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**A Reading from “Making a Difference” and “Silences”**

**Published by  
The Council of 3M National Teaching Fellows  
and  
The Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (Canada)**

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***Script devised by Alex Fancy***

Making a Difference / Toute la différence (2005), ed Marilyn Lerch, and Silences in Teaching and Learning / Les voix du silence dans l’académie (2008), ed Clarissa Green, Council of 3M National Teaching Fellows / STLHE are available from:

The Bookstore at Western  
University Community Centre  
The University of Western Ontario  
London, ON Canada N6A 3K7  
[www.bookstore.uwo.ca](http://www.bookstore.uwo.ca)

Authors, in order: Denis Bélisle, To Roam or to Perish\* (Making a Difference); Peter Brook, quotation from The Empty Space (Silences); Maureen Connolly, Distinguished, my ass\* (Making a Difference); Debbie Schnitzer, (Silences); Michelle Daigle, quoted by Joy Mighty, (Silences); Janice Penner, (Making a Difference); Suzanne Stewart (Silences); Kelly Redman (Making a Difference); Susie Turner (Making a Difference); Basil Smith (Making a Difference); Howard M. Armitage, Accounting for Love\* (Making a Difference); Marcia Epstein (Silences); Chris Pollock (Making a Difference); Stephen Haff (Making a Difference); Joy Mighty (Silences); Bluma Litner (Silences); Kathy Madjidi (Silences); Jon Kabat-Zinn, Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life, quoted by David Fancy & Sue Spearey (Silences); Ron Marken (Silences).

\*These three stories were chosen by readers of this script, Educational Developers Caucus Winter Conference, February 2009, Durham College, Oshawa, Ontario (Arshad Ahmad, Alice Cassidy, and Trevor Holmes).

Bilingual scripts are also available.

**Questions / Contact Information**

Sylvia Riselay, STLHE Administrator  
Email: [riselays@mcmaster.ca](mailto:riselays@mcmaster.ca); Tel: (905) 525-9140, ext. 20130

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### Stage Directions

1. Readers can begin close to each other. During the reading they should move throughout the room, coming back to their point of departure for the final, brief choral reading.
2. Try to move between excerpts.
3. Try to plan your itinerary a move or two in advance!
4. Adapt your voice to what you think is the mood of the extract.
5. Without losing your place in the script, try to focus your attention squarely on the person who is reading.
6. Don't let your voice trail at the end of a sentence, as you might do in conversation. Work up to the final syllable.
7. 'Line-topping': in most cases (unless a pause is prescribed) your first syllable should coincide with the last syllable uttered by the previous speaker. Link the extracts, but take your time in mid-speech to inflect and shape.
8. Make sure that your pages are in order before you begin.
9. It is helpful to highlight all your lines, and to write very brief, clear notes in the margin (stress, slow, speed up, etc.).
10. Break a leg!

### Suggested Presentation Format

The reading can be followed by a discussion, perhaps in break-out groups followed by the general discussion.

## SCRIPT

**Reader 1**—I first met him more than twenty years ago in a tightly packed classroom where fifty young adults were waiting as in a theatre but without the barely contained excitement, seats arranged in graduated levels around a central platform, which until then had been for me a pulpit devoted to dispensing “scores” already read and heard too many times.

**Reader 2**—Vitality and boredom wait together, between two silences.

**Reader 3**—The first time I experienced depression was the summer of 1997 when my partner’s two sons—aged nine and eleven, bright, precocious and somewhat devious—spent the summer with us.

**Reader 2**—Why is so much of the “real” world terminated as soon as we enter our “hallowed” halls?

**Reader 1**—Nothing new under the rain on this September morning in 1980, even less in this damp room smelling of raincoats and wet clothes, as all busied with the cult objects of academe: notebooks, books, pencils, everyone preparing and dedicating their small altar for the ceremony of note-taking. I came with cigarettes, coffee, and the conviction that for anyone who has a little imagination, it is impossible not to waste one’s life.

**Reader 2**—“I attended a course on race relations that purported to incorporate equity concerns but had nothing on Aboriginal peoples . . .”

**Reader 3**—Before this, depression was something that other people, without my considerable strength of character and willpower, experienced. Nothing prepared me for the slide into worthlessness and unrequited rage. The real kicker was that the boys weren’t all that bad. They were just boys.

**Reader 2**—One day we started talking about grief and soon were deep into personal stories. She altered the agenda to allow us to spend the rest of the class on the subject of grief and loss (....) Some of the students admitted to never having shared these intense and personal stories with anyone before. In her classes, we talked, we argued, we listened, we laughed and we cried. We were often loud and sometimes very quiet and somber. Through all of this, we learned.

**Reader 1**—My first year at university had offered nothing but boundless emptiness of meaning, dispensed by insensible glottises, braying litanies of old recipes that pulled hundreds of eyes down to scribblings rather than lifting them toward something worth looking at. As soon as the last exam had been written, my throat on fire, I fled with thirty dollars in my pocket and thumbed my way west.

**Reader 3**—I would go to the bathroom, turn on the shower, and cry and cry. I would cry in other places and times as well and the summer unfolded into a succession of driving, cooking, cleaning and laundry commercials interrupted by daily rituals of tears and self-loathing.

**Reader 1**—That summer I wandered more than 15,000 kilometers, taking odd jobs as necessity dictated, lingering in mountains and cities (....) I met other students, workers, native peoples, travelers all, on the move, against the various backdrops of the world, boulevards, ocean, skyscrapers,

cliffs, houses, forests. A career? Not for me. My sole aim was always to experience the human condition, and its most sublime expression seemed to be this inner life, this fluid pulsation of thought rising and falling of which no one ever speaks.

**Reader 2**—As instructors, we are advised to teach with integrity, and to be “who we are” in the classroom, but that advice is complicated when softness of voice and gentleness of character are seemingly at odds with a vocation that entails speaking dynamically and confidently about our knowledge. I have come to believe that quietness, while it is a reflection of my true inner self, is not a legitimate teacherly trait.

**Reader 3**—Fast forward six years. The phone rings in my office.

**Reader 2**—Many times I would pop up to her office for help before an exam, along with two or three friends. She would simply move some books aside and make room for everyone.

**Reader 3**—I find myself gazing around the space as I contemplate answering (...) Shelves are piled high with books and files, the gifts of students, mugs, figurines, pictures of my nephew. There are unpacked boxes that reach the ceiling stacked on the corner of my long desk.

**Reader 2**—When she fell ill, she convinced the Faculty with great faith and optimism to permit us to teach the course in her absence. It was an honour to have been given such an opportunity and to have been trusted to present properly the curriculum she had devised.

**Reader 3**—A dresser sits in the corner, containing my fitness and training clothes. CDs and tapes are piled near the phone, my briefcase is hanging open, a mouth for papers, memos and more work to finish at home. My students wonder if I am moving in or moving out. This semester’s course and committee files are my only anchor to the here and now. And I am here, now. I am tired of here and now.

**Reader 2**—(His) consistent encouragement for people to take risks in their learning, to see their learning as a precipitate of possibilities that can coalesce into a lasting sense of one’s own possibility as an agent in the world—as opposed to simply a consumer acquiring a product, or a devotee receiving sacred unction—can result in a pedagogy of liberation, of constant engagement and becoming.

**Reader 3**—I feel the familiar and terrifying slide beginning. And it’s not that things are that bad.

**Reader 1**—In the fall, like a migratory bird, I returned to school. By habit. That very morning, that back-to-school morning, making my way among the umbrellas and notebooks, I made a momentous decision: if something dramatically different does not happen soon, by next week, I’m going west again. To hell with this masquerade!

**Reader 3**—It’s a fairly regular semester, a fairly typical day. I answer the phone. It’s Jill - her usual, damn chipper, high-energy, see-the-good-in-everyone self. She needs a title from me for the distinguished teaching award address I will give in May.

**Reader 1**—9:10 am—He is late. He walks in, a cup of coffee in his hand. No books, no documents. He looks at us almost en passant, smiles, takes a sip of coffee. He paces through the room, glancing at us from time to time. For a few minutes, that is all he does. Suddenly, he stops

and declares, “Hello. I’m here to travel with you on a stretch of road this term. I speak fast. I know I speak fast. I speak fast because I don’t want you to take notes. In this class, there will be no books, no exam. Rather we will talk—talk about knowledge ....” And then he begins, his flow of thought pushes him to resume the pacing, back and forth, and like a big cat in his cage, he makes us dream of freedom.

**Reader 3**—I say to her “How about the university’s fucked and nothing that we do makes any difference?”

**Reader 2**—The dinner guests were sitting around the table discussing life. One man, a CEO, decided to explain the problem with education.

**Reader 3**—There is a long silence. Jill clears her throat.

Pause.

**Reader 2**—He argued, “What’s a kid going to learn from someone who decided his best option in life was to become a teacher?” He reminded the other dinner guests that it’s true what they say about teachers. “Those who can, do. Those who can’t, teach.” The guests all laughed.

**Reader 3**—“Not a good time to ask you about this?” she asks. I wish that I had some magic button to stop the horrible ache in my throat and the tears in my eyes. I take off my glasses. The office fades to merciful fuzziness, the evidence of my incompetence temporarily, thankfully, blurred.

“Give me a half hour,” I tell her.

**Reader 1**—I did not go back west the next week. Ten years later I was completing my doctoral studies with this character who in no way resembles how I pictured a university professor. Look at him: he laughs, he enjoys himself. He is bold, takes risks, and sometimes, God forbid, he is wrong.

**Reader 2**—To emphasize his point, he singled out one of the diners. “You’re a professor, Susan,” he said. “Be honest. What do you make?”

**Reader 1**—It has been a fabulous journey, swept along in his wake, like a wave pushing me towards my own discoveries.

**Reader 2**—Susan, who had a reputation for frankness, replied, “So, you want to know what I make?”

**Reader 3**—Silence is like speech in having cultural norms and conventions. While it is usually regarded in current Western culture as an absence of sound, a passive state, silence is also an activity.

**Reader 2**—I make students work harder than they ever thought they could.

**Reader 1**—I have had scores of teachers, some of whom did not lack intelligence, scholarship or benevolence, but in light of the longing and intensity which marked my youth, I often have the impression that, as far as professors go, I only had one.

**Reader 3**—While he was supervising my undergraduate thesis research, he sent me for a one-week astronomy research trip. When I returned and discovered that I had pointed the telescope at the Big Dipper instead of the Little Dipper, he worked patiently and enthusiastically with me for two weeks to salvage useful data from the wrong Dipper!

**Reader 2**—I can make kids sit through ninety minutes of class and completely absorb their attention.

**Reader 1**—He handed us courage as directly and palpably as you hand a kid a hockey stick. Now, nearly twenty years later, I can reflect on the perennial return of his teaching in my life.

**Reader 2**—I can make students want to learn and practice their discipline.

**Reader 3**—(...) Do our methodologies perpetuate the silencing of marginalized groups?

**Reader 1**—When I first began teaching, there were few traces in the classroom of my embodied presence. I was expected to be an entity without context; a disembodied, thinking, living, teaching-a-particular-course presence to a classroom filled with disembodied students.

**Reader 2**—You want to know what I make? I make students wonder.

**Reader 3**—In many indigenous cultures, making space for periods of silence and reflection is an integral part of education.

**Reader 2**—I make them question.

**Reader 1**—“Think of yourself as an eternal witness, as timeless. Just watch this moment, without trying to change it at all. What is happening? What do you feel? What do you see? What do you hear?”

**Reader 3**—(...) Awareness practices (...) invite practitioners to address the plenitude and complexity of their present circumstances by engaging in acts of witnessing.

**Reader 2**—I make them criticize. I make them sensitive to different opinions.

**Reader 1**—Our students live in cacaphony.

**Reader 3**—Clamour, chatter, and din fill their ears, and may even injure them.

**Reader 1**—I cannot ask them to put their heads down on their desks and be quiet, as Mrs. Morgan commanded me to do in Grade 2.

**Reader 2**—I make them write.

**Reader 3**— I make them read.

**Reader 1**—I make them do.

**Reader 3**—I make them know I will review their work for grammar, logic and content.

**Readers 1 and 2**—I make them experience the joy of learning.

**Readers 1 and 3**—Appreciate the meaning of good performance.

**Readers 1, 2 and 3**—And take pride in themselves and their accomplishments.

**Reader 3**—I make them understand that if you have the brains, then follow your heart.

**Reader 2**—And if someone ever tries to judge you by what you make . . .

**Readers 1, 2 and 3**—You pay them no attention. You want to know what I make? I make a difference.  
What do you make?