

Shy, outgoing, introverted or extroverted, the question becomes, how do we, as teacher-librarians, help all students learn? How do we ensure spaces are created for everyone?

Jessica Honard, author of *Introversion in the Classroom: How to Prevent Burnout and Encourage Success*, gives a simple explanation of introverts: “Introversion is all about energy and where you get your energy from and where you spend it. I like to compare it to currency ... if you go to the mall and it’s really busy and loud and there are a lot of bright lights and noises and it’s a very active environment, you don’t necessarily have to talk to a single person, but if you are introverted you may still get drained from that because there’s external stimulation.” That external stimulation is a factor teachers and teacher-librarians need to consider when creating classrooms “for the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner” in which furniture is movable, louder collaborative groups are common and makerspaces are noisy. The library’s quiet hum is lost, and some introverted students have no space for solitude.



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Dr. Archie Kwan, senior psychologist with the Peel District School Board, suggests that “teachers may want to further explore the introversion-extroversion concept to develop a deeper appreciation for the fact that modern classrooms, where the focus is on high stimulation and interactive learning involving oral performance for class participation, can be challenging for the more quiet and introverted student, and understanding of how these personality traits can impact not only a student’s learning but his/her ability to fully demonstrate his/her knowledge and skills.”

While teachers can vary assessments, many boards are looking at 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies and introducing STEM/STEAM, robotics, makerspaces and alternative ways to demonstrate knowledge. Peel teacher and self-described introvert, Christine Kohse, wonders if we should study the impacts of new governmental or board policies before implementing them.

“Like any initiative with any board, we jump and perhaps do not study the impact enough. We do not always reflect on what is working and what we need to tweak. For some kids, we shouldn’t change everything just because it benefits some. You have to ask the question, ‘Why are we doing this and who does this benefit?’”

Kohse brings up an interesting point. As we change libraries and modern teaching concepts, do we think about long-term consequences?

Michael\* (not his real name) is a Grade 5 Peel District School Board student. He explained his thoughts on group work: “I don’t like it when I have to work in a group. I focus better when I work independently, and I get more work done.” However, group work is often necessary. One thing Michael suggested is that “it feels better when I have someone else to work with in the group, someone I’m familiar with.” This is not just the case of a child who is being picky and wants to work with his friends. This is a child who may shut down and be unsuccessful in the group because he is more introverted and uncomfortable with group work. Michael adds, “I wouldn’t be happy if I had to work with new kids all the time in groups. I find it difficult and it makes me mad or anxious. Knowing someone makes it easier.”

It is not just the group work that can cause an introverted student to shut down. Kwan worked with a student who remembered when “she was in Grade 3 and she took a chance and raised her hand and gave the correct answer, ‘KILOmetres.’” Several classmates laughed and said it’s called “kiLOMetres.” The student recalls being “mortified.” Although her teacher was kind and supportive, the power of the peer group encouraged her to keep quiet for the rest of the year. While a small example, it is one that is more than likely never far from this student’s personal fears when it comes to class participation.

Dembling explains why group work can be challenging. Introverts “will not fight to be heard. They don’t push themselves into competition. Given the opportunity, they have plenty to say, but they will not fight their way in.” Dembling says that introverts can do well in classrooms if “they have advanced warnings and they know group work is coming up. They get their brains in gear.” She suggests teachers give students a heads-up that group work is coming. This gives an introvert time to adjust to the idea. Dembling adds that when picking roles in a group, introverts can be good leaders, but are not often chosen by their peers. She suggests that teachers can help by picking introverts as leaders.

How does this impact our school libraries? As libraries are not necessarily the quiet havens they used to be, setting up a quiet area where students can read, or unwind and regroup is helpful. When classes come to work in the library learning commons, ensure there are choices for all students. If group work is a necessity, create jobs within the group, so each person can complete one aspect. Or, assign specific jobs within the group. Michael says he can work in a group and still have an individual job to complete. “I feel better working independently. I won’t have to worry about other stuff like if kids are actually working or not and whether they will finish the task. If we all have our own jobs and bring it all together, it works better for me.”

Dembling echoes Michael’s feelings. “Extroverts feed into competition. Introverts work well in teams or groups. When introverts go into a meeting and have their own piece and fulfil that, rather than collaborating the whole way through, they are more successful. Introverts can contribute to the team