



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Silent Pedagogy: Theorizing Practice

Dr. Ashima Das

Head of the Department, Department of Social Studies,
Avalon Heights International School, Navi Mumbai, India

Simi Sharma

Director, Avalon Heights International School, Navi Mumbai, India

Abstract:

The research article theorizes an innovation in teaching practice; the methodology of silent teaching. As the name suggests, silence is prescribed for both the teacher and the learner. The methodology is practiced at Avalon Heights International School, Mumbai, India for over a decade and aims to tap the benefit of silence for effective learning. The positive outcomes of the method establish the efficacy and cue for further investigation through research. The practice of silent teaching must be encouraged in other schools for establishing its relevance in the larger context.

Keywords: Innovation, silent pedagogy, Avalon heights international school, education

1. Introduction

Since time immemorial, classrooms have buzzed with meaningful and productive sounds. Silence, however is being increasingly recognized as powerful tool for enhancing the teaching- learning process. Dauenhauer (1980) contended that silence is preferred over speech in situations which transcend the capacity for verbal expression. Silence, in classrooms cannot be absolute and expresses itself through non-verbal behavior and communication. The ontological assumption here is that teaching is possible and more effective when there is absence of speech. Such an opportunity maximizes learning where the student concentration is highest. The power of silence with respect to schooling is well documented and researched (Lees 2012). Silence is practiced through meditative techniques and through silent teaching.

A classroom pedagogy rooted in 'silence' is a continued practice at Avalon Heights International School, Mumbai, India. 'Silent teaching', as it has been named is a deciphered way to reach out to the curious learners and enhance their level of learning. Unlike the initially known 'Silent Way', brainchild of the Caleb Gattegno which originated in the early 1970s, this pedagogy prescribes silence for both the teacher and the taught.

The rationale for introduction of 'silent teaching' was to explore the power of silence and enhancing concentration and learning outcomes for children.

2. The Process

2.1. Briefing

Briefing the children is extremely vital for this pedagogy. The meaning of some common symbols and their cooperation through this pedagogical experience is must. However, use of placards is also encouraged which does not require a prior knowledge of the symbols. Initially, the common techniques of behavior management for successful implementation of a new teaching learning policy like this are essential. For instance, individuals/ group of students following the ground rules could be rewarded with positive strokes while those flouting the rules could be served negative consequences like a sad smiley.

2.2. Planning

Benjamin Franklin rightly remarked, "If you fail to plan to plan to fail". This holds true in every bit for carrying out a successful 'Silent Hour'^{1*}. The elucidation of learning objectives in crucial is followed by teaching methodology. The methodology encompasses extensive usage of learning resources like visual and audio teaching aids followed by evaluation tools like worksheets, or self-check quiz etc.

¹ *Silent hour- the teaching period earmarked for silent teaching

2.3. Methods

Any method which discourages speech and could be effectively used to communicate a concept. Teachers have effectively used PowerPoint presentations, self-explanatory worksheets, board work. Any gaps in teaching-learning have to be noted and addressed in the subsequent class.

2.4. Efficacy

The students have reported improved levels of concentration and have showing better learning outcomes. Silent teaching is a welcome change for both teachers and students and is found to be efficacious in achieving the aims of the session. All teachers found in extremely effective after experiencing the success and failures in few initial sessions.

3. The Study

3.1. Objectives

The broad objective of the research would be to theorize 'Silent teaching'.

The specific objectives of the Study

- i. To give a perspective to the silent pedagogy as it existed in the school
- ii. To theorize the pedagogical practice of 'Silent teaching'.

3.2. Study Design

For theorizing the Silent pedagogy, the sensitizing concepts as illustrated in Figure 1 which would be explored. "Sensitizing concepts offer ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience; they are embedded in our disciplinary emphases and perspectival proclivities. Although sensitizing concepts may deepen perception, they provide starting points for building analysis, not ending points for evading it. We may use sensitizing concepts *only* as points of departure from which to study the data". (Charmaz 2003:259, emphasis in original) The use of sensitizing concepts would be appropriate for a study that fit into the framework of "naturalistic" ontology. Just an explanatory bit on the conceptualization; the pedagogy is interdependent on various interactive factors like the resources and the environment, and the originating factors like the organizational and individual factors which affect pedagogical transactions. There are three main sensitizing concepts, Genesis, Interactions and Outcomes which would be foundation of the study. These concepts would be treated as variables and would serve as a point of reference and guide in the analysis of data towards producing the grounded theory.

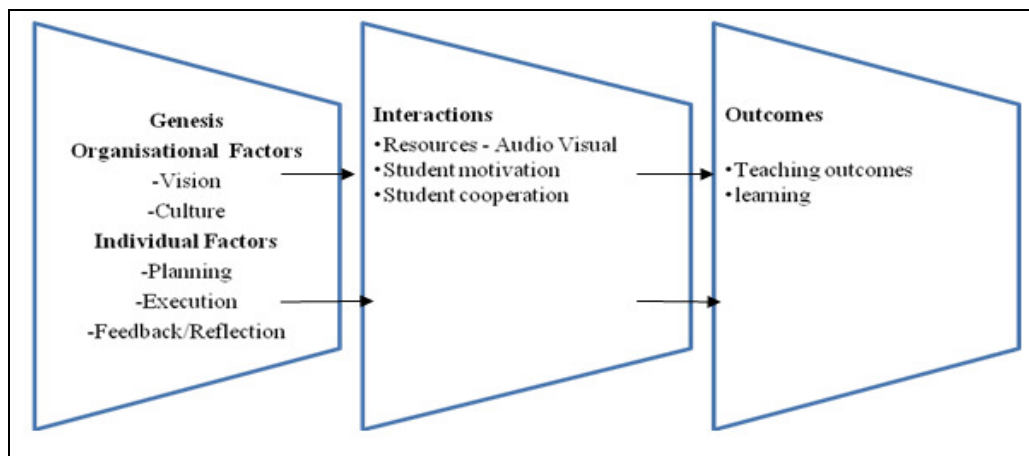


Figure 1: Sensitizing Concepts: Silent Pedagogy

3.3. Research Site

The research was carried out at Avalon Heights International School, Mumbai, India. As the pedagogy was conceived and executed through a decade at the school.

3.4. Methodology

The exploration of research objectives through the primary data sources in the selected site using qualitative measures. This study would describe and analyze the practices with respect to Silent teaching in the school. A qualitative research design will be adopted to assist in providing rich 'context bound' information (Creswell, 1994), with an underlying belief that situations are complex and hence must be portrayed from many dimensions rather than focusing on a narrow field (Bogdan & Bilklen, 1992). The intent would be to focus on the participant's perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of the reality (Merriam, 1988), with an attempt to understand not one but multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher is "bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which regardless of ultimate truth or falsity- become partially self-validating" (Bateson 1972 cited in Denzin & Lincoln 2000:19).

Surfacing ontological and epistemological assumptions are the primary steps for designing any research. Table 1 illustrates the methodology which would be the bedding rock of the research namely; ontology, epistemology, methods and the logic of inquiry. It would be interesting to first look at the logic of enquiry, which is abductive, “it is sometimes described as involving induction, but this grossly underestimates the complexity of the task involved” (Blaikie 2000:25). The idea of abduction refers to the process used to generate social scientific accounts from social actors’ accounts; for deriving technical concepts and theories from lay concepts and interpretations of social life (ibid: 114).

Ontology	Epistemology	Methods	Logic of reasoning
Viewing the social reality as the social construction of the participants.	Assumes that people employ interpretive schemes which must be understood, and that the character of the local context must be articulated.	In-depth interviewing will be used to gather information from the participating. Non Participant Observation and Participant Observation	Abductive; describing and understanding the silent pedagogy as understood by the research participants thereby producing a technical account from lay accounts.

Table 1: Methodology

3.5. Sampling Strategy

Theoretical sampling was employed for saturation of data. The aim was to have information rich cases, which could provide valid knowledge and meaningful insights. As categories emerged from the data, new samples were added to increase meaningful diversity.

3.6. Data Collection Analysis

The data was collected using the in-depth interviews with the respondents and key informants and non-participant and participant observation in the research setting. All data were analyzed to identify emerging themes and on what Miller (2000) (quoted in Welsh, 2002) terms as ‘organizing’ the data, which was done by coding the text and breaking it down into more manageable texts. For the observation data, the notes were scrutinized for recurring themes and were matched with those themes emerging from the interviews.

3.7. Findings

The findings were analyzed against the conceptual framework illustrating the sensitizing concepts. Within the large gamut of genesis came the organizational factors which led to origin of the pedagogy, and the individual factors which pertain to the main actors of the entire classroom proceedings, the teachers. The Interactions comprised of the classroom procedures and milieu during the silent hour and the Outcomes encompasses the assessment of the learning for the learners.

3.7.1. Genesis

3.7.1.1. School Factors

The school’s philosophical belief and practice of ‘soulful schooling’ forms the foundation of such teaching methodology. The school upholds the mission to educate its learners in a way which empowers them to face real issues of life, which makes them uncover the purpose of their life and help them find meaning and solace in the world. These perspectives like roots hold the larger methodological umbrella. The school up keeping with its nodal beliefs practices silent teaching to serve its curious learners giving them an unparalleled platform to interpret the learning in their own way without being compelled to look at the learning content as it was designed and delivered. The methodology opens up newer channels of communication, helping the teachers and learners to step up their thinking and acting procedures.

The school believes in innovation and freedom of choice. The teachers design their silent hour lesson plans individually but are guided through the process by the team leaders.

3.7.1.2. Individual Factors

The plan is designed and carried out in the classroom by the teacher and hence largely depend on individual factors like creativity and planning, control over classroom processes and reflection at the end of the session. The teachers who plan meticulously and take into consideration every possible query and doubts of the students succeed effortlessly. The success factor is also dependent on the level of engagement the teacher offers and incorporates active learning element using communication mediums like slates and chalk, paper pen or designing group activities which ensures participation.

In one of the English class, the teacher had engaged the students with an activity where they had to listen to the audio of a poem recital and simultaneously identify the various emotions which the poet was trying to evoke in the readers depicted in the accompanying worksheet. In one of the Geography classes the teacher had large outline maps of a continent and provided clay to the group members to make the various physical features on those maps. Both these illustrations exemplify high level of engagement of the learners while the learning content is delivered.

Execution of a lesson plan is largely an art and the individual factors of the teachers like her knowledge level, creativity, intuition and spontaneity play a vital role in the silent classroom. The following voices of the teacher may help in gauging the intricateness of the process and its scope.

- The most difficult part of the silent hour is its intricate planning. The teacher has to be prepared with every possible query, every nuance of the lesson for a gratifying class. (Teacher 1)
- Sometimes we are enlightened by the way students interpret a concept which may be different from how we perceived. (Teacher 2)

The class usually ends with a reflective task which enables the student to think on how the learning happened and how it could be improved. The reflection sheets are also useful for the teacher to make the process better for the students next time.

3.7.2. Interactions

These interactions pertain to the classroom execution of the silent plan. Of late, the silent lesson is often taken to the class as a PowerPoint presentation which is customized to suit the requirements of a Silent hour like clear set of instructions which illustrate the expectations like “Be ready with notebooks and textbooks”, “Open your textbook to page No #”, “Defaulters would be given an extra question for homework” etc.

The use of audio or video is seen to enhance the level of engagement. The audio or video parts of the lesson are however succeeded by worksheets which help the learners to recall and the teacher to assess the level of learning.

The student motivation to learn depends upon how the teacher has planned the lesson for them. A lesson plan with active engagement is likely to succeed over a plan which requires a passive audience to a slideshow or video. A lesson with variation is known to enhance the student motivation and the learning outcomes both, for instance a Maths lesson which begins with a story linked to the concept, followed by PowerPoint with an example and practice sums, followed by a group game, all in a single silent class.

The students generally clarify all their doubts using written notes and gestures, however in case the question requires an elaborate explanation the students “park their questions”, that is, they will write their question on a paper and drop it in the tray. The teachers in many cases carry placards for effective delivery and execution of the plan. Every time, the teacher finds a new way to communicate it excites the learning community and improves the participation.

3.7.3. Learning

All teachers who had practiced silent teaching had vocalized the effectiveness of the process. The silent hour maximizes learning achievement. The teachers reported that they were able to deliver more content as compared to a regular teaching period as the disciplinary factors were controlled. In most cases the students welcome the idea of silent teaching as it enabled them to concentrate and learn better (some testifying quotes are mentioned below). The informal assessments which follow the silent hour showed that the students had been able to successfully learn the content which was offered through silent teaching.

- We enjoy the silent hour; it breaks the monotony of regular classes and helps to explore newer ways to communicate (Student, Grade 8)
- We are able to learn better. There are no distractions whatsoever. (Student, Grade 9)

4. Conclusion

The school’s experimentation with silent teaching is a novel way to the educational process. The school has nurtured the concept and devised many innovative ways to communicate with the students in silence. The concept evolved with integration of technology in the classroom and has been a significant addition to the innovative pedagogical practices. There is not one way to teach in silence and it is thus not a model but a philosophical belief which guides the learner centered pedagogy which the school advocates. It is premise on which the educators can model their experiences and creativity.

5. References

- Blaikie, Norman (2000). *Designing Social Research: The Logic of Anticipation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: an introduction to theory and methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Charmaz, K. (2003). *Grounded theory: Objectivist and constructivist methods*. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies for qualitative inquiry* (2nd ed., pp. 249-291). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Dauenhauer, B. (1980). *Silence: The phenomenon and its ontological significance*. Bloomington,
- Denzin, Norman K. & Yuonna S. Lincoln (2000). *Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research* in Norman K. Denzin & Yuonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research: Second Edition*. Thousand Oaks: Sage
- IN: Indiana University Press
- Lees, H.E. (2012). *Silence in Schools*. Staffordshire, UK: Trentham Books.
- Merriam, SB. 1988. *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*. San Francisco: Jossey- Bass.
- Welsh, E. 2002. *Dealing with Data: Using NVivo in the Qualitative Data Analysis Process*. Forum: Qualitative Social Research [On- Line Journal] Available URL: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/>, 3 (2).