

# Engaging Quiet Students: Including Silence in Active Learning

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# Four Learning Objectives



# I: To Consider Our Own Perceptions of Quiet Students



## II. To Examine Why They Are Quiet



# III. To Explore Our Role as Educators



# IV: To Discuss Best Practices for Working with Quiet Students



# **Objective I:** How Do We As Instructors Perceive Quiet Students?



# Think-Pair-Share # 1: Our Thoughts on Quiet Students

- For one minute, please jot down your impressions of quiet students. Do you find them easy or challenging to work with?
- Please share your thoughts with your elbow partner.
- Report out.





## Reporting Out: What do instructors think of quiet students?

“For instructors who value dialog and see it as a critical aspect of their pedagogy, silence in the classroom may be somewhat unsettling. Dialog is an important part of the interactive, problem-posing approach to education advocated by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (2000). In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire advocated for the use of dialog as a means through which students learn to critically analyze their social and economic situations, question authority, evaluate long-held assumptions, recognize transformative possibilities, and help each other learn. Thus, quiet students may be a source of unease for teachers who believe in the importance of dialog for learning (Medaille and Usinger, 2019).”

## Reporting Out: What do instructors think of quiet students?

“For years I incorporated strategies designed to get introverts to participate in class. For the most part I had thought I was successful, if the true success is to get quiet people to talk. Just recently, however, I realized that not all quiet students are introverts. I guess I knew this all along, but in conversations with colleagues, we would often talk about the introverts in our classes and how to help them to participate, as if lack of participation was somehow a firm diagnosis of being labeled an introvert .... Therefore, getting introverts to better participate was a natural faculty development consideration (Zakrajsek, 2017).”

*“Language most shows a man, speak that  
I may see thee.”* – Ben Johnson, English poet, 1572-1637

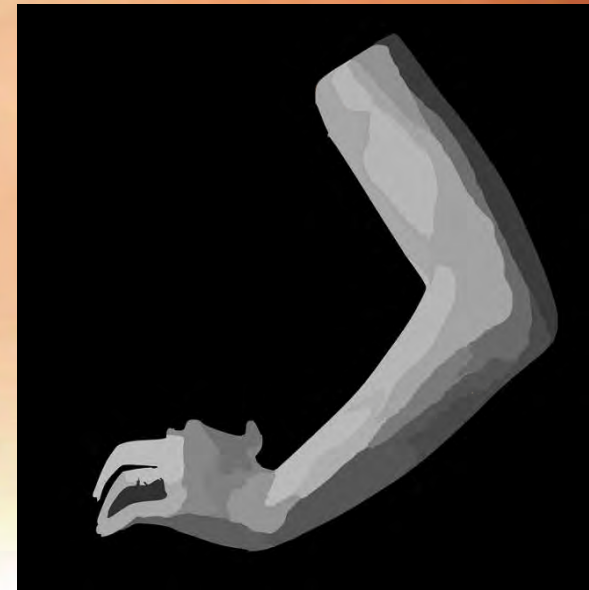


# Objective II: Why Are Some Students Reticent to Speak?



# Think-Pair-Share # 2: Reasons Why Students Are Quiet

- For one minute, please jot down the main reasons you think some students are quiet in class. Draw upon your experience.
- Please share your thoughts with your elbow partner.
- Report out.



An hourglass with white sand on top and orange sand on the bottom, set against a light blue and white background.

# And the Research Says ...

## Main Reasons Why Students Are Quiet

Medaille and Usinger (2019); Zakrajsek (2017)

- 1. Introversion
- 2. Shyness/Social anxiety
- 3. Linguistically diverse students
- 4. Cultural differences
- 5. Previous bad/embarrassing experience

# Some Reasons Why Students Are Quiet

- 6. Peer pressure/appearances
- 7. Cues from instructor
- 8. Lack of knowledge for response
- 9. Lack of interest
- 10. Generalized fear of failure

# Assumptions

**SILENCE IS OFTEN  
MISINTERPRETED BUT  
NEVER MISQUOTED**

Picture Quotes.com



# **Objective III:** What is Our Role as Educators in Working with Quiet Students?



Is it Our Role To Bring Them Out of Their Shells?



# What About Voice as Agency?



# Think-Pair Share # 3: Our Role as Educators

- Think for 30 Seconds: *In your opinion*, what role do we have as instructors to mentor students who hesitate to participate verbally in the classroom?
- Share with your elbow partner.
- Report out.



One Point to Remember:  
Context is Everything.



# Objective IV: What Are Best Practices for Working with Quiet Students?

- In short, employing *Culturally Responsive Teaching* is an excellent approach to working with this group.
- Let's look at *A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching* by Raymond J. Wlodkowski and Margery B. Ginsberg
- Their framework identifies four motivational conditions that teachers and students strive to create or improve upon in class.

# A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching (Wlodkoski & Ginsburg, 1995)



# Establish Inclusion:

- **Establish Inclusion:** Create a learning atmosphere in which students and the instructor feel respected by and connected to one another.





# Develop positive attitude:

- **Develop positive attitude:** Create a favorable disposition toward the learning experience through personal relevance and choice.



# Enhance meaning

- **Enhance meaning:** Create challenging, thoughtful learning experiences that include student perspectives and values.



# Engender competence

- **Engender competence:** Create an understanding that students are effective in learning something they value.





# Establish Inclusion: Examples

# Pre-Class Survey

- Give a pre-class survey asking students to write about their interests, and welcome them to class personally in an email.



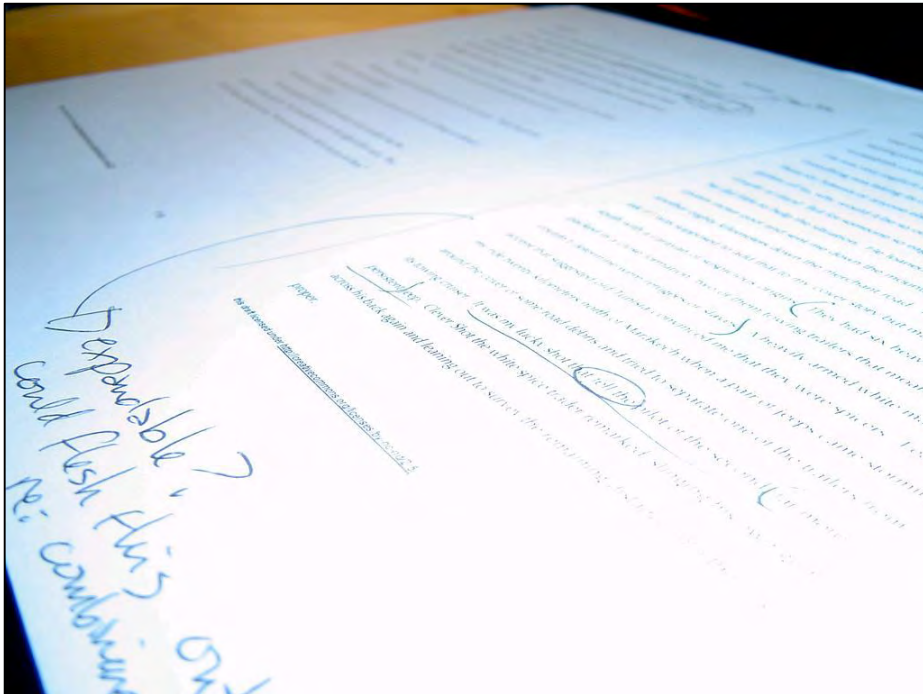
# Ask them ahead of time!

- Ask them ahead of time which activities they feel most comfortable participating in. Talk to students personally about ways you can help bring them into the conversation.



# Balance oral and written assignments

- Balance oral and written assignments to count for participation.



A close-up, artistic photograph of a glass filled with a golden liquid, possibly honey or oil, with a white object partially visible at the top right corner. The background is a soft, out-of-focus gradient of light blue and white.

Develop a Positive Attitude: Examples

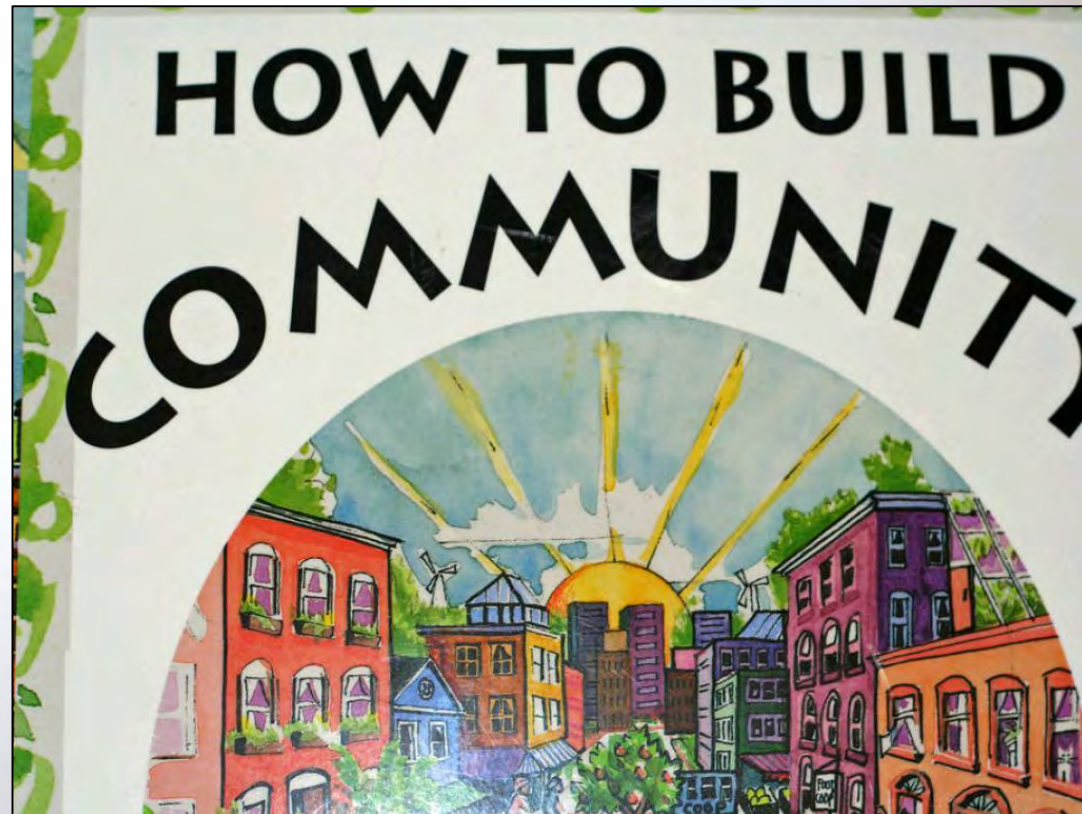


Be mindful of face-saving and face-losing behaviors in the classroom.



# Use community-building activities to promote trust among students

- (finding commonalities, think-pair-share, asking students to share interesting things they have written).





# Enhance Meaning: Examples

Promote active listening as much as active participation.



Tell stories that are meaningful to students' experiences.







# Engender Competence: Examples

Ask students to showcase their best work.





Focus on strengths first; reframe weaknesses as areas of development.



Encourage students strong in a particular skill to impart their knowledge to others.





In short, we should look for ways to engage quiet students through means other than in-class speech. (Medaille and Usinger, 2019).

- Consider other forms of class participation than speaking aloud.
- Have students share their thoughts through written responses.
- When asking students to speak in front of the whole class, give them time to formulate their responses before requiring them to speak.
- Use technologies to encourage and redefine what it means to participate in class.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a pen, poised to write on a document. The background is a soft, out-of-focus gradient of light blue and white, suggesting a bright, airy environment. The hand and pen are in the foreground, with the pen tip pointing towards the bottom right. The document is partially visible, showing some faint lines of text.

In short, we should look for ways to engage quiet students through means other than in-class speech (Medaille and Usinger, 2019).

- Ask discussion questions that promote critical and creative thinking.
- Ask questions that invite participation from those with a broad range of experiences.
- Encourage students to communicate with instructors outside of class time.
- Consider when it is appropriate to assign class presentations.
- Use lectures when appropriate to the course content.

# Think-Pair Share # 4: Alternative Ways to Engage Quiet Students

- Think for 30 Seconds: *In your opinion*, of the various strategies just presented, which one(s) would be most helpful or effective in engaging quiet students?
- Share with your elbow partner.
- Report out.



# Whole Group Discussion Question

- What are some ways you have successfully engaged students who hesitate to speak in class? Were these means successful or less than successful?



# Final Questions & Parting Thoughts



*“Music is the Silence Between the Notes.”*

- Claude Debussy, French composer, 1862 - 1918





Thank you for your time and attention!



# References

- Medaille, Ann, and Janet Usinger. 2019. "Engaging Quiet Students in the College Classroom." *College Teaching* 67 (2): 130-137.
- Wlodkowski, Raymond J., and Margery B. Ginsberg. 1995. "A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching." *Educational Leadership* 53 (1): 17-21
- Zakrajsek, Todd. 2017. "Students Who Don't Participate in Class Discussions: They Are Not All Introverts." *The Scholarly Teacher*, April 13, 2017 [blogpost].