

The Quiet Signal: Making It Work!

Managing noise during independent work is quite different than noise management in the Cooperative Learning class. In cooperative learning we encourage interaction. We move from the traditional notion that “A good class is a quiet class,” to “Learning involves healthy noise.” Some teachers fear by allowing students to talk and interact, they might lose control of their classrooms. Using Kagan Cooperative Learning, we release a great deal of energy. We allow students to do what they most want to do: talk, interact and



move. It makes sense then that we must be able to stop the release of energy and/or direct it in a productive way. Without an effective quiet signal that gets the students to focus on the teacher some teachers spend an enormous amount of time and energy trying to get the attention of all their students, “may I get your attention, please?” “Quiet please!” are phrases repeated many many times.

The simple solution is a raised hand that signals students to stop talking, stop doing and give their full attention to the teacher. The raised hand is a convenient quiet signal because we do not have to talk over the talk of the teams (to shout to get quiet seems a little ironic.) As we raise a hand the students do likewise and signal other students to raise a hand too. The whole process happens in 3-5 seconds resulting in quick alert attention. Time saved over an academic year can be a

staggering 15 instructional days!! Teachers can use this ‘time saved’ to reinvest into the class tone, making it a positive, family atmosphere, a place where children look forward to spending time.

Making The Quiet Signal Work

As with any management procedure the quiet Signal has to be practiced and reinforced to make it work. The following points are designed to help you to implement the Quiet Signal:

Firstly if the Quiet Signal is not achieved in under 3-5 seconds, **stop everything** and practice it right then and there. Wait for the last hand up! If you get full attention from all but two or three inattentive or reluctant students do not proceed. **Wait for the last hand up!** If you proceed without **all** students giving you the signal, the message to the rest of the class is that they don’t really have to raise their hands. Proceeding without all hands up is a prescription for erosion of compliance. If you allow erosion pretty soon you will find it difficult to get the attention of even your ‘best behaved’ students. The knock-on effect to the rest of your classroom control can be devastating as we communicate our expectations by our own behaviour.

Too ‘Primary’ for High School Students?

The bottom line is that kids of all ages will do as we ask if we are consistent and if we show/explain it is important to us. Will high school students raise their hands on the quiet signal? Absolutely.. they already do when they want to ask a question. So the question is not whether or not they will but how the teacher approaches the task. If we model for them, and raising of the hand becomes a classroom routine/expectation, they will comply. It is like any other classroom rule.. if you don’t **model** and **reinforce**, it will not become **routine**. Some high school teachers call it the ‘Attention Signal’ and say ‘May I see your eyes please.’ It works just the same!

(Apart from having to make yourself heard over the class talk). One High School teacher did an exercise in ‘sophisticated time management’. He used a timer and told the class the quiet signal, he would count how long it took them to become quiet and give full attention. The number of seconds it took the class each time was totalled each week and deducted from a Friday ten-minute free talk period. Students began to manage themselves because they did not want to lose the free talk time, not something I have ever tried myself.

Re-establish if it loses effectiveness.

5 count visual reminder. Emphasis that you expect full alert attention in under five seconds. Tell the students if it ever takes over five seconds to get all eyes on you, we will stop everything and practice the quiet signal.

Give me Five. As the teacher raises a hand with five fingers spread apart. The five fingers are to remind students of five rules:

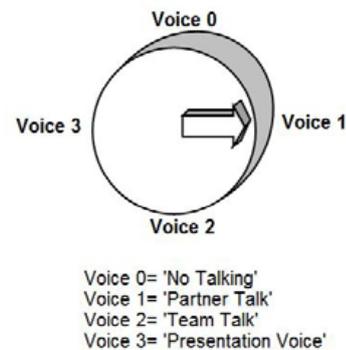
1. Eyes on the speaker.
2. Quiet.
3. Be still.
4. Hands free (put things down).
5. Listen.

Some teachers teach the students that the five fingers symbolise two eyes on the teacher, two ears on the teacher, and one mouth closed!

Tell the students we do not want to shout over their talk to get the attention of the class and that the Quiet Signal solves this problem. Don’t talk over their talk! (Exception ‘May I see your eyes please.’)

Explain how we get noisy: A bit of explanation to students may be helpful when introducing the quiet signal. After teams are formed explain to the students that there is a natural tendency for a classroom full of teams to become noisy; as one team talks, a nearby team talks a bit louder to be heard, which forces the first team to talk even louder. So noise levels can escalate. Ask them to

visualise the type of classroom they want to be part of, one that works in ‘forced’ silence, one that has an unearthly din where you cannot hear yourself think, or one that has an acceptable level of ‘healthy noise’. Noise escalation can be prevented if students know



and use their appropriate voice levels during interaction time. Different Voice Levels are appropriate for different tasks. In Kagan Cooperative Learning we teach three levels:

- Voice 0 = “No Talking” Independent work- no talking allowed
- Voice 1 = “Partner Voices” pairs must be quiet enough not to be heard by the other pair on their team.
- Voice 2 = “In The Team Voices” Teams must be quiet enough not to be heard by neighbouring teams.

Having established voice levels for example, ‘Voice 1 = an intimate pair voice between two students’ useful when using RallyRobin or Timed pair Share. The students can select the correct voice level just loud enough for their partner to hear without disturbing those around them. Students can hit a target that they can ‘see’. ‘Voice 2 = In the Team’ useful for RoundRobin or Talking Chips, students use a voice level just loud enough for everyone in the team to hear comfortably without disturbing other teams round and about them.

If the teacher needs silence then the students use ‘Voice 0’ giving full attention to the teacher or the task at hand. Have the students practice the three different voice levels. Have the students learn about and derive their own rationale for needing an effective focus on the teacher, brain research shows that a

quick change of focus allows us to recall more efficiently what has been said/presented rather than a slow hazy change of focus which seems to fog/cloud the message that is to follow. 'What's In It For Them', do they need to master the information you are presenting in order to achieve their qualifications? If so, give quick alert attention!

Signal others be vigilant.

Quiet attention spreads from the teacher across the class like ripples from a pebble dropped in a pond. Have the students understand that the Quiet Signal is for a way for them to manage their own attention and to get themselves ready to listen. It is not you the teacher battling against the class to get their attention. I usually add at this point, "if you see me stood at the front of the class with my hand raised waiting for attention and I am doing nothing it means that someone in the class is not giving attention, and it is your job (the rest of the class) to look around work out who it is and get them to give attention." If we want students to be more responsible we have to give them more responsibility. Every time the class respond with a 'successful' Quiet Signal I reinforce with **genuine** appreciation, "Thanks class for giving me your quick attention!", "I appreciate your quick focus!" etc.



Agree a simple Team Noise Cue. If a neighbouring team is too loud, teams can agree on a simple cue that the entire team performs, for e.g. the cue might be two finger clicks and a "ssshhhhh!" in unison. Teams

now have a polite way to let others know they are being too loud.

Class Noise Monitor. Give one student the role of Noise Monitor. When the noise monitor feels the classroom is too loud he/she reminds the class to return to their quiet voices. For younger students this role can fill them with a sense of pride and makes all students conscious of classroom noise levels. Rotate the role daily. Have each team select a Quiet Captain whose job it is to remind students on their team if they become too noisy. By having students formulate their own plans to use quiet inner voices (a voice that cannot be heard by a neighbouring team). The quiet Captain may use coloured 'traffic light' tokens to indicate if the group needs to quiet down. It is possible to have very quiet but enthusiastic cooperative learning..this time when the class gets too noisy, the teacher does not have to nag, you simply call the Quiet Captain from each team to come up to see you and you quietly ask them to go back to their teams and implement their teams prearranged plan to use 'quiet voices'.

Background Music: as students interact I sometimes play background music, this has two effects. One is that the shy students are more comfortable talking as part of the hum, if you like they can hide as part of the background, secondly I have noticed that students talk up to the level of the music and very rarely talk louder. This has the effect of the teacher being able to cap the noise at an acceptable classroom level.

How to become a puppet! Teachers who use the Quiet signal every few seconds are in danger of looking like a 'puppet' with their hand being tugged up by an invisible string. One teacher was trying to manage the noise level with the quiet signal. Students would get too loud, she would give the quiet signal, students would quiet down for a minute or so, then the noise would escalate again. The quiet signal is ideal for quickly getting students to focus on the teacher. But as a

noise management method, it is inefficient. We want students to maintain acceptable voice levels for prolonged periods without having to interrupt the class.

Work on the simple methods above to keep noise to a productive hum. The quiet signal manages attention, but does not manage noise level. (unless of course, you want to be a puppet!)

Use a variation

The best signals are fun, there are many possible signals to get the students attention, this is just the one I prefer you could for variation use: a sound maker, pleasant whistle, chime etc, the students stop talking and give the teacher full attention as above. You could use a snippet of music, or a sound bite. Try playing the first few lines of a song, "R.E.S.P.E.C.T." or how about a cartoon sound effect. Many sound effects are readily available on the internet. Download the students favourite cartoon character (e.g. Homer Simpson) saying "Quiet" this may be just the ticket your class need. Many teachers use 'Clapping patterns', the teacher claps a rhythm and the students respond by clapping a response rhythm in unison.

Some teachers flip lights off and on to get attention, not one I have ever used.

Choral response. Students all respond in unison to the teacher's prompt.

Teacher: One, two, three- eyes on me!

Students: One, two-eyes on you!

If you hear me, clap once! The teacher says, "If you hear me, clap once," and then claps once. Some students clap. The teacher says, "If you hear me, clap twice!" Most students clap twice. The teacher says, "If you hear me, clap three times!" All students clap three times and have full attention on the teacher. Noise Reduction Signal. There are times we want to remind students to keep their noise level down, but don't need absolute silence nor do we want to interfere with their projects or activity. Use of a non verbal, prearranged, signal, such as a horizontal palm

slowly lowering, can be very helpful to remind students of their agreement to keep to a 'healthy noise level.'

Lastly, there are mechanical monitors you can buy, such as the 'Yacker Tracker'. It looks like a traffic light. When the noise level gets too high, the light turns from green to flashing yellow. If the sound exceeds the programmed limit, the red light comes on and hopefully the students quiet down.

- For more great ideas on Classroom Management in the Cooperative Learning classroom read 'Kagan Cooperative Learning', item code BKCL available to buy online at www.kaganaustralia.com.au

