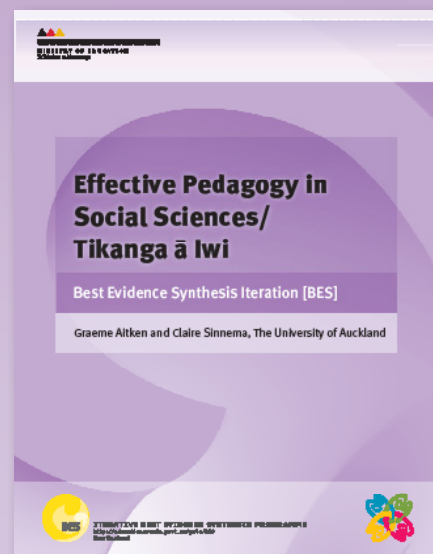


Use effective strategies to include quiet learners

This is one of a series of cases that illustrate the findings of the best evidence syntheses (BESs). Each is designed to support the professional learning of educators, leaders and policy makers.



BES cases: Insight into what works

The best evidence syntheses (BESs) bring together research evidence about ‘what works’ for diverse (all) learners in education. Recent BESs each include a number of cases that describe actual examples of professional practice and then analyse the findings. These cases support educators to grasp the big ideas behind effective practice at the same time as they provide vivid insight into their application.

Building as they do on the work of researchers and educators, the cases are trustworthy resources for professional learning.

Using the BES cases

The BES cases overview provides a brief introduction to each of the cases. It is designed to help you quickly decide which case or cases could be helpful in terms of your particular improvement priorities.

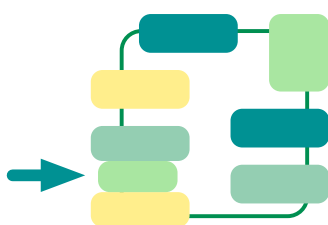
Use the cases with colleagues as catalysts for reflecting on your own professional practice and as starting points for delving into other sources of information, including related sections of the BESs. To request copies of the source studies, use the Research Behind the BES link on the BES website.

The conditions for effective professional learning are described in the Teacher Professional Learning and development BES and condensed into the ten principles found in the associated International Academy of Education summary (Timperley, 2008).

Note that, for the purpose of this series, the cases have been re-titled to more accurately signal their potential usefulness.

Responsiveness to diverse (all) learners

Use the BES cases and the appropriate curriculum documents to design a response that will improve student outcomes



The different BESs consistently find that any educational improvement initiative needs to be responsive to the diverse learners in the specific context. Use the inquiry and knowledge-building cycle tool to design a collaborative approach to improvement that is genuinely responsive to your learners

Use effective strategies to include quiet learners

This case demonstrates how quiet learners can be supported to actively participate in classroom discussion.

While the context is years 11 and 13 geography, the strategies for inclusion described in this case have much broader relevance because verbal skills, listening skills, and constructive participation are important in all classrooms, workplaces, and wider communities.

The case also highlights the importance of inclusive curriculum materials and resources.

To speak or not to speak: creating spaces for quiet students in classroom talk

Source

Nairn, K. (1997). Hearing from quiet students: The politics of silence and voice in geography classrooms. In J. P. Jones, H. Nast & S. Roberts (Eds.), *Thresholds in feminist geography* (pp. 93–115). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Nairn, K. (1995). Quiet students in geography classrooms: Some strategies for inclusion. *New Zealand Journal of Geography*, October, pp. 24–31.

Nairn, K. (1994). *Quiet students in geography classrooms*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

Introduction

The word ‘space’ is used in the title of this case to refer to the ‘public verbal space’ in which classroom talk takes place. Whether students speak or do not speak in the classroom is important, given the relationship between talking and learning. Nairn investigated why some students remain silent in the forum of class discussion and why girls are overrepresented in the silent group of students in coeducational classrooms. She also designed an intervention with the aim of increasing the verbal participation of quiet girls and examined its impact. The ‘women-focused curriculum’ intervention involved content that was carefully selected for its interest and relevance to girls and teaching strategies that were designed to encourage public participation by minimising the risks involved.

Targeted learning outcome/s

The objectives for the geography lesson featured in this case centred on understanding how people’s perspectives are shaped by their culture and lifestyle and how “each society perceives and interprets its own and other environments through the perspective of its own culture”. Further to these objectives, the researcher and teacher also aimed to increase the public participation of girls in geography classes.

Nairn emphasises that participating in the public verbal space (talking) is critical for learning in geography and other subjects. She also points out a longer term reason for developing students’ verbal skills: their ability to compete in the labour and training markets.

Nairn proposes that active participation in classroom discussion is important for five reasons:

1. Talking is central to the learning process because, through talking, we “remake knowledge for ourselves” (Barnes 1976).
2. Students who talk aloud in class influence what gets taught (Alton-Lee, Nuthall, & Patrick, 1993).
3. There is a relationship between talking in class and the acquisition of new knowledge: students generate “knowledge constructs as they engage in the process of making meaning out of curriculum content” (ibid.).
4. Teachers can check students’ understanding and correct any misunderstandings when students are talking aloud.
5. Class discussions are opportunities for female students to practise talking in public – an important skill in terms of future participation in society (p. 97).

Learner/s and learning context

Finding out who takes up the public verbal space in 5L, 5N, 7H, and 7L

Nairn investigated public teacher–student interactions in two year 11 and two year 13 geography classes from two schools – one in a small rural town and the other in a city. The year 11 students were working on a population studies topic and the year 13 students on a cultural process topic: migration. She found that “There were inequalities in the average public participation patterns of female and male students and also inequalities within gender groups” (1994, p. 65).

Observations of the four classes over two months revealed that:

- 39% of all student–teacher interactions were with female students (and 61% with males);
- between 30 and 58% of female students and between 14 and 44% of male students in each class were silent;
- the girls who took up the most public verbal space relative to other girls took up much less than the most talkative boys.

An attempt to shift the public verbal space patterns in 5L

Nairn describes the impact of a women-focused curriculum intervention on the students in 5L, a class of 30 students. Over the observation period, the absence rate for the girls in this class was 7% and for the boys, 3%. Nairn described 9 of the 11 girls and 7 of the 19 boys as quiet. She interviewed 10 of these quiet students, 7 girls and 3 boys.

Pedagogy

Content of the women-focused curriculum

The women-focused curriculum involved a lesson centred around a video featuring a Bangladeshi woman, Daslima, who was trying to decide whether to marry.

Strategies of the women-focused curriculum

1. Comparing

The students were given the task of comparing their 'typical' timetable with Daslima's 'typical' timetable. In this way, they were able to explore their prior knowledge before being introduced to the new content.

2. Turn taking

So that they could all participate publicly, the students took turns to share what they thought were the main messages/ideas in the video. The following protocols were followed:

- Preparation time was provided – time for students to think and discuss with their neighbours before speaking publicly.
- It was agreed that there would be no interruption or response from other students when points of view were presented.
- Anyone could decline their turn – it was acceptable to choose not to talk.

Outcomes

Prior to the women-focused curriculum

Females in 5L had 36% of the public student-teacher interactions in their lessons (observed over two months).

"Four male students took up the most public verbal space, ahead of the female student with the highest rate of public participation" (p. 66).

Amy was silent during three lessons and asked for the teacher's help in only one lesson.

Amy reported fear of being laughed at if she were to contribute publicly: "People are just sort of scared ... just the fact that if you are wrong you know you are going to get laughed at" (p. 94). She also said she was reluctant to 'put the teacher out' by asking for help (p. 105).

During the women-focused curriculum

Females in 5L had 41% of the public student-teacher interactions.

Five out of 11 girls reported that they had participated 'more' or 'much more', while 17 out of the 18 boys reported that they had participated 'the same', 'a little less', or 'much less'.

Altering the content on just one occasion inspired some girls to talk more. Their interest and responses increased when examples and issues involving women were introduced.

"When they got women-focused content that was interesting and relevant to talk and think about, female students talked more, watched more, and wanted more" (p. 113).

Amy participated (along with all of the other students) in the turn-taking exercise.

Nichola reported that her participation had been 'about the same' but noted that her contribution was of greater length and quality than usual. She said that she "gave more of an answer ... it was probably a longer response which makes it more of an impulse ..." (p. 124).

Students' ratings of the importance of the content

	No	Little	Some	Very	Extremely
Female	0	0	4	4	3
Male	2	5	7	4	0

How the learning occurred

Women-focused content – examples and issues involving women

Strategies to engage with that content in ways that facilitate public participation of all learners

Increased verbal participation of quiet students

How the learning occurred

<p>Connection</p> <p><i>Make connections to students' lives</i></p>	<p>The success of the intervention is explained, in part, by the interest that the female students found in the content and by its relevance to their lives and experiences. Seven of 11 of the girls rated the content as 'very' or 'extremely' important; the other four rated it as of 'some importance'.</p> <p>By comparing their own typical timetables with Daslima's, the students made connections to their own lives. Nairn warns, however, that there is a risk in strategies that make students' own experiences yardsticks against which to measure the experiences of others: they may reinforce 'third-world difference', with unintended, negative outcomes.</p>
<p>Alignment</p> <p><i>Align experiences to important outcomes</i></p>	<p>The activities and resources were deliberately aligned to the purpose of engaging all students with the learning. By using the video featuring Daslima – a girl of similar age but different race and class, the intervention ensured that the students' interests, particularly those of the quiet girls, were attended to. The turn-taking strategy promoted the engagement of all students, not just those who typically occupied the public verbal space.</p>
<p>Community</p> <p><i>Build and sustain a learning community</i></p>	<p>Turn taking encouraged the public participation of all students. The risks were minimised since the criteria for evaluating participation were the same for everyone:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">It is not enough to introduce women-focused content and expect female students to automatically begin participating in public. The structure that facilitates public participation must be changed to provide minimal risk opportunities for quiet female students to take up and gain confidence; turn taking provides one such structure (pp. 111–112).</p> <p>Three protocols governed the turn-taking strategy. These were particularly important in establishing relationships that would promote dialogue in this classroom:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students were not put on the spot – they had time to prepare. 2. Students were not judged – others were not to interrupt or make evaluative comments. 3. Students were not compelled to speak – this demonstrated respect for the students and recognised that there were other ways of participating, including listening and watching. <p>Mae and Nina suggest why the strategy succeeded for them:</p> <p>Mae: <i>Yeah I thought that was good ... because everybody got a chance to have their say and because everybody had to say it they were all sort of equal and nobody could ... disagree with their answer because they could just say their own thing as well so it was just what you thought and it was easier because everybody said what they thought (p. 29).</i></p> <p>Nina: <i>It was quite good I thought, the way that she went around the classroom and got everyone to say something ... because that way people get used to saying it and they are not really as worried about it and also if you are asking everyone to do it, you don't think oh I'm going to be the only one, if you are not used to calling out or something (p 29).</i></p>
<p>Interest</p> <p><i>Design experiences that interest students</i></p>	<p>When the researcher asked students why they had participated more during the women-focused lesson, their interest in the content was a common theme:</p> <p>Mae: <i>I think I answered more than I would have because I found it interesting so I watched it and got involved in it ... I watched it more.</i></p> <p>Zoe: <i>I think I might have put a bit more in than usual ... Because I found it interesting, it wasn't the usual boring geography lesson, it was more interesting.</i></p>

The female students described here were consciously, not naturally, silent. Their silence was, in many cases, a protective strategy for managing the risks around how their public talk might be evaluated. Simply expecting them to participate in public talk would not have worked. Opportunities for public talk occurred only after changes were made to the content and pedagogy of the geography curriculum. As Nairn points out,

It is our responsibility as geography educators to make it worthwhile for quiet female and male students to take part in our classes – taking part in class is used in the broadest sense to include talking, watching, listening – this means creating curriculum content and participation structures with quiet female and male students’ needs and interests in mind (p. 30).

This responsibility and opportunity relates not only to geography but to other subjects as well.

When making decisions about content and the pedagogical approach, teachers need to recognise:

- the impact that a concern to ‘get answers right’ has on the willingness of some quiet students to publicly answer questions. Girls express greater fear about ‘getting it wrong’ and fear of being laughed at.
- that students participate in different ways, depending on the context. ‘Quiet students’ are not necessarily quiet in every context. They can be ‘insiders’ when at the centre of localised private spaces inhabited by close friends, and ‘outsiders’ when on the margins of the public verbal and physical space of the classroom.
- the impact of classroom climate. Some quiet students are uneasy about how they may be watched and judged by their peers.

Nairn outlines a number of strategies to try, including:

- group-building activities;
- think, pair, share preparation before discussions;
- increasing wait time;
- changing students’ seating positions, one’s own position, the arrangement of the room;
- ensuring that students interact with each and every other student over a period of time;
- allocating ‘participation cards’ to students – once they have used them up, they have no more turns;
- asking students to write a reflection note about how much they participate and how they feel about participating;
- targeting quiet areas of the class;
- communicating with students through a weekly or monthly diary system;
- developing inclusive curriculum.

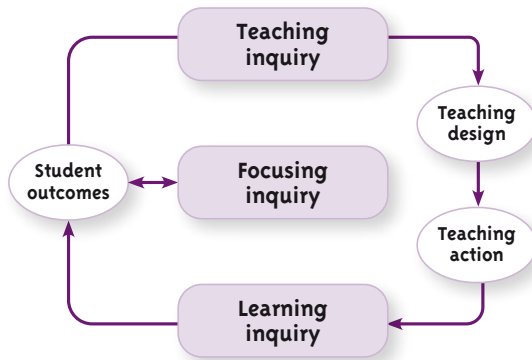
Nairn says that developing women-focused content to empower female students is a complex task:

Content must realistically portray the positive and negative aspects of women’s existence, and it must value women’s traditional (often unpaid) achievements as much as their non-traditional achievements.

Inquiry

Other references

The evidence presented in this case can be used to inform teachers' inquiries into their own practice.



Focusing inquiry

What is most important and therefore worth spending time on?

Teaching inquiry

What might work best? What could I try?

Learning inquiry

What happened? Why did it happen?

Suggested questions:

- Think of a time when you were asked or expected to talk in a group situation. Which (if any) of the three protocols were in place? How did this affect your participation and the participation of the others?
- Who are the quiet students in your class/es? Which students occupy most public verbal space?
- Think of the content in your programme. For which students is it of interest or most/least relevant?
- What risks do your quiet students run when participating in the public space? How might these be overcome?
- In what contexts could turn taking or a similar strategy be used?

Nairn, K. (1996). (Appendix to quiet students in geography classrooms article): Some strategies to try. *New Zealand Journal of Geography*, 23.

New Internationalist (circa 1986). *A Women's World* series: The price of marriage and the struggle for land. (Video).