

or group and fulfill the assignment and bring it back.”

Ella, a Grade 3 student with the Halton District School Board, finds group work difficult. “Sometimes it’s just too loud and too many people are talking. I can’t get my ideas heard in a group. When that happens, I just shut down and don’t offer anything.”

As introversion/extroversion is a specific personality trait, teachers cannot expect to change a student and make them “more extroverted.” Dembling brings up a strong point: “Introverts have been brought up to believe there is something shameful about their behaviour and that they are inferior. Instead, we should be discussing differences between learning and students, and stop necessarily valuing the qualities of extroverts. One is not better than the other. Introverts are used to being expected to behave in a way that is counterintuitive. Every interaction can lead to failure. Introverts are told you have to live like an extrovert. It can cause them to be anxious. If they come in thinking I have to be someone else, they will just shut down.” Having students “shut down” has never been the point of education. Educators need to be more aware of introverted students and help set them up for success.

Honard believes that “if you are an introvert and a teacher you kind of have a special job of being an advocate for your introverted students.” Kohse, is just that, a self-described introvert and teacher. She explains: “Relationship building wasn’t as important in the beginning of my career as I see it now. I have had to adapt and change to connect with the students. I can’t be a stand-offish person; I have to connect with them.” Kohse realizes that “once I get to know the interests of students and where they are coming from, I offer flexible work areas, make sure that when I notice things are getting a little loud that I ask people to consider and think about what other people need and we might just need to quiet down and have thinking time. I also ensure that there isn’t always just group work, and sometimes I say, you can work just by yourself.”

What does this all mean? It means that libraries need to be set up with intent. Intent to allow for noisy collaboration, quiet reflection, and individual space to work independently. Group work needs to be considered more carefully. Teachers need to vary assessment methods, use technology as a way to assess class participation – consider apps such as Kahoot, Socrativ, G Suite for Education – as opposed to always looking at the students who raise their hands.

All students’ needs must be considered when we follow the latest and greatest concepts in education.

“There is a perception of extroverts as high energy and pippy, so then introverts become unvalued. Letting kids and other teachers know that extroversion is not better – it is just different – is key,” said Dembling. “As kids begin to understand that there are just differences between learning styles, they will naturally start reaching out to introverts.” ■

Tips To Help Teachers Work With Introverts

By Archie B. Kwan, Ph.D., C.Psych., Senior Psychologist, Peel District School Board

Teachers often devote time at the beginning of the school year using various activities (online surveys, copies of questionnaires/surveys, etc.) to explore a student’s learning style (e.g., visual versus auditory being one dimension often explored) and to capture goals, aspirations for the year. The inclusion of surveys/materials to highlight the concept of introversion-extroversion can be utilized at that time and periodically throughout the school year, especially when group work is expected. I think this is a perfect opportunity for all students to better understand and appreciate the individual learning styles of peers and open the dialogue for respectfulness and expected code of conduct in the classroom (e.g., no bullying, no sarcasm or mean comments when peers are speaking, etc.).

Oftentimes, more extroverted students are quicker to express themselves and “take over” group activities. Therefore, it’s helpful to promote equal participation by defining clear expectations for group work (e.g. “everyone needs to contribute and here’s a list of possible jobs each member is responsible for” – possible roles: timekeeper, recorder, presenter/spokesperson, researcher, etc.)

Limiting the number of group members to less than five so all members are seen and can’t “hide.”

Consider allowing students to submit privately to the teacher, a list of students they are most comfortable working with in a group (as introverted students will be more likely to withdraw if they feel uncomfortable with certain peers).

Try to balance group activities/work with time for reflection and independent time.

Consider grading practices that balance group performance and individual work (having each student submit a short paragraph/essay on the topic).

Student self-evaluation and reflection can be enhanced by adding a rubric focused on group work performance and the student’s own performance in that group.

Work on creating a classroom climate where students feel safe to take a chance to participate orally. This is where clear rules for respectful behaviour towards peers combined with verbal encouragement from the teacher can go a long way to foster this positive and supportive climate.

During class activities requiring oral participation, give all students time to prepare and reflect on a response/answer.