



The Sound of Silence

by Lori Hewitt

“The busier you are, the more you need quiet time.” ~ Justin Zorn

Welcome back to another school year. We hope you all have had the opportunity to rest, relax, and restore over the summer months. While the start of the school year can be exciting and signify new beginnings, it can also bring forth challenges and uncertainty. I encourage you all to take a deep breath, assess where you are in this moment, and acknowledge your response and feelings. Try not to assign value to them (they're not good or bad), just acknowledge them. I challenge you to do this daily and notice where you are during different times of the day. What's happening around you that may be contributing to your response? Checking in with yourself regularly can be a very useful exercise and can go a long way in managing emotions, thoughts and actions. After all, we can't adjust what we aren't aware of.

I try to make a practice of doing this often and one thing I have noticed is that I could use some extra moments of peace, quiet and calm! So how do we bring this sometimes-elusive state into our very busy and hectic lives?

It may seem simplistic, but perhaps what we need is quiet time. Not necessarily the quiet time we provide to very young children (although this could be beneficial as well), but in essence, what I'm suggesting is the need for silence. I'm referring to getting a break from external noise in the literal sense as well as cultivating real sustained silence, the kind that minimizes inner chatter.

There is danger in excessive noise exposure. The world is literally louder now than it has been at any point in history. Today's sirens are an estimated six times louder than they were a century ago, and, according to the National Park Services, noise pollution doubles or triples every three decades.

As teachers, I'm sure you have noticed an increase in noise in your schools and classrooms as well. Some of the noise comes from the typical physical environment of a school, for example, desks and chairs scraping the floors, students

moving around, bells going off, ventilation and heating systems running and high-tech equipment functioning. One of the downsides of a technologically advanced classroom is the associated low-level noise.

External noise can lead to internal stress, especially when we have little control over it. Mathias Basner, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania who specializes in sound processing and rest, states that after a singular period (one night) of noise exposure, our bodies excrete adrenaline and cortisol that can change the composition of our blood. In essence, noise vibrates through our inner ear, converting the movements into electrical signals which get transmitted to our brain and can trigger the fight or flight response... the opposite effect of what we want, which is peace, quiet and calm.

What's the antidote? The sound of silence! “The power of silence helps to restore the nervous system, helps sustain energy, and conditions our minds to be more adaptive and responsive.” Not only does it help kick start our parasympathetic nervous system, but it is also associated with the development of new brain cells in areas associated with learning and memory. It's a win-win!

“Silence isn't just the absence of noise. It's a presence that brings us energy, clarity, and deeper connection.”

~ Justin Zorn, Leigh Marz

Some of the other benefits of silence include:

- 1. Enhanced Concentration:** Silence creates an environment conducive to concentration and focus, allowing us to perform tasks more effectively.
- 2. Boosted Creativity:** Silence can activate our imagination and encourage out of the box thinking. Engage in this practice and you will be in good company. Albert Einstein and Sir Isaac Newton

were believers in the necessity of silence.

3. **Heightened Self-Awareness:** By immersing ourselves in silence we promote self-awareness and personal growth, factors important to minimizing stress.
4. **Inner Calmness:** A period of silence each day allows us the chance to relax and reduce stress levels, promoting peace, calm and mental clarity.
5. **Improved Learning:** Research shows that excessive noise impacts learning. As teachers you know firsthand that as a child is exposed to more noise, their school performance suffers and they experience greater struggles with concentration levels. The exposure of children to tablets, cell phones and video games has increased the level of white noise and hearing impairment which affects their ability to learn.
6. **Increased Productivity:** Even short moments of silence can help increase productivity by reducing distractions. Research suggests that doing nothing and remaining silent can be linked to an increase in the production of new brain cells... how's that for productive!
7. **Cultivated Patience:** Constant noise from the media and our day-to-day activities causes many of us to miss out on silence. Silence encourages patience and mindfulness which cultivates peace and calm.

How do we cultivate periods of sustained quiet time, especially in a world that's growing increasingly busy? It could be as simple as (notice I didn't say easy) sitting silently for 2 minutes during the middle of your day, taking a walk outside in nature (without your phone), or trying a social media fast. Here are some other quick tips to help get you started.

- Wake up 15 minutes earlier than usual. It may not seem like a lot of time, but beginning your day less rushed will make a big difference.
- Try meditating or engaging in a solitary gratitude practice.
- Turn off your radio while driving. Be present and notice the quiet.
- Take a silent walk (with no phone or headset).
- Turn off the noise and practice mindful eating with no distractions.
- Incorporate quiet time into your bedtime routine. Try gentle stretching and yoga poses that help to activate your parasympathetic nervous system.
- Use your time in the shower for quiet and focused reflection.
- Intentionally sit quietly every time you close your computer.

- Cancel one recurring commitment and replace it with solitude.

There will be certain times in your life when finding silence is easier than others. Remember, the busier you are the more you need quiet time. And on that note, I think I'll turn off my computer and benefit from the sound of silence!

If you feel you could use additional support in any area of your personal wellness, please feel free to reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). We're always here to help.

Lori Hewitt is a Coordinator with the Employee Assistance Program for Teachers. For confidential assistance contact Lori Hewitt (ext. 242), lhewitt@nlta.ca or Kenda Riggs (ext. 265), kriggs@nlta.ca.

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