



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

*[Nadia Chaney](#)

Dear 3rd Thursday Assemblers! Welcome back, or, if it's your first time WELCOME! This is an exciting format we have been developing where people contribute and discuss a niche aspect of group facilitation.

Below you will find: A Check-in Question (please answer!); Goals and Agreements for today's session (hit "like" to agree to uphold these agreements during the session); 3 discussion questions and 3 case studies (posted approximately every ten minutes; answer in any order). I will be facilitating this experience for 90 minutes. There will be a pdf transcript posted at <http://pyeglobal.org/pye-learning-network/3rd-thursdays> in a short while. These

transcripts are so great we're thinking of making a book out of them!

This month we continue our investigation into VULNERABILITY IN FACILITATION by discussing THE STRENGTH OF SILENCE

See how nature -- trees, flowers, grass -- grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence. We need silence to be able to touch souls. – Mother Theresa (1910-1997)

THIS 3RD THURSDAY IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF THE BEAUTIFUL ZEN YOGA TEACHER MICHAEL STONE.

www.michaelstoneteaching.com.

As group facilitators we are often very focused on the way words and sound shape the space we hold. Here, we turn our focus to the element of silence in our work.



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

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Check-in Question for Aug 17 2017: Describe the quality of the silence around you right now (even if you are in a noisy place!)

[Laura June](#) quiet. The sound of my friend typing. My own typing. a soft and soothing buzz from the kitchen, might be the refrigerator. Sounds almost like crickets. The shifting of of my skin on the upholstered chair.

[Christabel Shaler](#) I can hear birds, footsteps, someone clearing their throat.

[Nadia Chaney](#) Sound of the neighbors in their kitchens, smell of fresh flowers, my very very comfortable arm chair...my own self typing.

[Nadia Chaney](#) (from Hjørdis Mair) I am sitting in the room i will teach tomorrow the seminar about poetry in the expressive arts. Very silent. I hear the air condition. Fare away some cars. The door opens. Silence. I am just sitting. Arriving in the room. Filling in Sensing its energy. Going through my notes. Always nervous.....
the space between the words. Between the lines. The silence between breathing. Silence in a group is listening. To myself. To each other. To the space. Slow down. 🧠💡 ng to more than to the first that will appear.

[Paula Fonseca](#) Cars outside, my refrigerator, my body moving

[Tammy Lea Meyer](#) Quality of silence: within me, a pregnant pause, a perception of presence and connection, through time zones and the inner-net; outside of me, the sounds of the small community of Chase waking up around me, cars going by, a beautiful wind chime, the ticking of a clock

[Mery Miguez](#) I am sitting at home in front of my computer, it's relatively early morning. Quite street. Listening to my key board as I type and an underlying sound, that I guess comes from the refrigerator in the next room. I usually don't get to listen to that.

[Shilpa Setty](#) I'm sitting in my room, some sound of vehicles occasionally, conversations in the neighborhood, the silence is inviting reflection, introspection, seeking answers from within, some kind of stillness.



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

[Nadia Chaney](#) Wow. It is so beautiful to imagine the different silences in all your different places. We have people here today from: Switzerland, Turkey, South Africa, Canada, USA, UK and India ♥

[Tasha Nathanson](#) In an office in Barbados. Colleagues quietly clicking on their keyboards, the opening notes of "La Cucaracha" playing repeatedly from the public transport vans up and down the street trying to attract riders, the thrum of the air conditioning...

[Vicki-Ann Ware](#) The rain is falling outside and the central heating is blowing. It's a great day to be working from home (it's winter here in Melbourne).

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Goals and Agreements for this session on Aug 17 2017

- 1) To deepen our understanding of silence in facilitation
- 2) To understand the costs and benefits of silence in group processes
- 3) To learn how to find and encourage silence in group processes
- 4) To increase our options and choices as facilitators
- 5) To support each other's learning and have meaningful fun!

In order to achieve these, here are some suggestions for COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS to make our time together flow really well. Be sure to add what you need or want AT ANY TIME DURING THE PROCESS. Let the group know or privately message the facilitator if you are concerned that an agreement is being broken.

- 1) No put downs of self or others. Keep a positive, lift-up vibe. If the facilitator finds your comments aggressive or inappropriate in any way you will receive a personal message.
- 2) Be willing to entertain simultaneous truths. Rather than proving a point, try to listen to understand, and be willing to agree to disagree. At the same time, if you



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

have a strong belief be willing to stand up for it. This will make our conversations rich!

3) Show your presence, by LIKING and by responding to keep the flow. Ask questions, make comments, connect. The technical trick for this format is to REFRESH your browser fairly often. The questions move around depending on how many people are answering, so please scan the whole page for new questions now and then.

4) Maintain CONFIDENTIALITY by not sharing names or personal information about the participants in your groups, sharing from your own perspective, and asking permission before sharing someone else's story.

5) Answer any questions in the COMMENTS below the question to keep the conversation organized and readable. Only open NEW questions in new threads.

6) You can come and go as you please, take as long as you like to respond, and basically enjoy the text-format to make this work no matter whether you are just waking up, just going to bed, or on your lunch break (time zones unite!!) A pdf transcript of the conversation will be provided. Feel free to continue the conversation even after the 90 minute period has ended.

*[Nadia Chaney](#)

Discussion Question #1: What are the ways that silence benefits a group process?

[Christabel Shaler](#) In my teaching practicum, I tried to cultivate the skill of waiting. When I first began teaching, I often felt uncomfortable when I didn't get a response right away. I would end up answering my own questions to soothe the discomfort of silence. My advisors forced me to



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

wait longer. As I endured the discomfort of silence, I was amazed to see the benefits of waiting. My students had time to gather their thoughts in the silence.

[Nadia Chaney](#) That's beautiful, Christabel. I know that feeling of discomfort, too. I wonder if you would be willing to talk more about that feeling, and what its roots might be?

[Christabel Shaler](#) I think it is my own discomfort from when I was a student. The fear of not knowing...of getting the answer wrong...of being "slow". When I endure the discomfort, it is like building muscle. It gets easier each time I endure.

[Tasha Nathanson](#) My oldest 2 children were very quick to always answer and fill the air with their words. My youngest needed reflection and was less sure of herself. I was often unsuccessful at holding space for her at dinner table conversation, for instance, though I tried. She blossomed when her sisters moved out. She needed some silence!

[Tasha Nathanson](#) As a teacher/facilitator, one needs to make space for the quiet ones while not cutting the external processors out of their way of learning. Neither is bad but the balance is tough. Best to have spaces/activities/intentionality about engaging both without alienating either.

[Paula Fonseca](#) Time to think, digest the ideas, accept yourself, reflections... is uncomfortable and weird but very powerful

[Nadia Chaney](#) Hi Paula!

[Nadia Chaney](#) I'd love to ask you the same thing I asked Christabel above...what IS is that makes silence so weird and uncomfortable sometimes?

[Paula Fonseca](#) I think we create an expectation for an answer. Depending on your excitement, your energy you want to keep your heart but fast because you can see where is going. And slow down and wait for the silence can be a good challenge.

[Paula Fonseca](#) Heart bit

[Laura June](#) Silence and waiting are closely related in group process I think. I feel like tempo in group process is sometimes connected to personality types - some people like to move quickly, and some people like to move slowly, in relation to the rest of the group at hand. I have worked



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

in group processes that move too quickly for me, where it seems like people are cutting off the ends of each other's sentences and it feels like a race to get your words in. This makes me retreat, as I need more space in order to engage. Silence feels inviting for more introverted people like myself. It allows the space to hear what people are really saying. Time to digest before jumping immediately into the next thought.

[Tammy Lea Meyer](#) To feel into what is present, to connect with the group field; to allow space for the group to feel itself through the energetic connections with each other, and develop the energetic perceptions of the group in connection with each other

[Laura June](#) Yes!

[Mocheko J. Nkoana](#) When people allow things to land nicely before they indulge. then it provides ample time for people to respond with consciousness.

[Mery Miguez](#) Silence in a group is like a pregnant space, the only way in which something truthful can emerge. In Social Presencing Theater we talk about the Japanese concept of MA in a conversation, which in simple words is the space that allows for something new and fresh to happen. It allows us to expand our awareness to the space in which the conversation is arising from; as space that is continually being shaped by our contributions. Silence allows us to see how are we shaping that space moment by moment.

[Shilpa Setty](#) It helps the group to let what is said sink in, and gather their thoughts and connect it to the discussion. Helps process the understanding both for the group and for facilitator. It definitely can get uncomfortable.

[Tasha Nathanson](#) Silence can make room for those who aren't as quick to jump in to decide to contribute. It is a way of evening out the power structures that give more voice to both those "in charge" and those more verbal.



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

*[Nadia Chaney](#)

Discussion Question #2: Is there a time that silence detracts from a group process?

[Hjørdis Mair](#) Silences is powerful. If somebody can't or don't want talk about wat is going on in a group. It can make insecure or give a feeling of punishing. This is silence outside of present, of the now. It is emotional. (for the other people here I don't know: hallo, nice to meet you. I am from Switzerland... 😊😊)

[Laura June](#) In my experience, how or if silence can be frustrating depends on what stage the process is in. Once your collective goals and processes have been agreed upon, and you enter the creative generative stage, silence can mean something awkward, like "your creative/art idea isn't *good*". This can be creatively hurtful or stifling when centered around a particular person or relationship in the group.

[Hjørdis Mair](#) May be silence needs a frame sometimes. Or the allowed ness to be silence.

[Mocheko J. Nkoana](#) It can disturb the flow if more people opt to pass to next in a session where answers were flowing through the circle.

[Tammy Lea Meyer](#) When something comes up in a group, and the silence holds a non-acknowledgement of that perspective or comment.... perhaps because it points to something really big for the group to hold, or is beyond the intention of the session... this feels like a tender space, where a lot of courage is needed to express the group tension in a good way

*[Nadia Chaney](#)

Discussion Question #3: What are all the ways that you create space for silence in a group process?

[Hjørdis Mair](#) In fact it is good to think about. I do it to little, a danger to pack to much in the teaching. Mindfulness, times where you have to be in silence, no talking, interacting with others.



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

And also communication exercises in silence. Listening instead of reacting: not knowing what it is about, being totally open what appears.

[Christabel Shaler](#) I think that a timed free-writing exercise is a nice way to have some quiet, reflective time. However, this is not technically silence.

[Nadia Chaney](#) So innnteresting...! I think I skipped an important opening question! What is technically silence?

[Hjørdis Mair](#) Yes. Doing art in the time if chairos is for me silence too. Can we listen behind the silence??

[Christabel Shaler](#) Nadia Chaney When I am writing, I feel like my thoughts are quite noisy. There is less room for possibility. Sitting quietly with no agenda seems more open.

[Laura June](#) I like to facilitate activities of interacting/communicating through movement, but without words. It creates parameters for improvisational group or paired connections, and invites forward the people who struggle more with words, which are often the most dominant means of communicating.

[Shilpa Setty](#) While facilitating activities where the group is taken through a journey of connecting with themselves through movement, music, visualization, or even relaxation.. it ends with a few moments of silence just to process everything that happened to an individual during that journey. That silence almost feels so palpable.

[Morag Christie](#) We sometimes start sessions with a relaxation exercise.

[Marianna Ani Pinchot](#) i think its particularly important in ceremonial spaces (heart circle comes to mind, but there is a ceremonial element to a lot of what we do) to leave space for things to emerge which means not only silence, but often uncomfortable silences in between emergent words and songs. it shifts the attention from the leaders to the whole space/group, creates conditions for cocreation, and allows room for the mysterious and magical to emerge.

[Marianna Ani Pinchot](#) facilitating with a quiet presence can have a similar effect. I almost wanna say "to be less captivation or to demand less attention" but it can actually be quite captivating. However, it is letting go of control of attention in a way that also some of the listeners attention to be inward and on others and on that mysterious unnamable other thing, which isn't always the right thing, but can be just the right thing.



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

*[Nadia Chaney](#)

Discussion Question #4 (last one before case studies): According to you, what is the difference between being and doing, and how do you find a balance between these in your facilitation practice?

[Nadia Chaney](#) Or, maybe I could phrase this as: How do you balance silence and sound, or action and stillness...

[Laura June](#) I think I use more sound (amplified music) when I want to rev things up, and I use less sound when I want to create a more reverent atmosphere. For me this touches on the relationship between being and doing, in that the quiet invites more space for sensitive openness, and the sound encourages a barreling forward of doing, going, making.

[Tammy Lea Meyer](#) hmmm... this one is rich. For me, the being and doing are merging somewhat... the facilitation practice I'm exploring now is using zoom, video conferencing software, so people are meeting non-locally using technology, and can see all of the participants, including themselves. Because of that, there is an observing of the self that is embedded in the practice that isn't as 'in your face' as it is in 'in physical presence' practices. The sessions are usually recorded, so they are also re-viewable outside of the present moment the group is gathered in.

It brings the being and the doing into somewhat of a merged state, for me. So I can observe myself, as well as all others, and the quality of presence that we are being and doing, at least what I can observe through the constraints of the form. What I'm stretching in myself is the ability to match my state of being with an emergent state of doing, whether that be listening, responding, or listening to what wants to emerge from my beingness in present time with the group activity. This piece, allowing the spirit to move me to communicate what wants to be communicated in the present moment, is the most delicate.... holding the will/experience of the group in the same space of what wants to be communicated through me. Such a tender muscle, and a challenge to articulate!

[Nadia Chaney](#) wow, a clear articulation of such a novel and complex process



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

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Case Study #1: You are facilitating a group of very energetic teenagers in a two-hour twice-a-week after school program. Your co-facilitator also has super high energy. The program is full of noise and laughter and joy. Where and how does silence exist in this program?

[Nadia Chaney](#) For me, it might come from a sense of wonder. Bringing in a sense of the new, of awe. Those moments of silence, maybe in relationship to nature, can bring the joyful bubblyness to an even deeper and more relevant tone.

[Shilpa Setty](#) In the joy of expression and joy of freedom

*[Nadia Chaney](#)

Case Study #2: You are facilitating a community meeting about a serious neighborhood issue that needs urgent resolution. Tension is running high. People are standing up, trying to shout over each other. One person has just stormed out of the room. How can you bring this group to a state of silence? What could be the quality of that silence? Where would you take them from there?

[Laura June](#) In an ideal scenario I would say singing. Bring up a respected community song leader to lead a song that ends with silence, then allow that silence to resonate. From there restating a process for speakers list and listening.



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

[Tammy Lea Meyer](#) I love this! It feels like it would connect the group, and then perhaps a minute of silence to allow the connection to drop in to peoples' bodies. I think there would have to be a clear acknowledgement of the tension, and a way to get the group to agree to shift the energy.... as you say, Laura, a respected community leader may need to be leaned on to help the group to choose to shift the energy

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Case Study #3: You are leading a team building session for a group of twenty young (13-18years old) members of a community art centre. Participants seem very quiet and low energy and in the break one of them informs you that they have done all of your activities before and are feeling bored. Is there a role for silence to play in this situation? If yes, how could you introduce it?

[Laura June](#) In this instance, I might move more towards switching up the vibe! If it seems like the group is quiet and low energy, then I might move away from silence to stir up the energy, inviting people to engage more collectively with each other.

[Tammy Lea Meyer](#) Perhaps after the break there could be a checkin, where the group could do a physical exercise to explore how engaged they are, where they express it through their bodies. Then perhaps the group could reflect what they saw/felt/experienced, to help inform the next activities and include any suggestions that were pointed to in the exercise and reflections



PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

*[Nadia Chaney](#)

Case Study #4: You are teaching a dance workshop for twenty people, a mix of professionals and amateurs. The workshop is focused on addressing an important community issue. They will be contributing to the choreography of the final performance. How might you use silence to support this process?

[Laura June](#) yay dance! I would do a mix of individual and group processes. I would have people create phrases each themselves, then I would pair people into duos or small groups and have everyone teach each other their phrases. I would have people take turns being in charge of how to sequence them, so I would call out when the next person steers the mini combinations of the groups' sequences. I would create a dramaturgical role and have everyone rotate through it, so that they could all have their eyes on the big picture, while still being within the piece itself. So the original generative creative work would be individual and without words (though dancing does usually make some sound). Then from there the process alternates between talking and watching.

[Arindita Gogoi](#) Sorry for not being able to make it this time, but loved going through all interactions.

*[Nadia Chaney](#)

Well, thus endeth our 90 mins together this month. You are more than welcome to keep hanging out here, or to come back later in the week...

Thank you for everything you are doing to make this world a better place for youth and communities all over the world. You inspire me, and all of us at PYE, everyday.

PYE will soon post the transcript and this page stays open if you would like to add anything to any of the posts. We are always open to new topics for the upcoming sessions. If you have any ideas please feel free to post them on this page. If you enjoyed today's session please tell your facilitator, teacher, manager, social worker, group therapist, activist and social artist friends!



Partners for Youth Empowerment

PYE Third Thursday Assembly
August 17, 2017

Don't forget to check www.pyeglobal.org for upcoming trainings, too, there's some new ones just posted.



[PYE Global - Partners for Youth Empowerment](http://www.pyeglobal.org)

PYE Global - Partners for Youth Empowerment ignites creativity and potential in youth and adults. Our Creative Community Model brings learning alive.
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[Laura June](#) This was so lovely.

[Tammy Lea Meyer](#) Thank you Nadia and everyone! so nourishing to read your sharings and experiences. ❤️