

Editorial

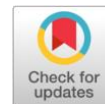
The power of silence for learning, artistic expression and mindfulness

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ABSTRACT

This editorial introduces a special issue exploring silence not just as absence, but as a vibrant and multifaceted phenomenon across educational, artistic, and therapeutic contexts. The eight articles examine how different forms of silence—physical, reflective, and creative—can serve as transformative tools in various fields. The contributors investigate silence's capacity to foster deep learning, artistic innovation, and personal growth, while acknowledging its complexity and potential in contemporary settings. The collection demonstrates how intentional silence creates spaces for authentic engagement and meaning-making, particularly valuable as a counterbalance to our increasingly noise-filled world. Through diverse theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, the articles reveal silence's capacity to enhance learning environments and creative practices. While identifying critical areas for future research, this special issue positions silence as an active, dynamic force, opening new possibilities for education, artistic expression, and therapeutic practice.



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1. Focus of The Special Issue

Silence, far from being a simple absence of sound, can manifest in multiple forms that serve distinct purposes in educational, artistic, and therapeutic endeavours. Physical silence represents the acoustic quietude that allows for concentrated focus and sensory awareness. Contemplative silence emerges as an internal state of mental stillness, enabling deep reflection and meditation. Creative silence operates as a generative space where ideas can germinate, and artistic expression can take its many forms. These different types of silence, as explored by Kagge (2017) and Picard (1948), work together to create conditions for profound learning and personal transformation.

The eight contributions in this special issue examine how these various forms of silence function across different domains. We do not mean to suggest that silence is inevitably, or necessarily pedagogically productive. However, when we are attuned to its potential it can be very productive. In educational settings, pedagogical silence can serve as a means of fostering deep learning and understanding, creating spaces where learners can process information and develop their own insights. Within artistic practices, aesthetic silence can be both a medium and a message, allowing for the emergence of meaning through carefully crafted absences in poetry, music (other performing arts),

and the visual arts. Therapeutic silences can offer healing spaces where individuals can connect with their inner experiences and emotions. Silence can be designed for pedagogical purposes. There are moments when practitioners might best still their tongues and let the silence do the work.

Sardello's (2008) concept of silence as an orientation toward wholeness is particularly relevant in understanding how different types of silence interact. Communal silence, experienced in group settings, can foster collective reflection and shared understanding. Digital silence, increasingly important in our connected world, provides necessary breaks from constant information flow and virtual noise. Spiritual silence opens pathways to transcendent experiences and deeper self-awareness. As Prochnik (2010) suggests, silence bridges internal and external worlds through its capacity to cultivate stillness and reflection. This bridging function operates across all types of silence, whether in the form of mindful pauses in conversation, intentional breaks in artistic compositions, or contemplative moments in therapeutic sessions. Understanding these various manifestations of silence enables educators, artists, contemplative practitioners and therapists to more effectively harness its transformative potential in their respective fields.

2. Why The Special Issue Was Needed

Despite the acknowledged value of silence across many discipline areas (Stoller, 2009), its integration into education, artistic expression, contemplation and therapy remains underexplored. While literature on meditative practices or artistic silence exists, it often lacks an educational focus that connects silence to pedagogy, creativity, and personal growth. This issue seeks to address this gap by investigating silence as a pedagogical and creative medium within arts education and beyond. Jaworski (1997) highlights silence's interdisciplinary dimensions, but its applications in fostering reflection and learning require further attention. By linking silence with diverse contexts, this special issue illuminates its potential to transform learning and create safe spaces of active contemplation, addressing a critical void in current research.

3. Overview of The Articles

The eight articles in this special issue collectively explore the possibilities for the use of silence across discipline areas and practice traditions. Each contribution highlights silence's unique role in enabling self-reflection, creativity, and connection.

Amy Hanna's **"Don't Look for Meaning in the Words. Listen to the Silences"** provides a conceptual framework for understanding silence through power dynamics in the arts. Drawing on Foucault, Hanna illustrates how silence operates within linguistic, epistemic, and symbolic boundaries, with consideration of its pedagogical potential. The analysis of Heaney's poetry highlights silence as an active force in literacy, social, historical and political engagement.

In **"Silence, Focal Practices, and Existential Inquiry"**, Greenwalt, Hadeer, and Kothari draw from Heidegger and Borgmann to juxtapose authentic silence with the noise of conformity. Exploring photography and yoga as focal practices, they argue for the integration of silence in education to promote self-awareness and authentic engagement. Their article offers practical strategies for educators to design classrooms that value silence as a generative and transformative practice.

Creely and Waterhouse, in **"Silence, Poetic Inquiry and Meaning-Making,"** investigate the interplay of silence and literacy using poetry as inquiry. Grounded in Heideggerian philosophy and the linguistics of Barthes, their work reveals how intentional silence shapes textual engagement and fosters deeper comprehension. They advocate for silence-based pedagogies, pointing to its critical role in enhancing literacy education through contemplative practices.

Southcott's **"A Pocket of Possibility: Silence in Creative Australian Music Teaching and Learning"** traces the historical influence of John Cage, George Self, and R. Murray Schafer on Australian music education. Her autoethnographic account highlights how silence has redefined music composition and pedagogy, offering innovative strategies for integrating silence into music education.

Choi's **"Alice, Where Did You Get That Blue?"** focuses on silence in visual arts to explore solitude and reflection. Using Charles Blackman's Alice in Wonderland series, Choi demonstrates how silence in paintings fosters visual and emotional literacy. The study integrates Dewey's aesthetics with TESOL practices, proposing a novel method to enhance English language learning through art.

Harumi's **"Silent Dialogues: The Shifting Flow of Silence and Solitude in Tokyo Story"** examines Ozu's classic film to understand silence's role in human relationships and language learning. Using Multimodal Social Interaction Analysis, Harumi explores silence's communicative potential, offering insights into its use in L2 pedagogy. The study highlights silence as a tool for empathy, reflection, and connection in language education.

Genat's **"Silence, Stillness, the Contemplative, and Creativity"** offers practice insights into the contemplative dimensions of silence. Drawing on personal reflections based on Buddhist meditative practices *in situ*, Genat discusses how stillness fosters awareness and wholesome mental states. The article focuses on contemplative practices, learning and embodiment with creative exploration.

Finally, Gruber and Henriksen's **"Silent Witness: Creativity, Mindfulness, and Social-Emotional Learning"** presents a structured model of silence-based art therapy. Their conceptual framework connects mindfulness, silence, and art to promote self-awareness and emotional regulation. The article positions the practice of "silent witness" as transformative for social-emotional learning, offering educators practical approaches to integrate these concepts into curricula.

4. Conclusion

This special issue "The Power of Silence for Learning, Artistic Expression and Mindfulness" makes a significant contribution to understanding silence not merely as lack but as a powerful pedagogical, artistic, and therapeutic force. The collected articles demonstrate how silence operates as both a physical phenomenon and a metaphysical space where transformation, reflection, and deep engagement can flourish. Through diverse theoretical lenses and methodological approaches, the authors reveal silence's multifaceted role in fostering creativity, self-discovery, and emotional development.

The studies presented here offer compelling evidence for silence's capacity to enhance learning environments and artistic practices. They show how intentional silence creates spaces for authentic engagement with creative processes, allowing individuals to access deeper levels of understanding and expression. The research particularly highlights how silence functions as an important counterpoint to our increasingly noise-filled world, including our educational and artistic spaces. Recent Australian scientific research (Valenzisi et al. 2024) has revealed how anthropogenic underwater noise is even impacting fish in riverine estuaries. Given how noisy we humans are then, is it any wonder that even on good days, with our heads well above water, we still need quiet moments for integration, reflection, and meaning making.

Leaving estuarine soundscapes and noise pollution aside, though, several critical areas remain underexplored. Longitudinal research examining silence's long-term impact on learners' development and creative practices would provide valuable insights into its sustained effects. Cross-cultural studies could illuminate how different societies interpret and utilise silence in educational and artistic contexts, potentially revealing new approaches to its value and implementation. Additionally, as learning environments increasingly incorporate digital elements, understanding how silence functions in virtual and hybrid spaces becomes crucial. Questions emerge about how we might cultivate meaningful silence in online environments and whether virtual silence carries the same transformative potential as trusting intentional silence in physical proximity with others.

This special issue ultimately positions silence as having potency rather than being passive and ineffectual. Drawing on Sardello's (2008) conception of silence as a pathway to wholeness, the research suggests that intentional engagement with silence could be particularly valuable in our current educational landscape, where constant noise, connectivity and information overload often prevail. This reconceptualisation of silence as a valuable, perhaps even precious, pedagogical and creative tool, opens new possibilities for educators, artists, practitioners and researchers to exploit its transformative potential in fostering deep learning, authentic artistic expression, and emotional wellbeing.

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