



Reframing Students' Silences

EDUC 201: Identity & Difference
in Education

Week 8: October 14, 2025

Homework

- **For this week's discussion sections, be ready to discuss:**
 - Gonzalez Ben (2023) – pp. 318-319, pp. 322-323, & pp. 326-331
 - San Pedro (2015) – pp. 132-135 & pp. 145-150
- **For next week (week 9), read:**
 - Kelly (2020) – pp. 449-452 & pp. 454-462
 - Rodriguez (2020) – pp. 14-15 & pp. 19-28

Midterm Feedback

**HOW
ARE WE
DOING?**

During discussion sections, you will anonymously answer the following questions:

- What is helping me to learn in lecture and discussion?
- What changes are needed in lecture and discussion to improve learning?
- What am I doing or need to do to improve my learning in the course?



A Brief Note on Chatty Students

“I hear it from teachers all the time. One of the things they don’t teach us in our education courses is just how freaking much students talk, and how hard it can be to quiet them down in order to get anything accomplished.”

- Jennifer Gonzalez (2017). When students won’t stop talking, *Cult of Pedagogy*.

HOW TO DEAL WITH EXCESSIVE TALKING*



Step 1: Define expectations in explicit detail.

Actually model what the desired behavior looks like.

Step 2: Have students practice.

Give them feedback, just like you would with any other skill.

Step 3: Teach the consequences.

Make sure you know exactly what these are, then teach like regular content.

Step 4: Do it for real.


“Test” students with a regular lesson. Deliver consequences if needed.

Step 5: Continue to define expectations in small chunks.

Before any classroom activity, give clear instructions about what kind of behavior is expected.

Responding to Chatty Students





A Quiet Classroom Isn't Always a Good Thing

”When compliance becomes the sole goal, students who communicate differently, question authority, or show emotion get labeled as ‘difficult’ or ‘disruptive’ even when they’re just being human [...] When we create a classroom where silence is the highest virtue, we stifle the very elements that make learning vibrant and lasting.”

- [Clementina Jose \(2025\). A quiet classroom isn't always an ideal classroom. *Edutopia*.](#)

What does silence communicate?

- Student engagement/participation doesn't always have to be vocal – what are we assuming or privileging by rewarding students who talk?
- How and when do students show us what they know?



Thematic Focus

- **Complicate the idea that silence means that students are uninterested in their education or are academically disengaged.**
 - This perspective is flawed and too simple a takeaway, and it works to support deficit thinking and practices.
- **Silence is complex!**
 - It's shaped by people and the spaces they navigate.
- **Student silence can be the result of:**
 - Students and educators silencing their peers
 - Students turning to silence as an act of survival and resistance

How are students silenced?



Let's think about how students with minoritized identities (e.g., race, gender, sexuality) are silenced by peers and educators.

Group Work Gone Awry

During Lissette's AP English class, she sat at her desk and took notes as she listened to the teacher review the agenda for the day. Students were reading *The Great Gatsby* and got in small groups to tackle discussion questions. Lissette was in a group with three female students and started the conversation by beginning to suggest how they should go about answering the discussion questions listed on their handout. Lissette did not finish making her suggestion as she was quickly cut off by one of her white peers who suggested to the group that they should read portions of the text out loud first before proceeding to answer the discussion questions. The two white students in the group delegated tasks to Lissette and Marie, a female Asian student in the group. Throughout their group work, Lissette's white classmates took time to socialize and not include her and Marie.

- Fieldnotes from P. 7 AP English and Composition

Group Work Gone Awry

“You were in English yesterday, the ginger one. She’s one of the girls I just can’t handle. She wants to be the one talking, she wants to be the one answering the questions. Those are the people I don’t like.”

- Lissette, junior, Shields High School

- **Takeaway** - This conversation highlights that even when Latine youth did want to verbally participate and take the lead, as in this small group conversation, white youth often did not let them.
- **Things to Consider** – Teacher could assign group roles to help stem students who monopolize conversation. How is participation assessed in this class? How are groups assigned - should students be placed in groups with friends?

Not all tragedy have to end in murder or jail. Some tragedies aren't just physical, the worst type of tragedies are the ones that leave your heart with aching pain, but you have to sit silent because you were told not to make a scene. Do not express how you feel. To forgive and move on as if the issue never existed. They say we are supposed to feel at ease when we are on school grounds but, how can we let our guard down if we don't feel welcome. We know you see the hate that is spreading like the plague, but you'd rather place a bandaid on the wound then to pay attention to the infected area, slowly infecting us. Right when you thought you solved the issue. The cycle continues.

What's socially accepted at [REDACTED] is disgusting, and the more you try to sweep it under the rug the more the ^{HATED} hate will grow. The more minorities don't feel welcome the more close off they will become. You can't say you want peace for all but ignore when we are being attacked. You can't say we're all equal when school rules only apply to some.

Silenced for Speaking Up

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- Brandy, junior, Meadowland High School

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Gendered Silence

”Michael is taken more seriously than I am, even if we say the same thing. I have no problem with Michael. Michael and I are good friends, and we hang out. It's really interesting to see how Michael and I will agree on something, and then it'll be Michael's idea. I feel like we have an innate response to listen to the men more or boys more, and sometimes it's really hard to – you hear about it – and you talk about it, and you hear about how women aren't taken seriously in leadership, but then when you actually are experiencing it, it's just weird, and it's kind of fascinating to see it happen. But it is definitely why there are less women in leadership because – I could only handle it for a few months, and then I was like, ‘I don't wanna do this anymore.’”

- Clarissa, senior, Meadowland High School

How are students turning to silence to survive and resist?

Let's think about how students, particularly those with minoritized identities use their agency by turning to silence to resist contexts they perceive to be harmful to their identities and sense of community.

Turning to Silence as a Survival Mechanism

"Ahí me voy a quedar bien calladito." I was taken aback when Joaquín verbalized these words to me moments before heading out into the hallway to work on a class project for his English class. I proceeded to join Joaquín and two of his white classmates in the hallway to further understand why he felt compelled to telegraph his silence to me. Throughout the time I sat next to Joaquín, he remained quiet, only talking to share with his peers that he had found a quote from the book they were reading to potentially use for their group project. When Joaquín spoke, he did so quietly, almost as if not to disrupt the conversation his white peers engaged in. Upon hearing Joaquín's suggestion, the girls slightly turned their faces toward him and dismissively said, 'Okay.'

- Fieldnotes from P. 2 English



Turning to Silence as a Survival Mechanism

”What did I say? ‘Calladito me veo más bonito.’ I just don’t feel like my opinion is – they don’t care about my opinion; they already have what they want to write. So, I’ll let them write and just nod my head when they say something.”

- **Joaquín, senior, Shields High School**

- **Takeaway:** Joaquín’s decision is calculated, as he preferred to be quiet, rather than continue to subject himself to being ignored and dismissed.

Turning to Silence as a Survival Mechanism

“So, in my science class last year, I wasn’t comfortable. I hate science. It’s always been my least favorite subject, so I was very shy in the class, and I was the only Hispanic. I don’t know what made me not participate. I was just scared that if I said something, it would be wrong, and then – not that I would get judged by the others, but that they would just kind of look at me and I would just maybe get embarrassed. I don’t know what made me not participate, but I think it was mostly I wasn’t comfortable in the class.”

– Jackie, senior, Shields High School

“For AP Environmental Science I look at it in the sense that I feel like I’m held accountable. If I say something too loud or in a way doubt, I change. I’m also intimidated. In English, there are more students, so I feel more open, but with these classes, these are the kids that you would label as as smart and that’s why I’m a little bit more quiet. So, intimidation, I’m the only Latino. I need to show things differently.”

– Jay, senior, Shields High School

Understanding Silence as a Survival Mechanism

- **For Jackie and Jay, as the only students of color in their predominantly white science classroom, shaped how they participated in class – 3 factors are in play:**
 - Microaggressions
 - Stereotype threat
 - Internalized oppression



Understanding Microaggressions

Definition: everyday, verbal, nonverbal slights, snubs, or insults regardless of intent that sends a hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their minoritized group membership.



Stereotype Threat

Definition: socially premised psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies.

For more on stereotype threat, check out this video from Claude Steele, Ph.D.





Internalized Oppression

Definition: assumed racial inferiority on the part of people of color.



Understanding Agentic Nature of Silence

- Understand silence as an action rather than a failure to act.
- Paying attention to student silence as a form of participation opens up further possibilities for understanding individual students and classroom interactions.



Lecture Reflection

In four or more complete sentences (one paragraph), respond to the following questions:

- **What is your biggest takeaway from today's lecture? What pushed your thinking the most?**