

Teaching french: Voices and silences

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ABSTRACT

In the midst of voices, in the pauses when emerges silence as part of a conversation, one is left to wonder if it is only an empty, shapeless moment where nothing is expressed. Yet, this article deliberately posits the phenomenon of silence as inextricable from the voices of teachers and as a meaningful part of the phenomenological project - Voices of Teachers. Teaching French in Victoria. It does so through a phenomenological interpretation of data obtained through semi-structured interviews of eight teachers online, on the phone, and in person. Even if the very nature of silence leaves one always having to deduct and induct meaning from the unspoken at such moments of a conversation, findings show that silence is not to be viewed as a polar opposite to the voices of the participants but rather as an active performance which calls for an intentional analysis. Furthermore, the literature review on the topic of silence revealed that the area is largely undertheorized. Most of theories read were aimed at the pedagogical use of silence in classrooms, but few talked about the silence performed by teachers in the education sector. The article propounds and recommends that there is a need to bring to the fore the silence about teaching on the part of the teachers and to incorporate it as part of the phenomenon of teaching French.



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1. Introduction

The title of the article is based on two main terms: voice and silence. Should one read into the title a goal that is irreconcilable by nature and intent or rather contemplate how to bring together these two opposites as fundamental tenets in the phenomenological interpretation of teaching French? The article deliberately posits indeed the phenomenon of silence as inextricable from the voices of teachers and as a meaningful part of the phenomenological project - Voices of Teachers. Teaching French in Victoria (TRANQUILLE, 2024). This would then imply that “voice” and “silence” are not in opposition to each other but rather, are the two facets of the representation of intentionality where voice reinvokes silence as a form of expression. Silence is not thus considered as the absolute limit of discourse but as an element that functions alongside voice, in as much as it creates and upholds tension within discourse in order to punctuate the latter.

One could ask a question that on the surface looks more than reasonable: Why look for silence in a research project about voices? Indeed, the project originally presented the voices of eight participants about the phenomenon of teaching French within an institutionalized setting, the secondary school. The former expressed views, concerns questions about their lived experience, their motivating force, the perception of French and its future within the school curriculum (*Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2023*), the fostering of social presence when teaching French online (Godhe & Wennås Brante, 2024). Teaching French was not only a meaningful transaction of learning and

teaching (Brown, 2020) with achievement through learning as its product, it was rather a complex everyday experience that stood in the gap between theory and practice.

First, it is important to understand voice as a phenomenological concept before contemplating the meaning of silence. Voices of teachers offer a foray into the quiddity of the phenomenon by the description of the lived experience of the participants within the broader perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology. To understand 'voice', the etymology of the word 'voice' showed that it could be a noun as well as a verb and that both lexical instances offered a wide array of definitions. Indeed, the latter expressed, vented, uttered, voiced their feelings and emotions. Some broached for the first time what they had for long pondered over. Others aired their demotivation. Their active voices were clearly expressed in the interview and meetings, phone calls and emails. As a noun, 'voice' could be the sound produced by a physical combination of the larynx, lungs and syrinx working together. Interestingly, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (*Silence Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster, 2023*) adds to the definition that the voice is produced by humans when speaking or singing. One wonders how this definition will now be altered in the age of AI.

The notion of intentionality (Gadamer, 2004) indicative of the inseparable link between individuals and their worlds is indeed central to the phenomenological principle of the 'voice'. Therefore, expressing one's voice presupposes that one is a conscious being who acts and interacts on purpose. One's voice then reflects how one makes sense of one's actions and is further linked to one's subjectivity. (Heidegger, 1962) explains, moreover, that the voice is agentic in as much as it is the direct interpretation of individuals as subjects of their existential choices. It is also of an evolving nature in as much as it assumes that reality is dynamic. Voices become a conscious entanglement, an intentional complex that offers a mosaic of possibilities in the midst of which, there were also moments of silence. In the pauses when emerges silence as part of a conversation, one is hence left to wonder if it is only an empty shapeless moment where nothing is expressed, uncomfortable to the speaker and to the listener, a void which voices slip into (Alerby & Alerby, 2003).

1.1. The representation and meaning of silence in the research project

Silence comes from the Latin word (*Silence Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster, 2023*), *silentium* (being silent) as a form of passive expression, a reference to a mere state. The state of being silent thus refers to one's beingness in silence. The French etymology leads to "absence of sounds". Absence is formed from two Latin words, away from (*ab* in Latin) what is (*esse* in Latin meaning "to be"). To mark its presence, silence could then be identified as a marker of boundaries occurring in the interstices of what speech is (Alerby & Alerby, 2003). It is only a mere gap before and after utterances, a gap with no positive significance of its own. But there is also the absence of the presence of the utterances.

In this absence-presence, silence does not refer to the same entity. In the first instance, silence refers to the absence itself and in the second to the missing utterance (Alerby & Alerby, 2003). But both, however, it can be said, co-exist and do not disrupt the flow of utterances but rather originate from a disruption of expectations. Silence then appears active when all acts, performances are intentional, conscious and not absurd, and that every performance, in which one engages, is deemed appropriate to one's lifeworld (Alerby & Alerby, 2003). Being silent becomes one's connection to the context in which one is, like the monks who have renounced speech and made the vow of silence to better contemplate the divine (Alerby & Alerby, 2003). Silence in its experiential qualities is not immaterial, as its etymological sense might lead one to believe.

Furthermore, silence, in its metaphorical sense, is seen as gold or at other times as a wall or even a threat for the value it carries and embodies. Even when one keeps silence, it can be said that one's silence is eloquent! Heidegger indeed emphasizes that we enter the world with a kind of practical intentionality that is essentially interpretive of the context one is in, one's lifeworld, and that eventually the meaning of a phenomenon is characterized by its context. All these conditions and presences of silence are then material and metaphorical to a large extent and at the same time. Each one of us has experienced silence as we have silent and unexpressed dimensions of ourselves within ourselves. Complete knowledge is unimaginable, unattainable as there remains always something beyond words, argues Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 2013). He even expressly points out that one

keeps silent only when one CAN speak. That is why silence is constitutive of voices as one elects to refrain from words to remain silent.

Furthermore, van Manen (Manen van Max, 1997) asserts that silence can be of different forms. He mentions 'literal silence' when one does not fill the space of the conversation with words. Epistemological silence is when words cannot totally express what is seen, heard and felt. One recognizes the phenomenon, knows what is but the unspeakable beckons and one keeps silent. Ontological silence is when one feels the needs to express the beingness of a phenomenon but is forced to the predicament of returning to silence even after moments of wonder and enlightenment (Manen van Max, 1997) Hence, silence is here portrayed as a lived experience and an intentional phenomenon. It is part of the reality of the participants. It is felt literally and gives rise to what could have been, what ought to have been said in its epistemological and ontological sense

2. Data collection and method

Any research epistemology is the theory of knowledge binding data and interpretation. In that case, hermeneutic phenomenology due to its concern for everyday practices like education was seen as an effective research theory to address the problem, purpose and method . It ensured a rigorous, critical and systematic approach to the study of the lived experience of teaching French through the voices and silences of the participants. Undeniably, phenomenology reveals the subjectivity of human existence and expresses the lived experiences of the participants. It offers the evidence of the intentional acts of Dasein which is expressed through language, an intentional voice.

Though, there is no prescribed and unanimous methodological sets of practices recognized for hermeneutic phenomenology, van Manen's approach (Manen van Max, 1997) served as a guiding principle to collect and interpret data. In the project, eight teachers were selected through the snowballing method (Parker et al., 2020). They represented a range of experience and opinions and were at different stages of their teaching careers. Some were at the start of their career; others had numerous years of teaching. Some had always been teachers; others had come to teaching after a career in another field. Others stopped teaching face-to-face in 2023 and opted for online teaching solely or are now teaching in another state. Some have retired or are about to. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used and the names of their schools were not revealed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted online, on the phone and in person.

The cycle of hermeneutic interpretation has opened multi-faceted possibilities of viewing the phenomenon, its "questionableness" (Barnacle, 2004) and here considers the reflection on silence. Else, the participants' silence can be easily overlooked and even ignored. Being observant of all types of utterances, of which silence is also part helps identify what is not said just as much as what is said (Alerby, 2020). Even if the very nature of silence left one always having to deduct meaning from the unspoken, it is not a polar opposite to the voices of the participants but is rather an active performance correlative to their voices and hence calls for an intentional analysis. It is here seen as a forceful act unravelling streams of emotions and uncovering power games preferably hushed up and left out of speech.

The aim then is to articulate silence as a voice and to draw attention to silences of teachers about their quotidian teaching practice in the context of the schools where they work. The silences of the participants were part of the research project just as much as their voices. The article will then delve into and make visible the different forms of expression that silence conveys as part of a wider of a pedagogical discussion.

In this present vision of silence as part of teachers' voices, the fundamental questions will then be to understand:

What is to be understood by "voice" when teachers perform "silence"

How "silence" explains "voice".

2.1. Acknowledging potential weaknesses

While there seems to be a growing awareness about teachers' experience with and of silence, the area is largely undertheorized. The literature on the topic of silence as part of a teacher's voice was

quasi inexistant. Most of theories I read were aimed at the pedagogical use of silence in classrooms (Bao, 2023), but few talked about the silence of teachers in the education sector (Thumvichit, 2023)

One could, on the other hand highlight, the limitations of the present study on the grounds of phenomenology's lack of scientific objectivity about credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Phenomenology is indeed primarily a philosophical method of questioning and not one that offers generalisations or determinate conclusions that can be proven and captured with analytic clarity. It remains an abstemious method of envisioning the pre-reflective experience of a phenomenon within its context (Manen van Max, 1997). Even if some could contest such contributions, I argue that the present hermeneutic interpretation has captured the phenomenality of silence in teaching French and rendered its meaning. It has furthermore paid close attention to the ethical considerations such a project requires and thus can offer findings that are based on thorough existential data that have been carefully collected and analysed (Creswell & Guetterman, 2020).

3. Analysis and Findings

3.1. Findings: What does “voice” look like when teachers perform “silence”

The teachers interviewed were enthusiastic about their participation in the project and even commented afterwards that they had appreciated being invited to share their experience as French teachers. Adele, one of the participants wrote in her email after having read the transcript, “I actually had goosebumps reading the transcript. I think it was a really powerful conversation that we had”. They were always enthusiastic during the phone calls and the in-person meetings. I looked for moments of unease and frustration about difficulty in dealing with challenging behaviour, and if they sometimes needed to ask for help to continue teaching in the face of difficult classroom management issues. There seemed to be none! In short, why the silence?

One could thus ask if their silences were then paradoxically part of their discourse. Iterative readings of the transcripts and reviewing of the recordings showed, furthermore, a total silence about disruptive behaviour in classes, issues of class management and incapacity to reach the participants' pedagogical goals, which are all part of daily challenges faced by teachers. None of the teachers interviewed expressed negative emotions, anger, or utter dissatisfaction. They never showed any sign of inadequacy, even in the face of difficulty. They only expressed positive sentiments about their students and painted an enthusiastic picture of their classrooms and the success they have in teaching. Enthusiasm, research says is an intrinsic quality that guides their teaching and help motivate their students. Anne, a participant, explains that most students would even improve with the proper support and encouragement from the teacher: “Given time and encouragement, most students like it; they like the challenge of thinking and the freedom to express their opinion without judgment.”

When surveyed the silences encountered during the research project could bring one to stand at the limits of phenomenology in those moments of silence when the ‘I’ of the participants muted their feelings and did not express their voice. As a matter of fact, the transcripts reveal in those times when the conversation verges on silence or refusal to express one's feelings, a heavy use of another pronoun, “you” in a last attempt for the subject “I” to hide behind a vague “you”, as in the case of Darren just before he refused to continue talking to me during the interview, as explained later: “Obviously, there are times when you become conscious of your own limitations, when you realize you're beginning to pretend

3.2. Silence: an interplay between empowerment and disempowerment

From the unspoken or the implied in the teachers' comments, one could deduct the other side of a reality which is kept silent while the participants chose not to disclose their true thinking. This left me to speculate about appearances that teachers maintain in a profession where the focus is first and foremost on positive emotions and achievement. The call for enthusiasm is fundamental in the teaching profession as it is commonly thought that teachers need to display positive emotions and be always motivated to motivate in return young adolescents in their learning journey. The constant enthusiasm of the participants seemed to replicate the attitudes and behaviour expected from teachers by one and all despite having to cope with challenges on a daily basis.

One could argue also that constant discourse in educational policy texts, public scrutiny and opinions in contemporary media about teacher accountability have shaped representations of the teaching profession and teacher identity. Teachers cannot voice incapacity (Nicole Mockler, 2022) it would be a sign of professional disempowerment. Hence, all teachers should feel, and sound empowered displaying a sense of accomplishment at all times. Continuing from Anne's above comment, there seems to be nothing to hinder progress in learning and teaching. Indeed, empowerment includes a sense of autonomy of beliefs in one's self-realization and self-efficacy. The teacher is empowered to succeed despite the challenges. Anne explained:

For the ones who don't like it, as a second language teacher, I feel one has the responsibility to lead young minds, young people, sometimes unwillingly, into a world where, with calm, quiet, and order, they can access the beauty and richness of another language and culture.

During the interview, the participants explained clearly as expressed above that their main line of action was to support first and foremost their class reach their goal. The system, however, was responsible for affecting teachers' performance. Hence, they complained about school regulations and mandates that often exert power and severely constrain their professional agency by adding to their workload (Longmuir et al., 2022).

However, they never mentioned during the interview voicing their views openly at the school where they taught. It is customarily thought that empowerment and silence are two sets of norms that do not mirror each other. If one is empowered, one voices one's beliefs and forms part of in the decision-making process (Berkovich & Bogler, 2021). One then shows one's full engagement and commitment to the profession and to the school where one works. Consequently, one does not keep silent as teachers' silence could only predict low levels of commitment on their part.

A question arises if their silence were not also a means used by the participants during our conversations to muzzle their negative emotion and provide to some extent an emotional buffer against the hardships of teaching. It could be argued that, by silencing their emotions, participants averted confronting any personal experience deemed too hard to express verbally and that they instead preferred to repress the inexpressible. The participants were ready to reveal only what they had chosen to and did not expect any further questions about the undisclosed too. I remained silent to respect their silence. Their silence was illocutionary in that they chose not to reveal more about their experience and perlocutionary in that I did not pursue the conversation to force any disclosure. In that sense, the noematic content of the silence in the cases cited above, those of the participants who consciously refrained from verbal utterances was directly linked to its noetic correlate. Silence had meaning.

One could contend that they felt empowered to continue teaching within their classrooms only because of the silence they kept. Teachers, indeed as part of their training and practice carefully consider before going against the school board's vision and aim (Leithwood et al., 2020). Silence then helps to weigh one's broader professional role and its limitations against the value of voicing one's opinion and when they stay quiet to control their thoughts and emotions to better direct their actions.

3.3. Organizational silence as a form of acquiescence

Despite the reassurance that their comments would be anonymous and that their school's name would not be revealed, the participants wanted to remain in control of what they choose to reveal to the interviewer I am because of my emic position. This is further explained in the later section on the limitations of the research process. Furthermore, as employees at their school, their silence could be read as acquiescent of their role as French teachers. Acquiescent silence does not relate to an indicative state of response but points to a multidimensional construct that underlie behavioral patterns. For example, not only did Tanya but all the other participants also admitted that teaching French is like being on a roller-coaster:

A day contains numerous interactions and decisions to take. A parent has called as they do not want their child to continue French. A student is in tears because they do not want to do French, but their parents want them to continue and the test results are not good. Another one expresses anger and frustration despite their effort to perform well for the test. This is only the beginning of the day. On better days, students are happy and motivated; there has been no test, no homework given, we have watched a movie. However, during that same day there are three departmental meetings to

decide about exams and curriculum and the thirty emails from administration, parents, students. It never stops, we are counsellors, cultural advisers, professional teachers. All interactions engage us on an intellectual but also on an emotional level. It is a roller-coaster every day and it takes its toll eventually.

The term roller-coaster used by Tanya depicts the level of stress and anxiety felt by her and more extensively by French teachers. Research has proven that teaching, more frequently than any other profession, is plagued by high levels of stress and burnout, whether teachers are novices, mid-career, or seasoned professionals. Emotional exhaustion is furthermore often associated, theory has proven, with the idea that silence is a fear to speak at work and that it involves a high level of emotional and cognitive self-regulation (Kassandrinou et al., 2023).

One could then ask if because of their inability to voice their opinion, emotional exhaustion could eventually outweigh controlled self-regulation and lead to simply leave one's school organization or the profession at large. However, there is no pause in her comments to allow for the questioning of such a situation. She explains what the day looks like but acquiesces implicitly that nothing can be done to change such a pace of work (Gkonou et al., 2020).

In other words, a French teacher is fully conscious of the demands of the job but chooses not to express their opinion or interfere with the organization of the day and even of the school calendar. In the psychological domain, their comments resounded with a sense of autonomy and accomplishment and in the structural domain of their teaching context as they are seen to share in the beliefs of their school community. Carrie also explained:

Yes, it's demotivating sometimes. It's demotivating because we have the impression that even if we want to, we can't make the changes, because we come up against a system that prevents us from doing so.

If the word '*démotivant*' in French (which she used during the interview and which has here been translated) relates to a state of discouragement from any further action and causes pain, Carrie uses it to reinforce a feeling of demotivation in the face of the challenge of "being up against the system". One could sense and could have pre-empted discouragement and inability to continue. In fact, research has proven that acquiescent and defense silence can be triggers for a loss of motivation as one cannot challenge the organization for fear of any consequence (Qin et al., 2014). By contrast, Carrie argues that to teachers, the only solution left is to identify the flaws in the system and to find ways to "push around the difficulty".

Thus, their silence becomes a sign of their disempowerment; they prefer to adjust to the organization even after making cognitive evaluations about the organization (Yang et al., 2024). The research then shows that despite an acquiescent silence, teachers are called to regain their self-efficacy and to face the challenges boldly. Hence, if the system or the contextual pressures can silence their motivation, Carrie clarifies that it is the teachers' choice and decision to overcome the challenge for the sake of "this one student" despite a sense of powerlessness because of the constraints imposed by the system. They need to act:

It's not often a matter of being motivated or not but it's a matter of sitting down and finding the means to get around the difficulty or sometimes just the means to help this one student despite the barriers that we face; it's a decision on the part of the teacher of wanting to do it. It has nothing to do with the power to do it.

For the record, Carrie has left the school where she was teaching at the time of our conversations. Could this move of hers refer to a silent form of acquiescence and acknowledgement that one cannot change the system? She is now teaching interstate.

Carrie was not the only to leave her school. So did Anne who voiced her dissatisfaction about her conditions of work during our meetings:

Being a teacher is one of the most challenging jobs. This needs time and regular contact. Lots of contact hours. French cannot be "present" in a school which does not respect and value second language learning as much as other "important" subjects like Science, PE or maths. If, that is all that matters at school, and I cannot keep teaching French at this school for these reasons.

Anne too preferred to leave after her long years of service as Head of Languages convinced that her needs as a French teacher had been silenced by her school policy. In fact, one can also claim that voices are often silenced by the contexts in which they operate (Qin et al., 2014). One of the participants, Ron, explained how he preferred to keep silent to keep his job. He had perceived the demands from authority and felt constrained to conform to administrative demands because of job evaluation reviews and the fear that he might lose his job. He knew the importance of silencing his professional dissatisfaction, and declared, "When I'm working at a school, I have to toe the line, and you have to do that".

Ron chose to remain silent to keep his contractual job but eventually regrets not having spoken as it could have led to more respect from his Head of Department. Could one here equate his silence to some form of powerful acknowledgement of what is not to be said out of tact? It is, in this case, the inexplicitness and inexpressibility of what cannot be said (Gadamer, 2004). Through fear of the "violation of the intimate sphere" of the other (Gadamer, 2004). His case further opens up a question of how silence is perceived by the one remaining silent and the other faced with the latter's silence

3.4. Quiescent silence: a form of self-protection

One chooses to remain silent for many reasons, one of which is for self-protection. Quiescent silence in opposition to acquiescent silence is indeed motivated by someone's belief that voicing one's opinion could have negative consequences. It is a form of voluntary silence consciously chosen revealing a low level of acceptance of the context in which it is performed. The performer in those cases is aware that there are other means to face the challenges engendered by the context and would have liked to express their voice. However, they see voice in such circumstances as a form of danger that they need to curb at all costs. Ron, as mentioned above, explained during our first interview about what he considered to be an important moment when he chose to remain silent at his school through fear, anger, cynicism, and despair:

Last year, at the school where I was working, you have to write a lesson plan and put it on Canvas, the Intranet school system. The lesson plan is for the students, so, why do you have to do two pages of all this gobbledegook and rubbish that kids won't understand? When I'm working at a school, I have to toe the line, and you have to do that. Then this woman in charge of French rang me from the other campus. And she was speaking to me in French and saying, you make sure you put the plans in there. And what I really, really wanted to say to her was "c'est une grosse perte de temps". No, I didn't, because I had just started there, and I wanted to keep my job. Maybe she would have respected me more if I had said that.

Ron insisted that his primary source of motivation is to be present in class with the students and that paperwork is a waste of time: "*une grosse perte de temps*". He perceived the demands from authority as an unnecessary waste of time; his main preoccupation should be to teach, he argued. He felt constrained to conform to administrative demands because of job evaluation reviews and the fear that he might lose his job. He resented keeping silent about the whole situation but did so through fear of losing his job. He wanted to protect himself through a form of quiescent silence (Hao et al., 2022).

In the end, Ron did not keep his job at that school and took up another teaching position in another Melbourne school before deciding to become a casual relief teacher in 2023. When we spoke on the phone, he explained his latter decision, "I needed a break from this ongoing administrative stress. No reason why we need to go through this". Ron extrapolated at one point of our last conversation and wished that his silence had been ruptured and turned into words, irrespective of tact and respect for authority. He felt that eventually it was his agency which was undermined.

All utterances, as well as silence, are lived and experienced in inextricable layers of perceptions by the voice but also by the receiver within their apperceptive consciousness. The perceiver perceives the other and is perceived in return and in the present case the perceiver perceives himself through his inner lifeworld. Ron perceived that he was disrespected and found himself with no authority (agency) to defend his point of view and even more so, he felt that he had lost his sense of self-respect. On the other side, one can then wonder if his silence was perceived by his Head of Department as a sign of weakness, as Ron himself argued during our meeting. Ron only expressed his consent to do as he was told. In organizational settings as a school, he was conscious of the form of discretion between speakers and chose silence over words. It was a discursive strategy (Foucault, 1969) he employed as he determined ways of saying and not saying what he had to. Silence was his authorized form of

discourse. He was left, however, to wonder if silence were a form of perceived passivity he would have to reckon in his dealings with authority

3.5. Silence: a matrix of emotions

Twice during the interview with Darren, one of the participants, there were moments of pause and heavy silence. Silence did not settle in but was interwoven, interspersed with utterance as it spoke of an experience lived and shared experientially and cognitively (Thumvichit, 2023). I also noted as part of my observation those times of uneasy silence when participants in general deliberately avoided the 'not to be said', passed over what had to be said, averted the question and slipped by it.

We stopped when Darren became silent and did not want to continue the interview, explaining that he was not a valuable participant in the research project as he presumed that only positive teaching experiences were permitted. Darren's deliberate silence during the interview amounted, one could say to a prosocial silence to some extent (Alerby & Alerby, 2003), as he wanted to conceal his true feelings for the benefit of the project. He thought that his voice would only undermine what the project wanted to achieve. When we resumed the interview, Darren explained why he did not want to teach French anymore by saying this time that, "assessment can be an overkill".

According to him, the school system had morphed into an exam factory, only interested in students' results and teachers' performance in achieving these results. Darren insisted that the introduction of constant testing and the push for accountability (Gregersen et al., 2021) had increased over the past decades and were imposed without consultation with the teachers. Such a situation contrasted with his view of education and with his perception of the role of assessment in teaching and learning. He was conscious that he had to remain silent despite as he did not have enough influence to change the school mentality or the wider policy influence.

It is interesting that at this point of the conversation, Darren went silent again before asking me if I had a position of leadership at my school. He felt strongly that if this be the case he could not discuss further. He explained that silence on his part was political in the sense that he wanted to make a point against school administration in general encourages administrator control, a competitive atmosphere, superiority of organizational aims and transactions over interpersonal relationships. I replied that I was not a school leader. He then accepted to resume the conversation. Consequently, he discussed more about his perceived loss of control over the situation and his resulting loss of motivation. He explained that meeting his students' needs remained his priority in his classroom until the very end. Darren officially retired in 2022.

Consequently, silence is an absence of words that follows or precedes words (Alerby, 2020). Much was said during the interviews and our meetings, but some was left out of our conversations, some was silenced for diverse reasons as explained above. One can then deduct that silence is even sometimes woven into words uttered. One indeed gathers from the data that the participants' silence was not made of silence. They were not an interruption of sounds before and after what they said, they were actually experienced and received for the meaning they contained. Interestingly, the participants welcomed the platform given to them during the research process to break their silence and to express their voice. Out of the eight participants, two retired, one left to teach in another state, and three changed schools

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The conclusion exposes why and how the occurrence of silence in its variegated form in the project speaks about the phenomenality of teaching French. Though, the reflection has been essentially an interrogatory endeavour, it did not limit also itself to offering simple descriptions or explanations of a lack of speech about the phenomenon of teaching French but has rather created a third space of in the interstices of the voices of the teachers. A hermeneutic interpretation of silence helped clarify a concept and its implications too often discarded through a rush judgement for its lack of positivity in organisational settings in general and in schools in particular. That is why I believe that the findings explicate why silence should be treated as an important philosophical concept in the field of education with regard to teachers' silence.

On a practical level, this entails that there is need for platforms of discussion where teachers can exhibit an agentic voice behaviour, a form of affective and effective commitment to the organisational goals. Coaching, mentoring, reflective learning circles, effective listening spaces and open communication could play this role and reinforce such behaviour. Teaching is becoming more and more complex and disrupted with the increasing use of technology in a world that is now highly signified by diversity, change and increasing knowledge based oftentimes only on opinions rather than facts and evidence.

The teacher is the mentor and moderator of knowledge as they have to sift through knowledges and make epistemic evidence-based decisions not on intuitive practices (Pressick-Kilborn et al., 2023). Rigour and intentionality suited to context and practice and developed at the intersection of practical knowledge, theory and evidence need be fostered in wide-system collaborative learning through school-based professional development, regular professional conversations, school workshops and professional network (Hart & Nash, 2022). Professional conversations help empower those in teaching and not leave them in the revolving doors of changes school situations and education policies.

Additionally, exploring the relationship between silences and teaching experience among incoming teachers through regular consultations with mentors and school administrators can generate confident teaching practices and teaching autonomy (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). The in-coming teacher is thus invited into the community as an active member in a knowledge-sharing and acquiring process. These learning opportunities or more widely these moments of shared experience between the mentor and the mentee is deemed crucial in the teachers' initial perception of their ability to maintain a classroom, teach diverse groups of students and apply the subject content learnt at university and impart it effectively to meet the needs of the students. A reflexive epistemic approach to conversation could then lead in an organic and democratic way to a *prise de parole* at school maintaining and fostering teaching and practice and motivation among the teachers (Ryan, 2023) and in turn hopefully can reverse trends of silent disempowerment (Leithwood et al., 2020). Employee silence, as shown above, lead to demotivation and even amotivation in the face of organisational challenges deemed too hard to face.

Consequently, one has to be attentive to the organisational silences experiences to identify the cause and to learn from such instances and not repeal them as lack of commitment on the part of the employees or just awkward moments in a conversation. What is not said is just as important as what is said. This implies a need for further research on the causes of organizational silence too often associated with disempowerment that erodes teachers' self-image, self-efficacy, attrition and demotivation. Such steps could instead help decrease high turnover in schools, combat teacher shortage (Worth & Van den Brande, 2020). It could instead sustain motivation among teachers throughout their career.

The discussion has highlighted a need for further research. In comparison to theories about voices of teachers, there is a dearth of empirical understanding of silence among teachers, and especially among second language teachers. Too often is silence and disempowerment, erosion of the teacher's identity and self-agency, demotivation or even amotivation viewed as interchangeable. Despite claiming that their voice was not heard and even silenced, they still managed to teach to meet their students' needs in the face of the challenges encountered. There is still much that we do not understand about the silences of teachers in general and more specifically about teachers of second languages within their specific teaching context and how it shapes their professional identity (Thumvichit, 2023).

By carefully and wilfully crafting silence as a conceptual ontological and epistemological tool, the article has argued that silence despite its inherent unsettling quality opens possibilities into realm of concrete practicalities. The participants' silence marks a place in their lived teaching experience to which their voice paradoxically alludes (Alerby, 2020). In the field of teaching which is primarily one of expressing knowledge in words in order to dispense it, the silence of teachers should not be regarded only as an incapacity on their part to put into words what they feel and would like to say about their profession.

That is why, a philosophy of silence might draw attention to the multilayered lived experience of teaching. If teachers are to develop understanding in others they are to be encouraged to listen, analyse, evaluate their practice and their silences too, thus shaping a philosophy of education to suit their

quotidian practice in real terms. The intention is then to propose silence as a philosophical concept made to stand together with voice in uncovering the meaning of teaching French in Victoria.

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