

Supporting Introverted Students

Jenn Stewart

Abstract

Understanding introverted students in the classroom is a necessary component of supporting students' unique learning needs. Educators need to be mindful of how introverted students learn in the classroom setting, and determine how best to integrate this peaceful personality in positive ways. Acknowledging introverted students for who they are, celebrating their unique differences, and guiding them on their learning path will inspire them to take risks, appreciate their value, and find their place in the world.

An ever-increasing role for educators is to familiarize themselves with the learning styles of their students. For student growth and social-emotional learning, it is vital for educators to support the different personality types of their students. Understanding introverted students in the classroom is a necessary component of supporting students' unique learning needs. Nurturing the quiet, reserved introverted student requires understanding the personality of the outgoing, expressive extroverted student. Educators need to be mindful of how introverted students learn in the classroom setting, and determine how best to integrate this peaceful personality in positive ways. Because their quiet disposition can hide feelings of anxiety, the mental health of an introverted student is frequently overlooked within this reserved personality. Teaching the introverted student in the classroom setting requires careful thought and planning. Educators need to evaluate their own biases and beliefs, because many educational institutions favour certain learning styles and personality types. Advocating for introverted students is paramount in supporting the future of this quiet personality. For these various reasons, it is vital for educators to support introverted students to reach their full potential.

An important component of supporting students' unique learning needs is having an understanding of introverted students. The terms "introvert" and "extrovert" have been helpful to describe different personality types and to explain basic differences in human temperament (Cain, 2016, p. 7; Monohan, 2013, para. 2). Introverted students navigate their world in a quiet, thoughtful, introspective manner (Cain, 2016; Kuzeljevich, 2017). They prefer to listen more than they talk, think before they speak, and observe more than they are the center of attention (Cain, 2012, 2016). Spending their days enjoying quiet time for introspection, introverts apply a calming approach to the structure of their lives (Beukeboom, Tanis, & Vermeulen, 2012). Introverted students prefer alone time, dislike conflict, and enjoy deep, thoughtful discussions (Cain, 2012). Too much exposure to people and conversation may cause introverts to feel over-stimulated and anxious (Kuzeljevich, 2017; Martin, 2014). Often, highly sensitive introverts need to retreat from the world and spend time alone to recharge (Cain, 2012). Although understanding introverted students is helpful, it is also necessary for educators to recognize the uniqueness of extroverted students.

It is imperative to understand the personality of the outgoing, expressive extroverted student in order to support and nurture the quiet, reserved introverted student. Western culture applauds the quick decision-making, outspoken, and confident traits of the extroverted personality (Higgin, 2017; Kuzeljevich, 2017). Many extroverts prefer talking to listening, and have a sociable, gregarious easy-going way about them (Beukeboom et al., 2012; Caine, 2012). Extroverted students make fast decisions, enjoy risk taking, and tend to dive right into assignments. Classrooms may have extroverted students who are excitement-seekers, enjoy thinking aloud, are comfortable with conflict, and are often assertive in their interactions. Because extroverts speak faster and louder, and have an extensive range, many prefer to communicate openly and not in small groups (Alshamsi, Pianesi, Lepri, Pentland, & Rahwan, 2016; Beukeboom et al., 2012). Educators need to be cognizant of learning characteristics of

introverted and extroverted personalities, and knowledgeable of how introverted students learn in a classroom environment.

Integrating this peaceful personality in positive ways requires educators who know how introverted students learn in the classroom setting. For an introverted personality, emotional security precedes learning because participating in the classroom setting can be difficult (Heick, 2017; Higgin, 2017). The classroom environment is a major source of emotions for the introverted student, and while educators are the focal point of many social exchanges for introverts, the emotional comfort of an introverted student is necessary for positive connections and future learning (Heick, 2017; Mainhard, Oudman, Hornstra, Bosker, & Goetz, 2018). Although introverted students are reserved and thoughtful, educators need to look beyond the “quiet” learner for increased student participation (Dack & Tomlinson, 2015; Higgin, 2017). Developing the self-esteem of introverted students requires educators who create emotionally supportive environments and encourage students’ varied pathways for learning (Cain, 2012; Dack & Tomlinson, 2015). Because introverted students prefer to work alone and explore their understanding in silence, teachers need to reduce outside stimulation to benefit the introverted learner in the classroom (Cain, 2012; Monohan, 2013). Although understanding how to integrate introverted students in the classroom setting is important, there is the tendency to ignore the mental health of introverted students.

This reserved, introverted personality has a quiet disposition. The growing emphasis in classrooms on group projects may cause anxiety for introverted students in this interactive arrangement (Cain, 2012; Godsey, 2015). To help introverts better control their anxiety, educators need to check the physical environment of the classroom, teacher behaviour and expectancy, and peer group behaviour and expectancy (Effiong, 2016; Shukla, 2017). Introverted students experience increased performance when they withdraw from highly stimulating environments and work independently in calm settings (Cain, 2012; Godsey, 2015). Because socializing may cause introverted students feelings of anxiety, they have a need to reflect and be alone. Introverted students often hear the social message that there is something wrong with their reflective need, thus causing them deep psychic pain (Cain, 2012). Introverted students need support in their quiet periods of reflective thought. Educators can help remove the stigma of “quiet” students, manage anxiety-provoking stressors, and guide introverted students in their comfort zone.

Careful consideration and planning are required to support the introverted student in the classroom. To create a classroom climate that supports introverted students in their learning, educators need to offer both group and individual seating, and varying levels of social interaction (Greene, 2017; Monohan, 2013). Teachers must organize the classroom environment to support introverted students with well-balanced social and quiet areas (Mainhard et al., 2018; Greene, 2017). Quiet areas can include individual desks for work, and well-designed small group learning experiences to strengthen skills and encourage introverted learners (Monohan, 2013; Greene, 2017). Teacher sensitivity and careful planning can connect students with one another and aid in the success of introverted students (Dack & Tomlinson, 2015; Hughes & Coplan, 2017). A positive classroom climate is consistent with support, whereby educators see introverted students as unique individuals, and plan lessons accordingly (Dack & Tomlinson, 2015; Hughes & Coplan, 2017). Although introverted students need a supportive classroom environment that nurtures their unique personality and learning style, educational institutions need to monitor the support of student learning needs.

Because many educational institutions favour certain learning styles and personality types, educators need to analyse their own biases and beliefs. Educational institutions neglect the needs of introverted students when “collaborative learning,” “project-based learning,” and “flipped classrooms” are encouraged (Godsey, 2015, para. 2). These instructional methods burden the introverted learning style and do not take into account the need for teachers’ increased awareness of learners’ individual differences (Sharma, 2015). When supporting introverted students, educators need to consider their own perceptions – which may be

misperceptions – of their students’ characteristics and abilities (Coplan, Hughes, Bosacki, & Rose-Krasnor, 2011). The word “introvert” is often stigmatized (Cain, 2012, p. 5), and “shy/quiet” children are often thought of as lacking intelligence (Coplan et al., 2011). The “self-fulfilling prophecy” phenomenon occurs when students meet their teachers’ expectations instead of fulfilling their own levels of potential (Coplan et al., 2011, p. 940-941). Thus, it is imperative that educators put aside their own biases and beliefs in order to support the growth of introverted students.

Educators are at the forefront of advocating for the learning style of introverted students. Teaching introverted students in a way that honours their personality type and advocates for their learning needs is critical for their future success. Although many classroom environments promote extroverted behaviour through lively learning activities, teachers may be neglecting the inward-thinking needs of the introverted student (Dack & Tomlinson, 2015; Godsey, 2015). Because companies often revere the outward qualities of the extroverted personality, many educational settings follow suit (Godsey, 2015; Kuzeljevich, 2017). However, teachers have a responsibility to optimize their students’ classroom experiences, regardless of where they fit into the introverted-extroverted continuum. They need to plan their teaching in order to encourage introverted students in their own learning process (Dack & Tomlinson, 2015; Sharma, 2015). When the vocal, active student is the forefront in the collaborative process in the classroom setting, advocating for the introverted “silent” (Reda, 2009, p. 4) student remains imperative (Reda, 2009; Sharma, 2015). “Listening to learn and learning to listen” is a phrase this author values and incorporates into daily lessons. Educators need to advocate for the value in listening, because there is a risk that students will spend less time learning to listen and therefore less time listening to learn (Remedios, Clarke, & Hawthorn, 2012).

In conclusion, educators should plan lessons to accommodate the needs and learning styles of introverted students. Educators have the potential to influence students’ lives and attend to their unique personalities and learning differences. It is essential for teachers to support both introverted and extroverted students, because their learning styles can contribute to a positive culture within classrooms and other educational settings. Students’ mental health should be a steady consideration for all educators, especially the mental health of the quiet, introverted students. A supportive environment encourages introverted students to participate and take risks beyond their comfort zone. Therefore, acknowledging introverted students for who they are, celebrating their unique differences, and guiding them on their learning path will inspire them to take risks, appreciate their value, and find their place in the world.

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About the Author

Jenn Stewart is in the M.Ed. program (guidance & counselling) at Brandon University. She completed her B.A. and B.Ed. at the University of Winnipeg, and Post Bac. at the University of Manitoba. Jenn works for the Pembina Trails School Division as a school counsellor and teacher.