

# Talk to Think or

## *Are We Meeting the Needs of Both Introverted and Extroverted Learners in the School Library?*

**E**nvision your school library with a class of junior students with whom you'll be working in literature circles. You notice a student sitting quietly, listening intently, and following instructions although disinclined to raise her hand and hesitant to share her ideas. Her counterparts, the chatterbox and the class clown, who excel at trivia games and insist on talking during silent reading, find it difficult to work independently. As a teacher-librarian, do you assess these students' literacy skills strictly on the "appropriateness" of their actions, or are you enlightened enough to know that learning is happening in those you've observed?

According to the Ontario College of Teachers' Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession, all teachers, including teacher-librarians, should demonstrate commitment to students and student learning by accommodating their differences and respecting their diversity. Hence the emphasis on differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences, learning style or brain-based theory. But little consideration has been given to the impact of personality attributes such as introversion-extroversion on learning, particularly in literacy development.



Dictionary definitions of the terms "introvert" and "extrovert" commonly indicate a biased perspective (e.g., an introvert is "a person more interested in his own thoughts and feelings than in what is going on around him; tending to think rather than act and so having qualities attributed as shy and unsociable"; an extrovert is "a person more interested in what is going on around him than in his own thoughts and feelings; tending to act rather than think; a sociable person; person who makes friends easily"; *World Book Dictionary*, 2001). Neither definition is wholly accurate or flattering.

But, as there is a biochemical basis to extroversion-introversion, it is more accurate to see these terms as neurological rather than based in the vague realm of personality. In thought processes, the dominant neurotransmitter and its pathway differ between extroverts and introverts. In extroverts, the short, dopamine pathway (associated with movement, attention, alert states, and learning) dominates, working like a positive feedback system: more dopamine is released with physical activity, thereby increasing excitement levels, all of which results in the release of more dopamine which motivates more physical activity. For introverts, the long, acetylcholine pathway (associated with long-term memory, attention, learning, and voluntary movement) dominates, and stimulates good feelings when thinking and emoting (Laney, 2002).

Luckily, based on the work of psychological theorist Carl Jung, the terms *introversion* and *extroversion* have become consolidated as basic ways of relating to the world, with extroverts and introverts now classified according to three components (Table 1): 1) energy creation; 2) response to stimulation; and 3) depth vs. breadth preference (Bellack, 2003).