

Chairman's Corner

SILENCE !

Ravi Ramakantan

It is 4 in the afternoon and about 20, 25 year old postgraduate students in radiology are gathered around viewboxes or are connected to an online "meeting".

Some call it 'class'.

This is an interactive teaching session in radiology that I have been conducting since the last 40 years or so.. usually once a week ,, most Saturday afternoons.

Up until COVID invaded our world, this was an "in person" meeting with these students gathered in a small lecture room.

Someone will show the x-ray of a patient; add a brief history. These are usually unknown cases to most present,

A volunteer student is expected to "take' the "case".. start describing the findings and offer a diagnosis,

Well... this is how it is expected to be..

But the real world happenings are different.. very different.

The x-ray image is up on the view box for all to see and I am hoping - there would be a volunteer resident (PG student) to come and 'discuss' the case.

Sometimes, there is a "brave" resident who will walk up to the view box and start describing the findings on the x-ray.

But this is an exception.

Most times, I wait .. wait and wait...for someone to come up and break the uncomfortable silence.. Some students are even hiding behind others just so I may not call them up.

SILENCE, nothing is happening.. no one is coming up.

So, I start my routine..

"Anyone from the first year , please come up.

The place remains dead.

"Anyone from the second year , please come up.

SILENCE

The place remains dead.

"Anyone from the third year , please come up.

Graveyard time!

I seldom remember names or faces.. so I start off my usual trick.

Anyone in a red T shirt..?

And then, after much coaxing, someone will show up and start describing.

There is a set pattern to describe a case,

You spell out the findings, highlight the important ones and give a diagnosis or a differential diagnosis.

But most times, the students' train of speaking stops after the description.

At this point, I coax them.. some more.... for a diagnosis,

More SILENCE.

"Someone else" I call out.. hoping another student will take the case forward.

More SILENCE

You see, all these long 'silence breaks' are not because the students do not want to speak, but because they are afraid of making mistakes and look like a fool in front of other students in the room.... in front of the class. All this in spite of the fact that most of these *bacchus* are top rankers out of the NEET battlefield.

Maybe, they are 'afraid' of me.

No amount of passionate explanation about "It is fine to be wrong; it is better to be wrong here than in an exam.. or in real life medical practice" or "you ask me an unknown. I might well be wrong".. seems to make no difference There is more

SILENCE.

Decades have gone by and nothing has changed. We have online meetings these days and *bacchuslog* hide behind switched off microphones even as I eagerly look out for one of those microphones to come alive, No such luck.

SILENCE,

That it is no fun to be in a class and be met with silence instead of a vigorous discussion is not really the point.

The question is "Why silence".

Once in a while we have these reverse meetings, when I become the student and the students become the teacher - and ask me to read an unknown x-ray and then ask questions, , In these sessions, I take every opportunity to show them how to keep talking till a differential diagnosis is spelt out. As often as not, my diagnosis is wrong and I keep hoping that will courage the students to understand "It is OK o be wong"

Why are the students afraid of being wrong?

I may have been a "Hitler" of a teacher in my younger days,.. but I no longer am. By their own estimates I have mellowed down "so much".

So I keep wondering why is there so much silence ... the Silence drags on and I feel lost.

Dear Bacchulog!!

Break this unnecessary barrier of wordlessness..

Discuss freely..

Ask me questions.. See... I do not know so many of the answers.

We are all sailing the same boat. It is just that I happen to be born way before you and that is no fault of yours.

In our meetings, change the monologue into a healthy dialogue and let's have fun as we both learn.

January 2023

[Contents page](#)