

The Quiet Majority:

Introversion and Gifted Students

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Curriculum Methods for Gifted and Talented Students

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Would you rather be “bold, talkative and energetic”, or “compliant, passive and reserved”? If you chose the former group of adjectives, then you are probably in the majority since they are all positive adjectives. On the flip side, introversion is associated with many negative connotations. Many gifted students carry the burden of being labeled “gifted” and “introverted” (Burrell 2011). Science supports the differences between introverted and extroverted personality traits. After understanding the misconceptions and science behind introversion, teachers can develop ways to help support introverted gifted students.

An introvert is someone who feels drained and loses energy from being around other people, but gains energy from being alone. Extroverts, on the other hand, gain energy from people and stimulus around them. Carl Jung coined the terms for introversion and extroversion and believed each one was a healthy personality trait. Then, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung had a falling out. Freud was angry with Jung and disputed his ideas including introversion and defined it as “being too preoccupied with the self,” “avoiding the world,” and “narcissistic.” These misunderstandings became popular and absorbed into American culture. In 2010, the American Psychological Association tried to add “Introvert Personality Disorder” to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, and the International Classification of Diseases *did* include Introvert Personality as a variant of schizoid personality disorder. (Recently, in the ICD-10-CM, the personality disorder has been removed.) Most research states that introverts make up one quarter to one third of the population. However, this statistic stems from Isabel Myers in a paper written during the development of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator test in 1957. The MBTI manual published in 2003 states introverts make up 50.7% of the population (Helgoe 2013).

Not only are introverts a part of a “quiet majority,” but introverted students form a large portion of the gifted population. Over 75% of people with IQ’s over 160 are introverted (Sword 2002). This is not surprising since many key introverted characteristics match gifted student characteristics. One, introverts have a love of learning. Two, both groups think outside of the box such as creative problem solving and original answers. Three, introverts excel at the creative arts. Since introverts often pause and reflect, they also see things from a different perspective. Four, introverts tend to be more empathetic which is another trait found in gifted students (Cain 2016).

The two groups have overlapping affective characteristics, and science has now shown that introverts are also physically different from extroverts. When scientists observed the nervous system, they discovered that introvert nervous systems react more intensely. The extrovert nervous system does not react as much, so the body needs increased and constant stimulation to get a reaction. In order to prove that reactions occur in a more physical sense, doctors placed lemon juice on the tongues of both introverts and extroverts. The introverts produced more saliva in reacting to the acid (Cain 2016). When processing information, introvert brains took a longer pathway that integrates the unconscious and complex information. This processing takes more time. Introverts also utilize their long-term memory more which also requires longer recall times (Laney 2005). Despite the fact that introverts show more electrical activity and blood flow in response to stimuli than extroverts, extroversion is still seen as a positive and introversion as a negative trait (Helgoe 2013).

The implications of different physiology means this special group of undervalued students deserves more attention to their needs. One major assumption is that all shy people are

introverts. According to Bernardo Canducci who has been studying shyness at the Shyness Research Institute, “Shy people want to be noticed, liked and accepted but they lack the skills and the thoughts, feelings and attitudes that could them manage social interaction.” Both introverts and extroverts can be shy. However, shy does not equal introverted. Introverted people prefer to socialize in a certain way (Laney 2005). These shy students want to connect with other people. On the other hand, introverts desire solitude.

Another assumption is that introverts carry the stigma of being “antisocial”. Simply having one to three close friends with deep relationships is normal. In our culture, many believe having thousands of Facebook friends is the desire of everyone. Instead of encouraging extrovert traits, introverts need to be taught to be themselves. Introverts can be taught to name and validate their emotions. Stories like *Winnie the Pooh* have clear temperaments that illustrate concrete examples of emotions and how being “social” is open to other points of view. Once introverts understand why they need breaks from people and stimulus, they will not feel so alone and unwelcome in the extroverted world (Laney 2005). Introverts *like* to be social, but it takes energy away from them and they need to recharge.

Science and psychology has proven a difference between introversion and extroversion. Therefore, teachers must also be aware of these major differences. Teachers must discuss these affective traits in the classroom and acknowledge that introversion and extroversion have positive characteristics. Every student has “a valuable perspective to contribute” (Cain 2016). Positive characteristics of introverts include: to stop and think before acting, naturally listen well, focus on ideas in depth, have a few deep relationships, provide calmness and clarity, loyalty and caring (Cain 2016).

Within the classroom, introverts can hear that they are valued, but they should also see it as well. Teachers should be aware of always giving awards to the most outgoing students as opposed to the quiet student that contributes just as much. When asking a question, leave a short pause before calling on a student to allow the students with longer pathways to process and recall an answer. Before a discussion, a teacher can offer a longer pause for developing ideas quietly. Instead of grading on class discussion and how many times each person speaks, grade on “class engagement” where grades are based on interaction with the materials. Teachers can offer group and individual projects and if students are grouped a mix of introverts and extroverts will give different perspectives. In “brainwriting,” everyone writes one idea down on a paper or post-it note and the teacher can put one at a time on the board for discussion (Cain 2016). Introverted students love quiet and need to recharge after receiving stimulus all day. Teachers can create a quiet space for the students to sit alone if they wish and re-energize themselves (Helgoe 2013).

Once aware of the introverted mindset, many teachers and gifted students can see the world a little differently. The science and psychology reveal hidden talents of introverts which can be used to create the next Apple computer as the introvert Steve Wozniak did, or write another Cat in the Hat as the introvert Dr. Seuss has done. Introverted students deserve the tools to flourish in the classroom and in life.

Works Cited

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