



**The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning
Brown University**

Box 1912; 863-1219; Sheridan_Center@brown.edu

http://www.brown.edu/sheridan_center

Introverted Students in the Classroom: How to Bring Out Their Best

By: Tami Isaacs, PhD. in *Teaching and Learning*

To promote learning, we encourage our students to be actively involved in class discussions by asking and answering questions. Even if we do not include class participation in our grades, how a student behaves in class does influence our perception of the student's abilities. These opinions may become important if the student's grade in class is on the borderline or the student asks for a letter of recommendation.

One factor in evaluating students that has been ignored is temperament. To better understand a student's behavior, we need to examine whether the student is an extrovert or an introvert. Since most people, including teachers, are extroverts; the introvert may not be understood and judged appropriately.

The main difference between the extrovert and the introvert is how each receives his energy. An extrovert is energized by external sources, such as people, activities, and objects. The introvert is the opposite. His sources of stimulation are internal ones such as ideas, impressions, and emotions. Extroverts and introverts also vary in their response to external stimulation. An extrovert thrives in an active setting and wants variety in the material presented. The introvert tries to reduce the amount of outside stimulation by behaving in a passive manner and prefers fewer topics presented in more depth.

Research has shown that extroverts and introverts process information differently using different parts of the brain and different neurotransmitters. The extrovert draws upon small amounts of information in his short term memory in developing his thoughts, while the introvert recalls thoughts stored in his long term memory to build more complex associations. The introvert needs more time, therefore, to develop his ideas and express them.

Based on these differences, we see that the extroverted student and the introverted student perform differently in the classroom. In a lively classroom the extrovert appears excited by the discussion and eager to participate, while the introvert may seem unenthusiastic and unsociable. These perceptions are not presenting a complete picture of our students. The introvert is so busy reflecting on the ideas that it does not occur to him to volunteer to answer questions.

Introverts prefer to work independently, but they may perform well in small groups. How much the introvert participates will depend upon the temperament of the other members. Extroverts who recognize the intelligence of the introvert can encourage him to be more active because introverts often are good at explaining material to others.

How can we, as instructors, provide support for introverts in their classroom? First we should be aware that the student sitting in the back may be an interested introvert and not an unmotivated student. The introvert is comfortable when allowed to observe and uncomfortable when pressured to perform. In order to get this student involved, we must directly ask the student to respond. Designing rotations so that all students are asked to participate will make the introvert more of a part of the class. Allowing the students to prepare questions at home by assigning the material for the next class discussion in advance can help.

Using required office hours to meet each student individually helps us to get to know our students better. As we become more aware of our students' personalities, we can better prepare our students to meet our expectations and become more successful in our classes.

Dr. Tami Isaacs is a chemistry professor at Montgomery College in Germantown, Md.