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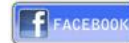
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Schultz, Katherine. (2009) *Rethinking Classroom Participation: Listening To Silent Voices*. NY: Teachers College Press.

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Reviewed by Kathryn Byrnes
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Class participation is often associated with verbal contributions or talking in class. Active listening is not easy to assess by a teacher or sometimes even to see. Does the absence of talk in a classroom equal the absence of learning? Katherine Schultz, in *Rethinking Classroom Participation: Listening to Silent Voices* asserts that the reliance on verbal participation to assess learning “often ends up rewarding compliance (e.g., talking because that is what a teacher expects), rather than thoughtfulness and learning” (p. 6). She challenges prospective teachers, experienced teachers, teacher educators, educational researchers, and educational leaders to expand our understanding of the value of silence as a tool for learning.

Schultz raises several questions for consideration and suggests a lens through which the reader might understand

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silence. In addition, she offers examples from research in elementary school and university classrooms to illustrate how silence serves as classroom participation. The insights from her ten years of classroom observations, research on silence in multiple cultures and disciplinary models compel the reader to consider the value of silence in new ways. Some of the questions Shultz proffers to the reader include:

- How does silence work in the classroom?
- What are the functions and understandings of silence in the classroom?
- What are some possible responses to student silences?

She respectfully recommends that educators and researchers adopt an inquiry stance in their investigation of these questions. Teachers who want to explore the role of silence for student participation and learning are advised to begin with a “nagging question which is closely tied to the problems or challenges they identify in their own classroom practice” (p. 123). By embracing a state of not knowing and viewing questions of talk and silence with wonder and curiosity, teachers can actively promote and enhance their commitment to inquiry-based learning. This best-practice model of self-study is described through two cases of classroom research and highlights the potential benefits to students of collaboration between teachers and researchers.

Schultz opens *Rethinking Classroom Participation: Listening to Silent Voices* with a discussion of silence as participation grounded in educational and linguistic research and theory along with classroom examples. Chapter 2 inspects the five functions of silence in classrooms and reveals the multiple possibilities silence serves to support or limit student learning. Chapter 3 offers a case study of a first grade classroom and how silence is built into the rules for classroom participation. Chapter 4 utilizes a case study of a fifth grade classroom in which the teacher worked with a team of researchers to create a curriculum that reflected the lives and experiences of the students and offered new spaces for both talk and silence. Chapter 5, the final chapter, offers specific tools and techniques for teachers to investigate silence in their own classrooms with implications for the preparation of teachers through teacher education programs. Throughout

the book, Schultz asks thought-provoking questions, highlights educational theory and poetry, and provides examples of teaching and classroom practices that value and explore talk and silence. *Rethinking Classroom Participation: Listening to Silent Voices* is a unique contribution to our understanding of the power of silence to promote student learning by investigating the forms it takes in our classrooms.

Schultz employs a sociocultural framework to explore questions about talk and silence or what she refers to as participation structures in classrooms. Participation structures are defined as “the rights and obligations that guide an individual’s contributions through talk and silence in classroom interactions” (p. 10). Rather than locating student silences purely with an individual or psychological frame of reference, Schultz highlights and explores the group dynamics that influence silence in the classroom. She asserts that silence plays five key functions in the classroom setting:

1. Resistance
2. Power
3. Protection
4. Response to Trauma
5. Reflection

Resistance is often viewed as negative or as a signal of disengagement however it can also be a refusal to be dominated. All five forms of silence are nuanced and contextual. Schultz observes, “Neither silence nor resistance is an individual act chosen by a student. Rather, they are collaborative activities constructed in relationship to a complex set of classroom and larger societal dynamics” (p. 32) Silence as power was explored through the story of Luis in which “silence was punctuated by rare moments of speech rather than the reverse” (p. 35). Through a norm of silence, speech can become more powerful and insightful. Silence creates opportunities for talk and encourages listening. It can also serve to protect students from being seen as too intelligent or as lacking intelligence. Students may learn that silence signals compliance which allows them to be successful in the game of school. As a response to trauma, Schultz notes, “Many youth live under the threat of becoming invisible in classrooms and schools. Fighting to become visible—or conversely, to remain invisible—they make daily choices

about when to speak and when to remain silent.” (p. 48). A final function of silence is to create time and space for creativity and reflection. When the typical wait time for a response, following a teacher’s question, is only two seconds, students have very little opportunity to reflect, make connections or consider deep and meaningful issues or topics. Silence after a question, during classroom activities or as a regular part of the day in Quaker Friends Schools allows students time to think.

Silence traditionally has not been valued in American schools and has often marginalized groups who *appear* to be more silent in schools such as females, African-Americans, and Native Americans to name a few. Schultz’s research poses new frameworks for educators to consider, investigate and appreciate silence as a form of participation in their classrooms. “... rather than assuming that all students will talk in equal amounts, classrooms can be organized to hold spaces for silence, recognizing and valuing ideas expressed in silence as well as those expressed in words said aloud” (p. 49). Silence does not necessarily equal learning, but neither does talk.

Paradoxically, each is required for the other to exist. Schultz opens the book with a quote from Picard that explains, “Speech came out of silence, out of the fullness of silence. The fullness of silence would have exploded if it had not been able to flow out into speech ...” (p. 1). Teachers, developing a more nuanced and complex understanding of classroom participation as articulated in *Rethinking Classroom Participation: Listening to Silent Voices* will only enhance their capacity to meet the needs of all of students. I highly recommend this book to be a valued addition to teacher preparation programs and should be offered in teacher book clubs or other professional development workshops for educators. We are in a time in our society, where we need to return to an ancient and wise understanding of the place of silence in our classrooms, schools and communities. As we were perhaps told as young children, “You have two ears and one mouth for a reason. You should listen twice as much as you speak.” Schultz reminds us of the value of listening and understanding silence in the service of our students’ learning.

About the Reviewer

Kathryn Byrnes is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Education at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. Her research interests include preservice teacher education, curriculum theory and design, and contemplative education. She earned her PhD in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis on Teaching and Teacher Education from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

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