

Children's Comments

A total of 62 primary school teachers in China, who had been using silent sitting in their classes as part of an SSEHV programme at least three times per week for a year, each interviewed 5-6 students regularly during the year about how they perceived the silent sitting to have affected them. Valid interview data were returned for 348 students, ranging from grade 2 to grade 6. Qualitative analysis was used to identify patterns in the students' comments, as indicated in the table below with some typical examples of their actual comments. Of the 348 students, 339 (97.4%) made positive comments. It is interesting to note that the effect mentioned most often is improved concentration (115 students mentioning this). In all, 749 valid positive comments were analysed, and these have been classified into five categories: **feelings, thoughts and emotions**, which accounted for 293, or 39%, of the total comments; **better study habits** (241, 32%); **improved school performance** (110, 14.7%); **physical effects** (73, 9.7%) and **behavior** (32, 4.3%). It is encouraging to see a spread in the comments between affective factors (feelings of relaxation, calmness and peace, improved moods); general behaviours (not getting angry, irritated or impatient as easily) and academic behaviours (improved study skills and attitudes, better understanding and retention and improved academic scores). The children's comments have been translated from the original Chinese, but with their expressions left as close as possible to the original.

Category	Effect	Number of comments (% of total comments in category)	Typical examples of pupils' comments
Feelings, thoughts and emotions Number of comments: 293 (39% of all comments, N=749)	Relaxed/comfortable mind	63 (26.1%)	It makes me reduce stress. That feeling is very comfortable. I don't want to open my eyes.
	Calmness	43 (17.8%)	It can make my heart feel calm. In my life a lot of matters vexed me. Now I will calm down to think when I meet these matters. It really has worked very much. I understand that the teacher lets us sit in silence before the lesson to let us study with a calm mindset. I can adjust my panic mood and feel full of confidence to have class.
	Improved mood	30 (12.4%)	I can adjust my own mood. My mood is at ease. My heart is smiling. If I am in a bad mood at home I will do silent sitting by myself. My mood changes very quickly and I recover my equanimity. The other day I was very angry, anxious, in no mood

			to go to class.....After silent sitting I became more peaceful. It's unbelievable a little silent sitting can become my psychological doctor, make me shift from worried to peaceful, from anger to happiness.
	"Forget agony"/take mind off unpleasant matters/reduce worries/able to cope with nervousness or anxiety	30 (12.4%)	After a period of time silent sitting, I slowly forget some vexing matter, concentrate on learning mathematics During the process I feel I am entirely free of worry, which I have never felt before. removes your worries and adds some fun
	Feeling of happiness	28 (11.6%)	Everyone has times when we are not happy. If you have this kind of mood for the whole morning or the whole day it is difficult to have your class. Then you get "half the result with twice the effort". The silent sitting makes me feel I am with the clouds to enjoy sightseeing of beautiful scenery in different countries, and my whole body feels totally relaxed and happy, no worries at all. Now I get "twice the result with half the effort". Since I learned silent sitting, life for me is not sad or miserable any more. It's happy. I feel I enter a world without suffering or sadness, only happy and smiling faces, a world of wonderful fantasy.
	Don't get as angry now – e.g. when in conflict with other people, I don't lose my temper as easily	26 (10.8%)	I was trying to do a painting at home but it was not going well. I became angry and destroyed the painting. My father saw me and reminded me to do silent sitting. After silent sitting I became calm and I did a very good painting. I no longer become angry with my mother. Mother says I am lovely. When I am not happy with a classmate over some small matter, silent sitting makes me settle down.
	Peaceful	19 (7.9%)	Even if I am in a noisy environment I can settle down to do my homework well.
	Light and free	19 (7.9%)	Whatever I like, I can think.
	Emotions	13 (5.4%)	When I meet an unhappy situation I seek a place of calmness to calm down. ...marvelous feeling I feel easily pleased. I feel very happy. When the teacher describes some scene to us I get up in good humour and feel happy to hear the lesson. Often in silence I feel exultation.
	Sense of awe/ appreciation of the beauty of the scenario being described	10 (4.1%)	The beautiful music makes me think of the great universe in play. It lets me imagine several beautiful pictures. I can feel my life is full of interest and beauty, a very wonderful

			<p>life.</p> <p>I feel wonderful inside my heart.</p> <p>I feel there is a bright spot in my mind that turns round and round in front of me and takes my soul away to the forest, over the sea, over the endless grassland etc.</p>
	Less impatient	5 (2.1%)	
	More tolerant of others	4 (1.7%)	<p>In the past I always liked to report to teachers, saying, “Xiao Hung, Xiao Lan, Xiao Dung won’t lend pens to me, Xiao Ker knocked me down and didn’t say sorry...” Silent sitting has made me forgive others actively. I never thought that silent sitting would have such powerful charm. It changed me, made me become more peaceful.</p>
	More understanding of others	2 (0.8%)	<p>If somebody else is, for example, criticized by a teacher or another person I will tend to comfort them – I have a greater sense of forgiving others</p> <p>Every time in silent sitting I feel in my heart there is an ideal kingdom. People there get along well with each other, they help each other, they are always “ready to help others for a just cause” and also sacrifice their own interests for the sake of others. What a peaceful and calm picture, then my heart will calm down.</p>
	Kinder/ more considerate	1 (0.4%)	I am more concerned about other people, do not humiliate people. I know I was wrong before.
<p>Better study habits Number of comments: 241 (32% of all comments)</p>	Concentration	115 (47.7%)	<p>Silent sitting helps me to settle to study very quickly and will not let other matters interfere with my thinking.</p> <p>When class begins I am still thinking of the bubble-gum I bought before class and thinking of buying another one. After listening to the teacher read the silent sitting...I am willing to participate in the study activity with the teacher.</p> <p>Before class I was thinking about when I went to McDonalds last week with my mum. After listening to the teacher I think less distracting things and I can concentrate on my study.</p> <p>In class, no matter who interrupts me, I won’t be influenced. I just concentrate, then I can make progress.</p>
	Review of classwork for understanding and memory / clear thinking	43 (18.7%)	<p>I usually do silent sitting before sleeping, quietly remembering what I learnt that day.</p> <p>I can think of a lot of knowledge.</p>
	Improved study habits and attitudes/ more active participation in class	38 (17.0%)	<p>My father thinks I have become more conscientious with my study. He doesn’t scold me now.</p> <p>I can learn more quickly.</p> <p>We can get “twice the result with half the effort”.</p>

			<p>I have more interest in study than before.</p> <p>At home there is now no need to fight because of my study – there is more happiness.</p> <p>I can cope with learning harder knowledge.</p> <p>I can learn more easily.</p> <p>I had a habit of talking in class. Now I am much quieter and more motivated to study.</p> <p>Before I would rush ahead and not think carefully. Now I have changed my way of going about things and will now do a couple of minutes of silent sitting first.</p>
	Settle down after play or excitement (or returning after a holiday)	27 (11.2%)	After PE class every time I come back to class sweating all over. It makes me feel agitated about coming back into the classroom. But now we have 2 minutes silent sitting I calm down and “no ripples”
	Better listening skills	13 (5.4%)	
	Less careless	5 (2.1%)	<p>Before I was careless. I understood everything while learning the mathematics but could not get a high mark and was always making mistakes in my homework. After doing silent sitting I pay more attention and am more earnest. The teacher says I have progressed.</p> <p>In every exam I made mistakes because of my carelessness and Mum and Dad scolded me, but I still did it again. I just could not get rid of this bad habit. After silent sitting my heart calms down. I become patient so I do better and won't be careless in my exams again.</p>
Improved school performance Number of comments: 110 (14.7% of all comments)	Stimulated imagination, eg easier to think of what to write	38 (34.5%)	<p>I imagine an outside matter in the classroom, imagine a past matter, also imagine a future matter. The imagination makes my self-confidence increase.</p> <p>When a teacher from another class asked me to make a model for the class I couldn't think of an idea, so I closed my eyes and got good ideas.</p>
	Improved problem solving /easier to find an answer	32 (29%)	<p>I can answer a problem very quickly.</p> <p>It can help me to resolve mathematics problems.</p> <p>The teacher teaches us to do silent sitting at the time of exams. I took first [place] in the exam.</p> <p>Silent sitting makes me more confident and I like to think of problems.</p> <p>We can get solutions by silent sitting with eyes closed when we meet with difficulties.</p>
	Improved academic work	28 (25.4%)	Especially the composition – I used to get a headache – now I can write anything to order.

			Silent sitting reduced my study pressure and let me have excellent results.
	Strengthened memory	9 (8.1%)	Sometimes I would forget what I had learned but, using silent sitting, I am reminded of the knowledge. Remembering the formulae for chanting [i.e. rote learning by chanting] also isn't so difficult.
	Think of the answer more quickly/give better answers	3 (2.7%)	I am quicker to think of an answer. Time slows down when my eyes are closed, so I have more time to find a solution. I can remember mathematical formulae quicker than before.
Physical effects Number of comments: 73 (9.7% of all comments)	Brain refreshed, stimulated or clear	39 (53.4%)	The brain is very quiet – it can expel miscellaneous things.
	Body refreshed if tired/more energetic	23 (31.5%)	It can remove fatigue. I feel my spirit aroused – very much vitality. It can eliminate my tiredness/fatigue and I can continue the third and fourth class [of the morning] full of energy. Every day we have five classes before we can have a break. So I feel very tired, especially during the third and fourth classes in the morning; tired and hungry, dizzy and with a big head. Since we have had silent sitting, when I feel hungry I imagine there's a roast duck in front of me. When I feel tired I feel I become a bird flying in the sky or a fish swimming in the water. Therefore all hunger and tiredness goes and I can finish my classes happily. When I feel perplexed or annoyed and worn out, absolutely exhausted, I will do silent sitting as our teacher tells us. I can take a short rest for a while.
	Easier to go to sleep at night	4 (5.5%)	
	Good for the eyes to give them a rest	4 (5.5%)	
	Helpful in sport, to calm down before competition	2 (2.7%)	
	Can make me more healthy	1 (1.4%)	
Behaviour Number of comments: 32 (4.3% of all comments)	Initiates conscience /helps to get rid of bad habits	12 (37.5%)	I changed some bad habits. Silent sitting makes me understand my shortcomings. Silent sitting stories have told me a lot of morals that I can think about. It is silent sitting that makes me think about a lot of morals, for example to be honest, to be open-hearted.

	Improved self-behaviour/self-discipline	11 (34.3%)	<p>Mother said, “Child, you have really improved. You should appreciate your teacher’s guidance”. I said with a smile, “It is not only the teacher, but also silent sitting”.</p> <p>If I get angry or fidgety I use silent sitting.</p> <p>I have realized that you cannot be so noisy otherwise you will interfere with other students.</p> <p>In class sometimes I talk, so after class I sit silently for 5 minutes and try to find out the reason why I talk in class.</p>
	Improved class behaviour/ class spirit	8 (25.0%)	<p>Those very naughty classmates also changed.</p> <p>They don’t affect others as much.</p> <p>It brings control much better than if the teacher growls at the class.</p> <p>In our class Li Xiao Ping is the most impatient one. After silent sitting he has “cultivated his morality and temperament” and is not naughty any more.</p>
	Self direction	1 (3.0%)	Lets me ascertain my direction for achieving my goals

Only nine of the 348 students made negative comments about silent sitting – one of these, whose initial comment was “how boring” was giving positive comments six months later. Their reasons included:

Inability to put the skills into practice:

- I can’t focus – I think hard, but again and again what I saw on television last night... I can’t attain inner peace.
- I can’t be quiet, I look at other classmates secretly, being almost asleep.

The belief that the time should be spent on studying:

- I still don’t like it because I feel dull. It does not seem to give me any important help.
- I think it’s not necessary – it takes a lot of time, doing not much
- I think having it very often wastes our precious time but I’m very interested in occasional silent sitting
- I feel very vexed – much precious time spent not in study – why do we have to spend it sitting in silence?

Teachers’ comments:

The following are typical of the comments made by teachers in their personal reflections:

- It calms down the children’s minds. When they close their eyes they can try to recall previous knowledge – not just in class but also things they have done right or wrong, ie self-assessment.
- Silent sitting is a way of thinking, gives people a sense of quiet, and they are very free to think about anything and escape temporarily from reality – therefore it decreases the pressure of work. I use it personally to have a break mentally or physically.
- I have found myself able to control my own mood easier.

- Silent sitting is very good to nurture their study habits. It encourages the students to think, try new things and change their attitudes towards their studies. They are now beginning to see that they are studying for themselves, not for their parents.
- Silent sitting brings real benefits to students – it reduces pressure, concentrates their minds, improves their thinking, changes naughty behaviour, and improves imagination and quality of writing.
- Sometimes students give up when facing difficulties but, after silent sitting, they are more persistent.

Benefits to the family

After we had introduced silent sitting to the schools in the SSEHV projects in Mainland China, the teachers asked their pupils to share it at home with their families. After some time, the children made comments such as the following, which indicate clearly that families have benefitted from doing this activity together and that it has contributed to building a sense of community within these families.

- My father does not get so angry with me. He knows I have changed and he loves me very much.
- We do not fight any more in our home because of [silent sitting] – now it is more fun.
- We sit at the same table to do silent sitting. My family members say it is very helpful to a person's mental state. Mother says it is so very good.
- I tell my family that, when they meet difficult times, using silent sitting will help them to look before they leap.
- I can think of my mother's pain and can also help her with her life. After silent sitting I do not want to fight with my mother. She says I have changed.
- My mother likes to do silent sitting very much, getting me to do it every evening.
- My father and mother both say it is very interesting and they would like to do silent sitting with me, together. The nights when mother does silent sitting with me I am able to fall asleep very quickly. Father's mother likes it too. My elder sister and elder brother also like it very much and use it.
- When my mother saw me using silent sitting she was a bit shocked. Now, under my influence, when she is in a bad mood she will also listen to music and do silent sitting.
- Having once seen me doing silent sitting at home, my grandmother thought I had been learning to follow some religion from the television and told me not to learn such things from television. After I explained she has no objection. Sometimes grandmother is very tired so I teach her also to do silent sitting.
- Now when my father meets difficulties in his life he can do silent sitting like me – sometimes it really can solve a problem.
- Every evening my mother will tell a silent sitting story for me. I like to do silent sitting with my mother.
- The change in me seems to have had an influence on my father. Now he will sit down with me and have a conversation, unlike before when he always wore a face like a plank and scolded me.
- I have been doing silent sitting at home with my mother. Now, I feel that the number of times that mother and father fight are fewer.
- Every evening my grandpa also does silent sitting before going to bed.