years, the make-up of the class is the opposite, with a larger percentage of quiet, reserved or shy students.

Not surprisingly, Cat’s response is in tune with the literature, specifically Ollin (2008) and Trahan (2013), which speaks to the diversity of personalities and learners in all educational settings. Where Cat’s responses diverge from the literature is in the methods she uses to gather information on student individuality.

...I like to do our multiple intelligences survey (now part of the myBlueprint online high school planner) at the beginning of the school year. Both the students and I gain a lot of insight into our “class intelligences” and our own individual intelligences. When the majority of the students score high in interpersonal intelligence, it is usually an indicator for me as a teacher that this group could benefit from more cooperative learning and oral language activities such as class discussions, debates, and collaborative inquiry groups. When there are greater numbers who score high in intrapersonal intelligence, I keep in mind, when planning, that small group activities and opportunities for individual reflection time before coming to the small group or whole group, may be more successful with these types of learners.

Cat’s use of multiple intelligence surveys to better understand student silence was not addressed in the literature. She uses the information when preparing her lessons, allowing more room for group discussions and oral activities when more students score high in interpersonal intelligence, and accounting for intrapersonal intelligences by organizing smaller groups and allowing for more individual reflection time. Multiple intelligence surveys can be a great tool for gaining perspective on students’ comfort with silence. In addition, Cat uses the tool in a purposeful way by applying her knowledge in the planning of lessons. However, by planning more vocal activities for interpersonal students, and more silent activities for intrapersonal students, it must be questioned
whether or not Cat is providing enough opportunities for students to participate in activities that challenge them to explore intelligences they are uncomfortable with, and thus develop the versatility of their intelligence.

When asked to expand on some of the underlying reasons for student silence, Cat echoes the work of Forrest (2013) who cited the presence of any number of hidden pathologies that could account for student silence:

There are many possible reasons for student silence and the challenge for me as a teacher, especially in intermediate, is to observe and recognize whether student silence is simply a reflection of an intrapersonal intelligence or shy personality or if it is a possible indicator of something more, such as low self-esteem/self-confidence being a victim of bullying, mental illness, or of a difficult home life or personal loss from a death or divorce in the family.

This response indicates that Cat is keenly aware of the myriad of influences that could contribute to student silence. The statement also shows that while she values multiple intelligence testing as a tool, she also recognizes its limitations in shedding light on the more emotional aspects of a student experience, such as those that involve self-esteem issues, bullying, mental illness, or a difficult home life.

In another divergence from the literature, Cat explains that she often finds differences between grade levels as well:

In the primary and junior grades, generally the students enjoy talking and socializing with their peers (of course there are always a few students that are more reserved or shy), but as the students move into the older grades, especially Grade 7 & 8, there do seem to be more students who choose to be more reserved or quiet, which I believe has quite a bit to do with self-esteem and being self-conscious about how they may appear to their peers.
Cat refers to Grade 7 and 8’s becoming more silent as a choice. This response moves beyond the reasoning that some students are silent by nature, while others are more inclined to be vocal. In addition, as students enter the intermediate years, self-image and the opinions of their peers become more central to their own opinion of self, and thus how they choose to present themselves. Cat found this to be especially true for adolescent girls, “especially when they are in a class where there is a disproportionate number of boys to girls.” This observation could be representative of the patriarchal atmosphere that could threaten the dynamic of any classroom if the teacher is not aware of its existence.

In order to best support students during this time, boys and girls alike, Cat prescribes the following role for teachers:

*As teachers, we need to be very observant and make a strong effort daily to engage in conversation with these students, to ascertain if what we are seeing is in fact shyness and/or being reserved or withdrawal and/or distractedness.*

Cat’s response is reminiscent of Paulo Freire’s (2000) stance that reality can only be understood and transcended through dialogue. Whether it be the underlying patriarchal relations of a classroom, or the internal or external challenges young people are forced to confront, a teacher cannot aid in development if they are not open to dialoguing with their students. This dialogical encounter also requires silence from the teacher. As mentioned in the participant responses from Ollin’s (2008) study, the teacher’s own voice can be an obstacle to his or her capacity to read, and reflect on, student experiences.

**Mike**

Mike parallels Cat’s position regarding the diversity of students and their approach to silence. He reports that he has had students who would not “utter a word
even when directly addressed” and others who spoke very little “until they opened up, you know, six to eight weeks into the semester.” But Mike also made it clear that he “never interpret[s] the silence as a disinterest,” that that is not his first “instinct.” For Mike, silence is “an open opportunity to engage the student in some way.” If the silence persists, Mike looks to the student’s presence as enough of a response, “because they’re there, you know, and that’s more than half the battle, just having the kids show up.” The possibility of communication is kept alive simply through the act of students showing up.

Like Cat, Mike does not speak of student silence as a problem that the student needs to overcome, but as a signal that he may have to reevaluate how he approaches the student. As has been stated above, the literature is almost unanimous on the perspective that student silence can be influenced by numerous factors. Such a statement may seem an unhelpful platitude to some teachers. However, as Mike and Cat show, the myriad reasons contributing to silence, above all, means that the teacher must work harder to unveil and better understand those contributing factors. How this is to be done surely depends on the individuality of the student, the teacher, and the situation. Cat describes a more active approach involving multiple intelligence testing; while Mike prefers to give the students space to find their comfort. This difference in approach possibly reflects the different roles the participants occupy. As a Grade 8 teacher, Cat has direct and consistent interaction with the same students for a prolonged period; she has the advantage of being able to continually gather information on the students over time. Whereas Mike, as a Chaplain in a high school, does not encounter the same students on a regular bases. As I can attest from shadowing Mike for a month as part of my teacher education program, it is more likely that a student will seek out the Chaplain to have a
discussion; sometimes Mike is familiar with the student, other times it is an individual he
has never met before. The nature of Mike’s position, largely an emotional counselor who
does not have the added responsibility of having to assess students academically,
provides him the space to allow a student to open up and become more vocal on his or
her own terms.

As a Chaplain, Mike contributes the additional perspective concerning how
students respond in a retreat setting.

...even on the retreat scenario, you know, where its largely directed by an adult,
probably the majority of kids remain silent. You know, either they are intimidated
by the new retreat surroundings or the unknown in terms of what to expect on a
retreat day. There’s a large range, we find out in the first half hour where kids fall
on that range.

A retreat has the potential to be a powerful experience for students and teachers. I had
the privilege of supervising one with Mike during my time as a student-teacher. To
begin, the students were very hesitant to share; many of the students had never met before
and the discussion topics for some of the small and large group discussions were rather
serious and private. Through my retreat experience with Mike, I was able to experience
firsthand the polarities of silence. As I sat in on the inaugural small group discussion of
about 10 high school students, I felt a very hesitant, defensive silence. The students were
not yet comfortable with each other or me. The silence was only interrupted by nervous
laughter and the occasional superficial remark in an attempt to lighten the mood.
However, after a few more hours together, and some engaging ice breaker activities, the
students were given another chance to share in the small groups. What happened will
stay with me always. A brave young woman spontaneously opened up to the group. She
shared an extremely disheartening, disturbing, yet courageous story about a traumatic situation at home. In response, all we could do was be silent. Speech was not prohibited, the activity was intended for sharing. I assume our silence was an indication of the helplessness we felt in terms of alleviating the young woman’s suffering with immediate action. Our group silence lasted for over fifteen minutes. Her story was so horrific, the pain so real, that words would only have tarnished the strength she displayed. This silence was profoundly different from what we experienced just a few hours before. This silence was booming with sympathy, compassion, and an acknowledgment to the young woman that though we cannot feel or understand your pain, we desire to mourn with you. The atmosphere of the retreat changed after that moment. Nourished by their peer’s courage, the students began sharing their own challenges, burdens, and triumphs. I feel honoured to have witnessed the student’s spirits in action, as well as the transformational potential of silence.

**Obstacles to Silence**

This theme explores the participants responses in relation to the work of Carr (2010). The theoretical findings of Carr (2010) are weighed against the practical experiences of the participants. This section aims to illuminate how the participants feel modern realities influence student thinking, behaviour, self-concept, and comfortability with silence.

As referenced above, Carr (2010) states that with the introduction of a new technology, a new “intellectual ethic” also comes to permeate the society in which the technology is introduced. Through her responses, on numerous occasions, Cat expands on how she feels the modern intellectual ethic is influencing students. From her words, it
is evident that Cat believes there are many obstacles to silence presented by the ubiquity of technology and digital media.

*We live in such a busy multi-media, multi-tasking world, that if we do not stop and make time for quiet reflection, we just continue to race on and begin to lose sight of who we are and what is important to us. Our society has become so fast paced that our students are used to instant gratification and need to be taught how to slow down, clear their minds, and reflect.*

This statement reflects Carr’s (2010) position that technology and digital media rewards hurried and distracted thinking. It shows that Cat believes young people are not immune from adopting the habits of a “multi-media, multi-tasking world.” It is Carr’s (2010) central argument that the overwhelming quantity of information and messages that compete for our attention when we go online is turning our brain into a “juggler’s brain.” Cat’s responses are a testament to the manifestation of the jugglers brain in students.

*...our students live in a world where they are constantly being over-stimulated and bombarded with media and technology (i.e., video gaming, texting, social media) They are natural multi-taskers by necessity, which is why so many of our students have trouble focusing in class. ADD may seem like it is on the rise, but really it is our society that has changed in this the informational age of media and technology. It is no wonder that so many of our students have difficulty concentrating in class.*

By using terms like “over-stimulated” and “bombarded” Cat is echoing the statement by Carr (2010) that “[w]hen it comes to the firing of our neurons, it’s a mistake to assume that more is better” (p. 123). Her language reflects Carr’s (2010) image of the digital world: a setting of unlimited sensory stimulants, all competing for the viewer’s attention, only to scatter it once attention is grasped. It is interesting that Cat refers to students’ multi-tasking as a “necessity,” this speaks to the ubiquity of technology and digital
media; it is as if the students have no choice but to adapt to technologies intellectual ethic. As a result of this ethic, Cat reports that many students have difficulty focusing in class. She even attributes the rise in ADD to the changes in society brought on by the information age. While this statement is not grounded in any scientific knowledge, it is certainly an important consideration that scientists and researchers should explore (discussed further in the next chapter).

While Carr (2010) predominately considers the neurological effects of technologies intellectual ethic, Cat’s response goes one step further by listing the social and emotional challenges students face which she, at least in part, attributes to the reach of technology and digital media.

*Students are bombarded with images and examples of self-gratification, impulsivity, and self-interest everywhere they turn. If you are not fast enough, strong enough, smart enough, pretty enough, or witty enough you will get left behind in society or even worse, get broken down and made to feel unworthy.*

This insight by Cat is immensely important for educators to understand. Again, Cat uses the word “bombarded” to explain how students interact with digital media and technology. This language speaks to the perception that the Net can be an overwhelming place for students to navigate, especially if their usage is not mediated by a calming, silent alternative. Cat also uses the words “self-gratification,” “impulsivity,” and “self-interest” to explain the images and messages she believes students are exposed to “everywhere they turn.” While students are also undoubtedly exposed to images and messages that do not promote self-gratification, impulsivity and self-interest, it is the ones that do that compete and strive for their attention with vast amounts of capital and market research at their disposal. The effects these images have on students all point to a
distorted, negative self-concept. In addition to holding negative feelings about themselves, Cat also describes how students’ actions toward others can be influenced by the media and technology they consume:

* I have often seen my students get in trouble for acting on impulse and not thinking about the consequences of their actions or poor choices on others.

* They act based on what they see online, on TV, and in their video games.

If it is the case that students can at times “act based on what they see online, on TV, and in their video games,” then it is crucial for teachers to have an understanding of what students are watching and playing. Practical steps on how teachers can best gather information on the technology habits of students, and methods to discuss those habits compassionately, are areas of teaching that can greatly benefit from further research (discussed further in the next chapter). The next theme will address some of the ways Cat uses silence in her teaching to mediate the negative effects technology and digital media have on students.

In terms of student comfortability with silence, Cat reports that students really struggle with silent practices at first. She equates the presence of noise and distractions in students’ lives to a form of addiction, stating that “It is almost like these students are going through withdrawal and need to ease into the silence and need lots of teacher support at the beginning.” This symptom of noise “withdrawal” points to Carr’s (2010) position that the effects technology has on the brain carry over into how situations without technology are experienced.

Overall, Cat’s responses point to a general theme of distracted thinking, distorted self-concepts, and poor decision making that is informed by both. It is clear that Cat, like Carr (2010), attributes much of what she sees from her students to the deluge of messages
and images (some helpful and some hurtful) they consume through digital media and technology. However, it must be reiterated that the purpose of this research is not to criticize technology and condemn its ubiquity in the lives of students. The aim of this paper is to show that students can greatly benefit from silent practices in the classroom. The effects technology has on the brain was considered at such length because they are symptoms that can best be disrupted by the calming, grounded presence of silence. The last two themes will hopefully show how teachers can implement silence, and what students stand to gain if they do.

**Mike**

Mike’s statements concerning the obstacles to silence follow the same stream as Cat and Carr (2010). When asked to expand on some of the factors that could make silence difficult for students, Mike reiterates the pervasive nature of technology and digital media.

...we live in such a noise filled world. Like the world...oh my gosh...like at every twist and turn the world says don’t be silent. We’re constantly surrounded by noise. You know, through the media, even through things that are supposedly silent like billboards and advertising, that’s a noise unto itself, it fills us with noise that might not be audible but it’s distracting and it’s toxic to who we are as human beings.

Mike adds to the statements of Cat and the findings of Carr (2010) in referring to the noises produced by such supposedly silent things like billboards and advertisements that “may not be audible,” but are still “distracting” and “toxic.” Though silent, print advertising corresponds to the same intellectual ethic as digital media and technology in that its aim and purpose is to arrest the viewer’s attention through the use of images and messages. As various sources compete for attention, the viewers become vulnerable to
the habits of distracted thinking. The more distracted thinking becomes a habit, the more difficult silent contemplation and meditation, or single pointed, sustained attention (Beanoff, 2001), will become.

Speaking on the broader cultural trends that contribute to noise in society Mike states, “I think we live in a culture that is materialistic and consumerist and filled with things that are designed to entertain us and distract us.” The terms “materialistic” and “consumerist” are problematic in that they are difficult to define and open to a myriad of interpretations. The perspective of Dale (2012), as referenced above, may help to narrow the definition of the terms and connect them to the educational experience. To restate, Dale (2012) believes that the “busyness” and “noisiness” of the world has contributed to the view of school as a place for “getting”: getting information, getting grades, getting a degree, getting through, and just getting done. Broadly conceived, the terms materialistic and consumerists invoke the same ethics of getting, using, and getting more. For Dale (2012), there is limited room for contemplation and reverence for life within the utilitarian ethos of getting. As will be shown by the participants’ responses below, the practices of silent pedagogy can be used to disrupt the noise of students’ lives and enlarge their perspective on school from a place strictly of getting, to one where they can also receive the miracles that are within and around them.

**Strategies for Practicing Silence**

This selection expands on the ways educators can incorporate silence into their teaching. The participants responses explain how they monitor their own silence while in front of students; how they use silence to help students deepen their curriculum knowledge; and how they use silence to help students quiet their minds to develop a
deeper understanding of Self. These findings will be supplemented by the research from Belanoff (2001), Zembylas and Michaelides (2004), Rud and Garrison (2012), and Kumashiro (2003).

**Cat**

When asked to explain how she deliberately uses silence in her teaching, Cat mentions that she always strives to be conscious of how much “wait time” she allows in between questions. She says wait time is important because it gives “all students an opportunity to think about a question that has been asked before I ask for a volunteer to respond.” Cat finds that when she holds silence in between questions “more students...volunteer their answers, because they have had time to think about what they want to say.” Cat’s reasoning reflects her keen awareness of the diversity of learners in her classroom. She acknowledges that all students process information at varying speeds and if she is not aware of her silences, if she is “quick to pick the [first] volunteer to answer a question,” then she risks bypassing the students who are still processing the question.

The importance of wait time in between questions has been discussed extensively throughout my studies in teacher education. The program has also touched on the significance of teachers as models for their students. Cat connects the importance of silence and the teacher as model when she states, “I have had to make a strong effort myself to slow down my teaching and to model how to be a reflective thinker for my students.” So in addition to allowing students the time to process, Cat’s purposeful silence is also a way to show her students how to listen, how to be patient, and how to be comfortable in silence.
To reiterate, Belanoff (2001) encourages teachers to create moments of “deep time” in their teaching where students can distance themselves from the linear sequence of life and immerse themselves in reflective thought. Cat states that she tries to “incorporate quiet reflection time at least 3-5 times a week.” She finds this time especially useful during her Religion classes.

_Sometimes I will put on a Christian rock music video or soundscape music and nature scenes on the Smartboard, as students quietly observe, listen and reflect on how these sounds and images make them feel, especially in terms of their relationship with God. Those who wish to write or draw can do so, or they can just sit and focus on listening to their inner voice or to God’s voice speaking to them._

In referencing the student’s relationships with God, Cat is echoing Belanoff (2001) Zembylas and Michaelides (2004), and Rud and Garrison’s (2012) belief that silence is the best medium to approach the unspeakable, the other worldly, and the divine. As a teacher in a Catholic school, Cat is obligated to share the teachings of the Church with her students. These teachings can come as textual and ritual knowledge, but it can also come through the experiential contemplation of God or a Creator. Silence is mandatory during Cat’s reflection time with her students, but the students have the freedom to experience that silence any way they wish: writing, drawing, or just “listening to their inner voice or to God’s voice speaking to them.” While textual and ritual knowledge certainly has its place, some students, depending on where they are at in their spiritual journeys, may be put off by confusing theological reasonings or dense church doctrines. By giving students the opportunity, through silence, to feel the divinity within themselves, Cat is practicing a form of religious education that is student centered and different for all who participate.
Cat’s responses also indicate that she values time for silent reflection outside of spiritual education. When asked if she ever thought that a student’s understanding of something was enhanced through silence she unequivocally states, “Yes, especially when it comes to taking different perspectives and looking outside of themselves and their own personal world, to look at social justice issues and the common good.” As expressed by Kumashiro (2003) and Zembylas and Michaelides (2004), there are inherent limitations in trying to teach about the Other’s experience. Especially when considering social justice issues that usually involve the experience of immense suffering, intellectual reasoning can work to reduce or rationalize the Other’s experience. In mentioning the need for students to look “outside of themselves and their own personal world,” Cat is touching on the unknowability and ignorance we all possess, and as Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) contest, it is in the potential to become aware of our shared ignorance that silent pedagogy has its greatest merit.

Cat also expands on how she uses silence to help students through moments of emotional turmoil. She reflects on how she uses “time outs” in the older grades, not as a punishment but as a way to help students “gain perspective and to regain control of their emotions.” She even explains that she sometimes uses silence with the whole group, “...for those days when we all need to put our heads down and just reassess how our day is going.” Cat notices that once the students have had a chance to calm down, they can “In most cases... independently make good decisions and solve their conflicts/problems in a more socially acceptable way.” Cat’s responses regarding the potential of silence to illuminate knowledge of Self correspond to Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) position that silence can bring us closer to an understanding of the Other’s experience, except in
Cat’s example the Other is the students’ own Self; the mysteries of the students’ own emotional vicissitudes and hormonal workings is the amorphous Other that silence can help demystify. However, Cat also acknowledges that students cannot always be left alone to work out their problems in silence:

Sometimes, I need to step in and help them “talk through” their problem and give them guiding questions to help them reflect and figure out the most appropriate way to solve their problem.

Silence does have its limits. By always trusting that students can work out their problems through individual silence, teachers risk ignoring the questions and concerns students might have, and they also risk withholding the valuable wisdom that they may have to share. This reflection by Cat emphasizes that awareness cannot be suspended simply because the students are silent. Conversely, Cat believes she must still strive to compassionately read what the students are showing and be open to intervening if what she reads indicates her to do so.

Cat also reports that she uses visualization meditations in her physical education programs. She has the students “visualize themselves scoring a goal or successfully performing a difficult skill or play before they try to do it.” She finds that this practice helps the students become more open to taking risks “because they have already tried it and experienced success in the safe place in their minds.” For Cat, visualization practices can help students “build up their self-esteem and confidence” and “foster a growth mindset.” She states that her Grade 8’s really enjoy these practices and that she can see a tangible improvement in their self-concepts and success in school.
Finally, Cat explains how she uses technology in her lessons as a way to incorporate silent practices to account for students who are shy or hesitant to speak in front of the group.

*I have experimented with student blogging and blended learning and now that we are finally moving towards a Bring Your Own Device policy in our board, I hope to give students more opportunities to text (i.e., think-pair-text) and tweet their ideas and thinking. I have often seen my “shy” students really come alive in these online/cyber discussion formats. Media and technology gives these students a voice that we (myself and the other students) would miss out on if I only allowed for the traditional oral discussion in the classroom.*

This is a brilliant use of technology that many teachers may overlook. Sometimes a students’ silent reflections may not manifest in written or oral responses within the school day. But with the proper use of technology students can have the opportunity to share their ideas at any time of the day. In addition, as Cat indicates, for students who have difficulty speaking in front of others, online sharing can be a great way to give them the privacy they need to share their voice. As mentioned above, Cat also uses her Smartboard to play Christian Rock music or soundscapes during meditation time. This is another example of how technology can be used to enhance silent pedagogical practices.

**Mike**

Mike expands on one silent strategy that he implements whenever he leads a student retreat. He terms it the “Power Hour.”

*It’s one hour of complete silence. Now it’s not a static thing, the students are allowed to move about the retreat centre, you know, but it has to be done in silence, no reading, no talking to others, just a simple prayer of movement throughout the centre, but done in silence.*
I am fortunate to have participated in a “Power Hour” with grade 11 and 12 students on a retreat lead by Mike. Surprisingly, the exercise was both a physical and mental challenge. Speech is such a dominant, and largely unconscious, part of our lives that I suppose we take its presence for granted. When asked to suppress the urge to speak, the body goes through various levels of resistance. There is definitely a certain degree of discomfort inherent to the experience of such an exercise. Undoubtedly, the discomfort will increase or decrease depending on the participant’s familiarity and acceptance of silence. But as the practice progresses, the physical displeasure subsides and the awareness of internal and external happenings grows. As a consolidation for the exercise, Mike had the students gather in a large circle and volunteer to share how they experienced the silence. Mike’s statement below reflects the profound sharing that can occur after participating in the Power Hour.

And the revelations we get from the kids after that hour is done is immense...immense...And a lot of the times what they’ve been harboring inside of themselves is just made more clear...in silence...So the sharing we get absolutely provides evidence for a greater understanding after silence, but in this case it is an understanding of the Self. But not just about the Self, but about God, about nature, about the world around them. Ohh...many...many revelations. One student in particular, eloquently narrated the experience he had standing on a small bridge above a stream just outside the retreat centre. He accounted how he followed a branch as it was carried by the stream through the debris of ice and snow. He went on to relate the branch’s journey to his own, and in essence all of our journeys, through obstacles and set backs. But in the end, concluded the student, the stream keeps moving, carrying the branch forward like time does to us.
A student retreat is a unique situation. The isolation and disconnect from the world that it allows is difficult to emulate within the parameters of the traditional classroom. However, an extended period of intentional silence is definitely a feasible activity for any classroom. Depending on the age or needs of the students, the duration of the silence can be reduced to alleviate some of the discomfort. Ideally, a Power Hour would work best outside of the regular classroom: maybe in a nearby park or open field; a nature trail; through the hallways and grounds of the school; or even in a typically loud setting like a shopping mall or subway so the students can have an opportunity to really observe and receive the sounds of humanity that surrounds them. By taking the activity outside of the classroom, the students will be more engaged due to the novelty of the situation. Extended silence within the confines of a classroom, without the activity of reading or school work, may prove to be too daunting of a task to impose on students (and teachers) who are just beginning to explore the challenges and rewards of silent practices. All such practices must be followed by a detailed consolidation period. The consolidation can take the form of group discussions or individual reflections, it can be oral or written, acted out or drawn, and kept private or shared with peers. For maximum benefit, a Power Hour must include the opportunity for students to express their thoughts and emotions in a non-judgmental, expectation free setting. Through the consolidation period, students can begin to think about the significance and mutual dependability of silence and communication.

The Benefits of Silence

This section outlines how the participants have observed students benefit from the practicing of silence. This section includes much overlap with the previous three, as
many of the benefits have already been discussed while showing how and why the participants use silence in their teaching. The most referenced areas of improvement were in student self-esteem, self-confidence and self-knowledge.

In a very interesting remark, Cat shows how silence can be used as a method to counter Paulo Freire’s (2000) notion of the “banking model” of education.  

_Sometimes, a seed is planted during class which eventually grows to a new student understanding over time; sometimes in a few hours, days or even weeks. Those precious “A-ha” moments often come at a time when a student is reflecting quietly on an activity or discussion that has occurred in class earlier. Rather than trying to force a bunch of facts, concepts, and ideas into our students’ minds, it is more successful when we plant these new seeds of learning and let them grow and evolve in our students’ minds. I believe that the best way to water and nourish these seeds is through silence and quiet reflection, so that students have the opportunity to think about new learnings without distractions and preconceived ideas being thrown at them._

This very eloquent and informative description by Cat shows how silence can work in opposition to the traditional banking model of education in which facts, concepts, and ideas are simply to be swallowed and repeated (Freire, 2000). Cat’s reasoning shows that new learnings often take time to mature into greater understandings, and that silence and reflection is the best way to “nourish” these learnings into greater understandings. Cat’s description is also reminiscent of Hao’s (2011) critique of the linear process of education that starts with speech, is mediated by a hypothesis, and closes with the evaluation of verbalized conclusions. In Cat’s schema, those “A-ha” moments of deeper understanding can occur at anytime within a student, not always during or following a lesson and not always at the same time as other students. For Cat, the benefit of incorporating silent
reflection throughout her lessons is that it allows the students to consider new learnings without “distractions,” or “preconceived ideas being thrown at them.”

When asked what students stand to gain from silent moments in the classroom, Cat states that while some students may not admit it, “they really enjoy these silent moments of reflection.” She believes that the enjoyment grows after “they start to become comfortable with the silence,” they come to “enjoy that quiet time to be alone in their own minds and to get to know themselves better and to hear and value their own inner voice.” It is interesting that Cat does not just report that students “hear” their inner voices better, but that they also come to “value” it more as well. In the next response, Cat explains how valuing their inner voice can manifest in the students everyday lives:

*I believe that this helps students develop a stronger self-concept and helps improve their self-esteem and self-confidence, by helping them to feel more comfortable in their own skin, so to speak. If students can learn to slow down and take time to reflect and set goals for the future, this will help them in the long run to become more self-reflective problem-solvers and contributors to society.*

Cat’s repeated use of the terms self-concept, self-esteem, and self-confidence points to the potential of silent pedagogy to positively effect those aspects of a students internal being. And for Cat, the ramifications of a stronger self-concept can extend into the students future, where they have the potential “to become more self-reflective problem-solvers and contributors to society.” Thus, while the benefits of silence may not be visible through specific achievement levels and quantifiable test scores, it can be viewed through the lens of general well being, awareness, and internal contentment.

Finally, as referenced briefly above, Cat’s emphasis on self-concept corresponds to the literature regarding silence and the understanding of the Other. As the Talmudic...
saying goes: “we don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are.” Thus, students who possess a negative self-concept, or have not explored the glory within themselves, will have a more difficult time seeing, sympathizing and praising the glory in others. However, by allowing students the space and time to quiet the mind from the competing messages of the world, teachers will be enlightening students to the greater Truths of love and inclusivity.

Mike

As stated above, Mike’s role as a Chaplain differs greatly from that of a classroom teacher in that his sole responsibility is to nurture and support the student’s spiritual growth and emotional well-being. However, as shown by Cat’s words on the importance of emotional health and internal well-being, classroom teachers may at times also need to consider these aspects of a student’s education.

Stress has become a common emotion that threatens the lives of students at all levels. Once conceived of as a state confined to the experience of the work place, children as young as five or six will admit to feeling stressed or anxious at some point throughout the day. As students move forward in education, and the expectations imposed on them are given the perception of greater weight, the stress they experience has the potential to become more toxic and debilitating. Mike reports on how stress influences the lives of the students he interacts with at the high school:

*You know, my first encounter with kids here on a daily basis is stress and fear. It’s how they start their day and it’s how they end their day. Or, they end their day in complete exhaustion from the stress and fear they practiced throughout the day.*
To help alleviate the stress in student lives, Mike makes himself available to lead guided meditation sessions for any student or teacher who wishes to devote some class time to the practice. The response Mike has received thus far has been very positive. He is not surprised by the response because as he states, “Students crave it, they crave meditation, they crave being still...So when they get a moment to practice meditation and be silent it’s monumental in its effect on these kids.” For Mike, the biggest thing students gain from practicing meditation is “awareness.” He believes that students can “learn so much from simple observation.” Mike states that as educators “we want to be so good at fixing, but sometimes a problem doesn’t require fixing it requires simple attention and awareness.”

The meditation that Mike practices with the students is structured around a form of Christian Meditation. Christian Meditation follows a simple format of breath awareness and the reciting of a mantra or phrase internally. To start, Mike asks the students to sit in an upright, but comfortable position to allow the breath to flow through unobstructed. Then, he asks the students to become aware of every inhale and exhale breath, adjusting the duration of each to fit what is comfortable for them. Mike invites the students to recite the Aramaic word maranatha on every exhale breath. He explains to the students that Aramaic was the language Jesus spoke, and the word maranatha roughly translated means “come Lord.” Mike welcomes the students to choose another word to recite if they wish, such as love, happy, or success, but he recommends using a mantra during meditation because it is a good way to refocus the attention which will inevitable be distracted by thoughts. Mike sets a timer for five minutes, at the end a bell rings three times to signal the end of the meditation. As a consolidation, Mike asks the students to share their experiences, especially to elaborate on any noticeable differences they feel
within themselves after the meditation. Students often report that they feel calmer, more relaxed, a little tired, or report no difference whatsoever. Mike closes by encouraging the students to practice on their own, he equates meditation to weightlifting by stating, “I just taught you how to use a bench press, now it’s up to you to put in the work to get stronger.”

In addition to the emotional and physical benefits of meditation, Mike believes that the greatest benefit it can have for students is to help build their relationship with God.

*When we’re talking about a God that is beyond human comprehension, a God that cannot be comprehended by the five sense we possess, then the only way we can encounter God is through silence. It’s the only way! We don’t pray because it benefits God, we pray because it benefits us...Once we provide students with the atmosphere to delve into themselves, they’ll experience God on an experiential level, exponentially greater than the traditional forms of prayer.*

Mike’s description of God as something “that cannot be comprehended by the five senses we possess” recalls the philosophy of Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) who state that teaching with silence requires an acceptance of “teaching with ignorance” (p. 207). Whereas Zembylas and Michaelides (2004) are referring to our ignorance in relation to the “Other,” Mike is referring to one’s ignorance before the mystery of God. In either conceptualization, silent practices can benefit students by providing them the space to feel humility and wonder before phenomenon that cannot be dissected by the intellect. This sense of humility through ignorance is a needed counterweight to a society and a curriculum that heavily favours intellectual exactitude and utilitarian thinking over the intuitive, spiritual sciences of emotion and feeling.
Through the responses above, the pedagogy of silence was made audible. Cat and Mike’s responses show that by being aware of the value of silence, teachers can be better prepared to provide the nurturing, compassionate and inclusive environment that students need to grow and achieve. The participants explored the multiple ways silence from a student can be interpreted, and they also used personal examples to explain how a teacher can gain information on student silences. The obstacles to silence were considered in depth, both participants discussed how the realities of technology and the information age have contributed to the discomfort with silence that they often see in students. Furthermore, Mike and Cat share the opinion that silent practices can be used to alleviate the distracted thinking and impulsivity that can emerge through engagement with technology and digital media. As a classroom teacher, Cat provided tremendous insight as to how she infuses silence into many aspects of her teaching. And Mike, as a Chaplin, showed how silence can be used as a form of prayer to help students attain the necessary stillness for Self and divine exploration. Some personal examples from my own experience as a student teacher with Mike were used to supplement the responses, doing so allowed me the opportunity to reflect deeply on my learnings and revisit a time of great emotional and spiritual development for me.
Introduction

This chapter aims to summarize the implications of the research. The implications are considered through my perspective both as a researcher and future educator. In addition, some brief recommendations are made regarding the significance of my research for the larger educational community. Finally, I explore some areas of future research that could enhance the awareness of silent pedagogy.

Implications as a Researcher

My time spent in teacher education is difficult to articulate: it has been filled with emotional highs and lows; inspiring young people; wonderful insights from colleagues and professors; and a persistent, at times debilitating skepticism on my part. Through first year, I was plagued by vague awareness of a contradiction between the theory, aims, and practices of teaching. I was enlightened to the concept of the whole child approach, yet the subjects were compartmentalized and promoted for their individual merit; I agreed fully with the call for teachers to create a stress free, inclusive environment, but I was puzzled by the stress inducing scope of a curriculum that, like any standardized curriculum, is more accessible to students from certain backgrounds and socio-economic status; and I felt a disconnect between the acceptance of every child as unique, with the theoretical and practical discourse of grade standards, levels, and exceptionalities.

I gained a greater vocabulary to discuss my spectrum of emotions when a friend of mine introduced me to the world of critical pedagogy, specifically Paulo Freire. Freire’s concepts of “banking education,” “conscientização,” and “problem posing education” provided me with the vocabulary I needed to articulate my philosophy of
education. I uncovered additional theorists, such as Michael Apple, Henry Giroux and Ira Shor, who expanded on Freire’s work. Thus, with the backing of research and theory, I set to work on the first draft of my research paper. What resulted was a manifesto like assault against everything from capitalism to curriculum construction. It was loud, opinionated, and full of generalizations. When I shared this work with my supervisor he tacitly pointed out that nothing I was saying was new, the debate that I was trying to concluded had been going on, and continues to be going on, at all levels of education. He enlightened me to the fact that what was needed from me, as a teacher candidate, was methods on how to improve the field, not elaborate condemnation.

As a researcher, I learned the most through this first failed attempt at a research paper. I gained a greater understanding of how to use literature to support my argument. I learned that passion and honesty was not enough to convince a reader that what I was saying was important and worthy of consideration. Above all, I learned that by narrowing your scope of research, by not attempting to address every pitfall of the education system, you actually gain greater flexibility of argument which can result in findings that are both grounded in theory and practicality.

Implications as a Teacher

Through the research, interviewing, and writing of this paper I have gained a better understanding of where I can most contribute to the field of education. The reader will undoubtedly agree that this paper was devoted almost entirely to the more ethereal aspects of a student development: their emotions, understanding of Self, appreciation of the Other, and their spirituality. Issues of curriculum achievement were considered sparingly, and in most case with a critical lens. I do not want to leave the impression that
I do not value academics and intellect. I recognize that a spiritual, self-realizing person can only do good in the world to the degree that they can apply their intellect to the situations and people they encounter. However, I also firmly believe that by privileging academic achievement over intuitive feelings we dangerously limit a student’s ability to handle crisis when it arises and to apply their knowledge with compassion and devotion. While it is crucial that we prepare students for the jobs of the future, it is equally important that we prepare students for the possibility of unemployment, loss, tragedy, and any number of unforeseen events that will challenge their character and commitment to love.

Some teachers may believe that it is not our duty to address issues of student character and spirituality, that there is simply not enough time considering the scope and depth of the curriculum. Before writing this paper I would have agreed that the curriculum is a major obstacle to “teaching” about spirituality. However, I now see that spirituality is not something that can be taught, it is something to be experienced; and through my research and interviews I have been enlightened to the power of silence as a medium for feeling spirituality. Silent pedagogy is not about teaching a specific topic or theory, it is about modeling and nurturing a demeanor of reverential thinking, deliberate reflection, reserved judgement, and humility. It is my opinion that such a mindset can be applied to, and can enhance, any curriculum learning. The success of silent pedagogy largely depends upon the culture that a teacher is willing to create. I do not believe that a teacher can “make” their students into deep thinkers and reverential observers, the most a teacher can do is be one themselves, and the power and influence of such a model will naturally vibrate throughout the class.
I was very fortunate to have had the opportunity to interview two incredible educators from two different occupations within the field. Cat really showed me that a classroom teacher can address issues of the spirit and the Self within the parameters of a curriculum. Her compassion and awareness concerning her student’s emotional well-being has inspired me to strive to ground my practice as a teacher in the same love and commitment. My time as Mike’s student teacher was both informative and life changing. During my time with Mike I never heard him utter one negative or disparaging word about a student or colleague. His positivity was intoxicating and contagious. Students honestly and joyfully referred to him as both a teacher and a best friend. The relationships that he was able to develop and maintain is partly attributable to the position of Chaplain itself. Without the responsibility of teaching or assessing, Mike can interact with students free from expectations and the personal distance sometimes required from the classroom teacher. Students desperately need to have access to such an individual. Students need an adult that they can turn to when the stresses of life become overwhelming. Inspired by Mike’s love and influence, I have decided to pursue Chaplaincy as a vocation.

**Recommendations**

Above all, I recommend that teacher education programs implement more avenues for the exploration of silent pedagogy. Prospective teachers may be able to greatly benefit from the awareness and experience of the transformational potential of silence. Such training needs to go beyond the meditational practices of mindfulness, and address how silence can be used to enhance all areas of the school experience. I would also like to see the discourse around “reflection” evolve from treatment as a specific
action to a general demeanor of being. Apart from an optional course on Catholic Education, there was very little consideration of how spirituality and reverential thinking can inform the practice of teaching. I recognize that the word spirituality can draw much controversy and discomfort. However, I believe that much of the discomfort can be alleviated by following the central tenants of silent pedagogy: reserving judgement, and acknowledging our shared ignorance. For me, spirituality is a recognition that there are things in this world that are beyond the physical, things that cannot be dissected and intellectually verified, such as the origin of thoughts, the experience of consciousness, and the miracle of life itself. If teacher education programs can create the safe spaces where prospective teachers can explore and experience spirituality, then future students may not have to grow up resisting the phrase “I don’t know,” or live unaware of the glory that is within and around them.

Further research

In the future, I hope to see more research that delves into the effect technology has on the brain, specifically relating to young people. In one statement, Cat attributes the rise in ADD to the changes in society brought on by the information age. Researchers may wish to consider this possibility. As shown in the report by the American Academy of Pediatrics, students of every age are spending more time in front of computers, tablets and smartphones. It is also a reality that the effect technology has on young people will differ greatly from the effect it has on adults. Today, children as young as two or three are being exposed to the intense visual and audio stimulation of technology. Parents are allowing such usage regardless of the fact that the effects are still unknown or not fully understood. In education, we are exploring all the different ways
technology can be brought into the classroom in order to keep the students engaged, without pausing to considering how technology is influencing erratic or fleeting engagement. The information age is a reality that is here to stay, but so is our brain. As educators, it is imperative that we become better informed on the types of brains technology is producing. Once better informed, we can structure our teaching to mediate the less desirable effects of technology’s intellectual ethic.

Finally, there needs to be more research and examples on how to compassionately discuss internet habits with students and parents. It is very difficult to explore student habits that occur outside of the classroom. Many parents may see it as a breach of privacy, or unwanted advice on how to raise their children. However, if backed by research on the neurological effects of technology, educators and parents may be able to work together to structure the experiences of students to allow them the opportunity to become well rounded thinkers. Before this can be done, parents and educators need to better understand how to discuss technology and digital media consumption with their children and students without shaming them.

As stated above, the issue is not whether or not technology is good or bad for the brain, the issue is control. Without the proper knowledge on what exactly is happening to the brain as we become more attached to our devices, we risk relinquishing control of our brains. And more crucially, without knowing how technology is affecting young people, we risk limiting their perception of the world beyond the artificial glow of the screen.


THE PEDAGOGY OF SILENCE


Appendix A: Research Questions

1. How much variation between students have you observed as far as degrees of being quiet and or reserved?

2. How do you understand student silence? What might be some reasons for their silence?

3. Do you make any efforts to push them to be more vocal? What do you do in particular?

4. Do you ever deliberately use silence in your teaching?
   If yes, why?
   If yes, how?

5. Do you ever use silence as a disciplinary tool?
   If yes, why?
   If yes, how?

6. Do you believe there are students who become more vulnerable when their voices are not being heard?

7. What are some factors that could make silence difficult for many students?

8. What do students stand to gain from silent moments in the classroom?

9. Is there a connection between silence and concentration?

10. What about between silence and compassion?

11. Have you ever thought that a student’s understanding of something was enhanced through silence?

12. Have you ever practiced mediation/mindfulness with your students?
   If yes, how have the students responded?
   If no, would you consider implementing a silent practice in the future?
Appendix B: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: _____________________

Dear _____________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying the pedagogy of silence for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: __________________________________________

Phone number, email: _______________________________________

Instructor’s Name: __________________________________________
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by _______________________(name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name (printed): ___________________________________

Date: ______________________