Silence as Agentive: Shifting Curriculum and Pedagogy to Sustain Community Stories

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THE LAND

The University of Minnesota--Twin Cities is built within the traditional homelands of the Daḳota people. Minnesota comes from the Daḳota name for this region, Mni Sota Makoce--the land where the waters reflect the skies. Each day students, faculty, staff and community members who use our services look out our windows to the Ḥaḥa Wakpa, the River of the Waterfalls. The Circle of Indigenous Nations recognizes the original peoples of this place and makes ongoing efforts to educate the campus community about the ongoing relationship that Daḳota people have to this area.

-Iyekiyapiwinį Darlene St. Clair, Bdewakantunwan Daḳota
Central Questions:

Questions:
• How do our interpretations of silence create or limit opportunities for students?
• In what ways do significant shifts in curriculum and pedagogy encourage spaces for students to sustain their culture?
• How might the stories of students shared today shift the way you approach the work you do?
Today’s Agenda:

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• Introductions: Who am I answerable to? Where am I local? (Pictures)
• Discussions centering interpretations of silence
• Setting the scene: Desert View High School
• Acting the scene: Re-enacting student stories
• My analysis and interpretations of student stories
• Brainstorm: How might the stories shift the way you approach the work you do?
Who’s in the Room?

1. Take a couple of minutes to think through and/or jot down answers to the questions: Who am I answerable to? Where am I local?
2. Locate a picture on your phone that represents who you are.
3. Pair up: Introduce yourself, your job title, answers to the questions (if helpful) and share a picture with your partner (if you feel comfortable doing so).
4. Small group: Share what you learned about your partner with your small group.

Literacy Coaches
Curriculum Leaders
K-12 Principals
We all know that we can go through life convinced that our view of the world is the only valid one. If we are interested in new perceptions, however, we need to catch a glimpse of the world through other eyes. We need to be aware of our own thoughts as well as the way life is viewed by other people.

—Leona Okakok (1989, p. 248)
Foundational Quotes:

Awareness of one's self is the beginning of learning.

—Deloria & Wildcat (2001, p. 13)
We should see ourselves as stewards not of specific pieces of knowledge but rather of the productive and generative spaces that allow for finding knowledge.

—Patel (2015, p. 79)
Our stories sit in us, waiting to be told, to be acknowledged. Untold and unacknowledged, they will eventually translate themselves into other languages—languages of abuse and addiction, of suicide and violence. In such a society and in such schools we are literally dying to tell our stories.

—Nelson (2000, p. 14)
Interpretations of Silence

Small-Group Discussion:

• In schooling contexts, how do you interpret student silence?
• What are some circumstances or situations that might lead to student silence?
Interpretations of Silence

• Shout outs.
“Classroom participation is understood most often as students’ verbal activity; their silence is rarely viewed as a contribution to classroom work and learning. ... [S]ilence generally has a narrow and specific range of interpretations [whereby] a student’s silence tends to have negative connotations, indicating disengagement.”

–Schultz (2009, p. 1, 13)
Framing Silence:

Scholars now tend to recognize the inseparability of silence and language in communication research ... Researchers might conceptualize silence and speech as opposites or as similarly functioning communicative acts; they might define silence as the absence of speech, or speech as an addition to silence, but they will rarely define (or study) one without the other . . . Alternatively, some scholars conceptualize silence and language as similarly functioning communicative acts and focus on the ability of silence to empower rather than oppress.

—Acheson (2007, p. 4-5)
Framing Silence:

“Communication can be silencing and silence can be expressive.”

—Clair (1998, p. 157)

“One of the greatest disparities in research on silence involves the values that people hold for silence—whether they perceive silence as a positive or negative phenomenon.”

—Acheson (2007, p. 6.)

“Words are wholly alive in the hold of silence; they are sacred.”

—Momaday (1997, p. 16)
12th Grade Native American Literature course

Only Classroom in the metropolitan area despite large population of Native Americans in the area and the area’s proximity to reservations.

Multi-tribal and multicultural group of students.

Still being taught to this day.
Arizona’s House Bill 2281

Ethnic Studies Courses

- Promotes the overthrow of the United States government.
- Promotes resentment toward a race or class of people.
- Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group.
- Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.

Native American Literature

“shall not be construed to restrict or prohibit: courses or classes for Native American pupils that are required to comply with federal law”
Ethnic Studies course: Native American History
Instructions:

• Need one brave volunteer to read Eileen’s words that are highlighted yellow.
• While listening, think of the following questions:
  • What are your reactions to Eileen’s story?
  • Envision what you might say to Eileen’s teacher.
  • What would you say to Eileen if you had the chance?
• After we re-voice this story, engage in a small-group discussion centering your thoughts to these (or beyond these) questions.
Responding to Culture as Learned Behaviors

However, Banking

Deficit Theory

Collaboration

Small Group Work

Blame

Culture = Success

Culture as handicap or strength toward learning, being and knowing.
General Products of Culture
Not just HOW

WHAT is being taught?

For what reasons?
Racial Microaggressions

“subtle verbal and nonverbal assaults directed toward people of color, often carried out automatically or unconsciously.”

Such assaults, overtime, “take a psychological and physiological toll on people of color” (Solorzano & Perez Huber, p. 1498).
Racial Microaggressions

Students Experiences

something forcibly done to students in a schooling context, in which their resistance to dominant curricula, thinking, and behaviors presents itself in the form of silence.
Re-Voicing Student Experiences

Small-group Instructions:
• Each table has multiple handouts to re-voice particular student experiences.
• Locate “Nisha: Vignette #2”
  • Three volunteers read their highlighted sections.
• After listening/reading, discuss what feelings, emotions, understandings you’re having while listening to the vignettes.
• Consider how you might address Nisha’s frustrations if you were her teacher.
I asked my teacher last year, “Why is it that there’s only one section of Native Americans out of this whole entire history book?” She said, “Well, that’s the way this book was created.” I said, “Well, that’s just stupid. I mean this book is only based on White European history. Nothing discusses Native American history in there.” She said, “I don’t know what to tell you; this is the way it has to be.” I said, “Is it?”
Is it [the way it has to be]?

Whose knowledges are being highlighted, taught, and valued?
“...educational leaders engage Indigenous students in a decolonizing process of praxis, dialogue and self-reflection to sustain and privilege Indigenous knowledge systems while simultaneously addressing contemporary goals and issues within the schooling context”

(Paris, 2012, p. 95)

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Sacred Landscapes and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

“We must be open to sustaining [languages and cultures] in both the traditional and evolving ways they are lived and used by young people.”

(Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 91, 95)

...by demanding explicitly pluralist outcomes that are not centered on White, middle-class, monolingual, and monocultural norms of educational achievement.”
Ethnic Studies: Native American Literature

Fueled by Lived Experiences

Co-Construction of Knowledge

Emphasis on Indigenous Knowledges, Literacies, and Histories
Contested Storied Space: Mascot
Contested Storied Space: Mascot

A space where a student’s identity, understanding, and knowledge are in direct conflict with another’s and may not completely match their own.

**Dialogic Listening:**

For keeping the Native American Mascot where they include their ideas, knowledges and emerging identities into the conversation in their minds.

Against keeping the Native American Mascot where they include their ideas, knowledges and emerging identities into the conversation in their minds.

Vince

Keene
Contested Storied Space

Vince

For keeping the Native American Mascot

Keene

Against keeping the Native American Mascot

Dialogic Listening

Nisha and Eileen
“I don’t know what to tell you; this is the way it has to be.”

Is it?

Silence as agentive shield

Re-engaging

Not just HOW

What is being taught?

For what reasons?
Re-Voicing Student Experiences

• After listening/reading, discuss what feelings, emotions, understandings you’re having while listening to the vignettes.
• Consider the ways centering student and community issues in curriculum and pedagogy impacts students’ motivation and engagement.
• Engage in a small-group discussion.