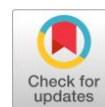


Editorial



Solitude together with education

Małgorzata Walejko ^{a,1,*}, Julian Stern ^{b,2}

^a University of Szczecin, 70-453, Aleja Papieża Jana Pawła II 22A, Szczecin, Poland

^b Bishop Grosseteste University, Longdales Rd, Lincoln LN1 3DY, United Kingdom

¹ gosenka0@interia.pl; ² julian.stern@bishogp.ac.uk;

* corresponding author

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ABSTRACT

The articles published in this edition are based on papers previously presented at the third International Pandisciplinary Conference on Solitude in Community 'Alone Together', which took place online between 31st March and 2nd April 2022 in Szczecin, Poland. The event was organized by the International Society for Research on Solitude with support from the University of Szczecin (Poland) and the Bishop Grosseteste University (UK), with the attendants from 13 countries (UK, Poland, Australia, Romania, Norway, Netherlands, USA, India, Italy, Sweden, Israel, Canada, Malta). The conference series motto says, 'we must, it would seem, be alone together' (Macmurray 2004, p 169). Following the conference, this special Issue is born out of the collaboration between the International Society for Research on Solitude and the Journal of Silence Studies in Education. It is a huge joy and honour to cooperate and co-create the network of researchers dedicated to the idea of solitude and silence in various contexts.



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A young, fragile girl is sitting in a crowded subway with her eyes closed and headphones. In the withdrawal from the buzzy world, she surrounds herself with the sounds of the oceans, listening to contemplative, mysterious whale songs. The quietude of the ocean protects her autistic mind from the turmoil of stimuli. We don't really know if she is immersed in the depths of the ocean or in the

depths of her soul, where whale music is singing of her deepest desires, fears, losses, and memories, hidden under the surface.

That is a scene from a South Korean television series ‘Extraordinary Attorney Woo’ (directed by Yoo In-shik, 2022) and brings to mind Maria Montessori, who argued that silence would give children access to their inner world and let them experience the internal life (Schmitz-Meder, 1991). How important is this call, since it is hard to find anything more valuable than experiencing the inner life? Silence gives us – and children – access to it, but silence is also a guardian of inner mystery, as Huxley wrote:

From pure sensation to the intuition of beauty, from pleasure and pain to love and the mystical ecstasy and death – all the things that are fundamental, all the things that, to the human spirit, are most profoundly significant, can only be experienced, not expressed. The rest is always and everywhere silence. After silence that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music. (Huxley, 1950, p. 19.)

Like the music of whales.

In this issue of journal, we would like to look at the relationship between silence, solitude and loneliness in the context of education. Solitude was defined by Koch as ‘the state in which experience is disengaged from other people’ (Koch, 1994, p. 44) with disengagement being fourfold, ‘in perception, thought, emotion, and action’ (Koch, 1994, p. 57). In this account silence seems to be a form of solitude – a kind of disengagement, primarily perceptual (not listening or hearing: aural) and actional (not speaking or making other intentional sounds: oral) (Stern, 2014, p. 147-8, Stern & Walejko, 2020). Solitude is an experience, one that can be positive or negative; it can be chosen or enforced, accompanied by joy or suffering, pleasure or pain (Stern, 2022, p. 4). Likewise, silence may be a positive or negative, willed or imposed, experience (Lees, 2012, 2022), being categorised by Lees as ‘weak’ or ‘strong’, the former negative and punitive, the latter positive and sought (Stern, 2022, p. 6). Solitude and silence may be thus associated with the emotion of loneliness, which combines the negative affect of pain or suffering and its interpretation (Spinoza, 1955, p.173-185), like the idea of absent love, causing self-rejection, when one thinks the absence is ‘deserved’ (Stern, 2014, p. 182).

Link between the three concepts indicated and education will be the stronger, the more education really cares about children themselves and their self-realization, not merely instrumental purposes, as Helen Lees calls for in one of our articles. Let us recall Montessori again: the role of silence in education is not to improve results, but to create an inner attitude that is to help the child in life, strengthen it from the inside, develop focus, balance, and own initiative. A person will not be the same after experiencing deep silence, and that is the strength of real education (Schmitz-Meder, 1991).

The first article **Learning in/of solitude in the context of pedagogical monoseology**, by Elżbieta Dubas from Poland, deals with the just mentioned change: its dimensions, and personal areas in the light of the theory of existential learning. Her empirical research focused on the connection between being alone and learning, conducted in Poland on a group of 19 people on the threshold of adulthood (aged 18-25). The research showed a very wide range of learning in/of solitude, including, for example, coping with loneliness and difficulties, getting to know oneself (‘I was learning myself, who I am’) and self-realization, learning through reflective contemplation, changes regarding the philosophy of life or quality time with oneself. Yet, apparently proving the thesis that solitude brings people together, the participants declared, for example, ‘opening up to others’, appreciating them and learning to ask for help. And – how solitude might be beneficial.

But are the adolescents aware of the benefits? What does solitude mean to them? – the question was asked by our Canadian colleagues: Sandra Bosacki, Shanel Quenneville, Sophie Powell and Victoria Talwar, in their article **Canadian adolescents’ solitude experiences, self-perceptions, and well-being**. The authors thoroughly focused on adolescents’ solitude activities, their reasons for choosing to be alone and how they feel and think when they are away from others. A majority of the youths experience time alone as more positive, while one-third (mainly girls) as more negative. The more positive feelings,

the lower competence in social situations. Older adolescents enjoy their solitude more and benefit socially and emotionally more than younger youth, which supports past research that loneliness peaks in early adolescence. The study supports the view that solitude is a complex, multifaceted, and paradoxical phenomenon, providing emotional benefits and pains and enabling positive and negative experience.

The next article deals again with the educational benefits of time spent alone and in silence. Amy Webster from the UK in her article entitled **Children reading alone and reading together: Literary representations and lessons from a pandemic** claims that being alone with books in quiet spaces seems to facilitate immersive reading experiences and counteracts feelings of loneliness, by providing escapism and company. Inspired by three literary representations of young people who are immersed in books – Alice’s sister in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* and *Matilda*, the author recalls the pandemic ‘lesson’, when children’s reading was largely a solitary experience, contrasted with shared reading dominating schools. How much it is worth promoting solitary reading is shown by its benefits described in the text, like children’s wellbeing, self-confidence, and educative aims.

Torgeir Fjeld from Norway in his essay **The silence of the educated** presents and explains Wolfgang Schirmacher’s ‘living’ philosophy of education, cultivated at the European Graduate School (EGS) founded by the philosopher. The author contextualizes elements of the conception to the thought of Martin Heidegger. One of the topics he tackles is silence as necessary and constitutive for any relation between master and student: ‘Education isn’t so much about a set of verbalized instructions ... but instead a kind of pantomime ... isn’t so much a telling as it is a showing’. Another ‘tacit speech’ is speaking by art, which brings truth into presence; meditative or poetic thinking helps to ‘see again the things as they are’. However, silence can be also repressive, used as a technology to hide from view truths, what is analyzed in the context of Heidegger’s support for the Nazis. The author also, critically, raises the topic of the educational standardization of knowledge, a clearly defined catalogue of what counts as knowledges, and rigorous sets of criteria to assess whether these knowledges have been acquired.

That is interesting that the same question, but in a slightly different context, we find in the article by Helen E Lees from Italy. **Science and self-care via therapy and Internal Family Systems in the context of silence practices for schools** is a postulate of involving therapy (for example known as Internal Family Systems) into education as its equal partner. The author undermines the dominance of science in schools, arguing that the idea of caring for ourselves in a therapeutically engaged way is a part of well understood education, especially if we take into account the inevitability of childhood trauma and the harmful nature of much of the school system. Meditation, mindfulness and silence practices in school may be a good start, as they help children to recover from all the noise and to cope better with their inner harm, but they can’t heal it. Therefore, schools need a research base for therapy as well as the system shifts from one of harm to healing and well-being.

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‘All the things that are fundamental’ – wrote Huxley in phrase cited above – ‘can only be experienced, not expressed’. Enormous and most important things, ones yet hidden in the depth – like whales, whose songs may be heard only in silence. The questions ‘most profoundly significant to human spirit’ should be the most cared objects of education. If not, then what?

Acknowledgment

We would like to express gratitude to our friends, Dat Bao and Bambang Widi Pratolo, for the invitation to be guest editors of this issue. It is a huge joy and honour to cooperate and co-create the network of researchers dedicated to the idea of solitude and silence in various contexts. The articles published here are based on papers previously presented at the third International Pandisciplinary Conference on Solitude in Community ‘Alone Together’, which took place online between 31st March and 2nd April 2022 in Szczecin, Poland, organized by the International Society for Research on Solitude with support from the University of Szczecin (Poland) and the Bishop Grosseteste University (UK), with the attendants from 13 countries (UK, Poland, Australia, Romania, Norway, Netherlands, USA, India, Italy, Sweden, Israel, Canada, Malta), because, as the conference series motto says, ‘we must, it would seem, be alone together’ (Macmurray 2004, p 169)

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