

## EDUCATION WEEK

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Educators often look for ways to bring quiet children out of their shells, but emerging research suggests schools can improve academic outcomes for introverted students by reducing the pressure to be outgoing and giving all students a little more time to reflect.

"Whoever designed the context of the modern classroom was certainly not thinking of the shy or quiet kids," said Robert J. Coplan, a psychology professor and shyness expert at Carleton University, in Ottawa, Canada. With often-crowded, high-stimulation rooms and a focus on oral performance for class participation, he said, "in many ways, the modern classroom is the quiet kid's worst nightmare."

Susan Cain, the author of ***Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking***, published by Random House this year, argues that such children often stop learning when they feel emotionally threatened in a class environment in which being an extrovert is considered the norm.

"There is too often a tendency to see it as inferior or even pathological," Ms. Cain said, "so teachers feel they have to turn the introvert into an extrovert."

**Quiet as Stupid?**

Take a typical class review session, in which a teacher asks rapid-fire questions and calls on students in turn.

"So if a teacher asks a question and the person doesn't answer right away," Mr. Coplan said, "the most common thing is the teacher doesn't have time to sit and wait, but has to go on to someone else—and in the back of their head might think that child is not as intelligent or didn't do his homework."

That slowness to speak can dramatically affect a student's success in classrooms where vocal participation and group activities are critical.

A **2011 study** found teachers from across K-12 rated hypothetical quiet children as having the lowest academic abilities and the least intelligence, compared with hypothetical children who were talkative or typical in behavior.

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Interestingly, teachers who were identified as and who rated themselves as shy agreed that quiet students would do less well academically, but did not rate them as less intelligent.

As many as half of Americans are introverts, according to the **Center for Applications of Psychological Type**, located in Gainesville, Fla.

There's a distinction between shyness—generally associated with fear or anxiety around social contact—and introversion, which is related to a person's comfort with various levels of stimulation.

A shy student, once he or she overcomes the fear, may turn out to be an extrovert, invigorated by being the center of attention.

By contrast, an introverted child may be perfectly comfortable speaking in class or socializing with a few friends, but "recharges her batteries" by being alone and is most energized when working or learning in an environment with less stimulation, social or otherwise, according to Mr. Coplan and Ms. Cain.

Mr. Coplan and his colleagues **found differences** between shy and introverted students as early as age 4: In play observations, shy children tended to hover anxiously just outside a group of unfamiliar children, while introverted children played quite happily on their own and did not attempt to approach other children.

"It seems clear," the researchers concluded, "that 'solitude' is an insufficient criterion for characterizing children as 'socially withdrawn.' "

In the 2011 study of teachers, the educators were more likely to respond to an over talkative student with direct intervention or social-learning strategies, while, for a quiet child, they were more likely to simply watch and wait or report the child's behavior to the principal or parents.

"The kids who are bouncing around the room and punching people in the face need to be addressed right away. In a classroom of limited resources, that's where the resources go," Mr. Coplan said, adding that the quiet students often get ignored.

The research is mixed on when and why quiet students are academically challenged. Previous, separate studies by Mr. Coplan; fellow Carleton University psychologist Kathleen Hughes; Mary M. Reda, an associate professor at the City University of New York; and others **have found** that quiet and shy students often have difficulty with class grades, but that largely comes from lower levels of class participation and oral skills.

### Test-Taking Advantage

Some studies show introverted students can be better than extroverts at taking standardized



Tenth graders Kintaro Campbell, foreground, and Jamel Martin, make use of a hallway nook at City Neighbors Hamilton Charter School in Baltimore. The school tries to provide an introvert-friendly environment.

—Matt Roth for Education Week

tests."Parents of extroverts have told me [those students] never actually learn to work alone, so when the time comes to take tests, ... they have trouble," said Ms. Cain, a former corporate lawyer and researcher.

On the other hand, she said, focusing too much on students' work in a 30-to-a-room class environment doesn't necessarily prepare students for the project-based group work more common in the workplace.

"I actually think our [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] shortages are a cultural problem as much as a pedagogical problem; the type of kid who likes to sit by himself and do math problems or science problems is not supported," Ms. Cain argued. "Most science operations are done as teams, but scientists still have quite a bit of privacy and autonomy to their workday," she said, noting that such environments are also hard to replicate in classrooms.

### Friendly Setting

Bobbi MacDonald, the executive director of the City Neighbors charter schools in Baltimore, is trying to create a more introvert-friendly environment at the network's three campuses.

"We start with play-based kindergarten and give increased independence and autonomy each year that you are in school," she said. "It used to be everyone is seated at their desks in a row, and everyone is supposed to be thinking the same thing at the same time. Those days are gone.

"When an individual needs a minute, it's not unusual for that student to find a space."

Most City Neighbors classes have a mix of desks, tables, and small reading nooks with soft chairs, and some walls are lined with floor-to-ceiling whiteboard or tag board, so that students can work on the schools' project-based curriculum alone or in small groups.

"Each teacher does it a little differently," Ms. MacDonald said. "In science class, the students might be in small groups, with one person as the team leader, one watching the clock, one taking minutes, and so on."

Creating smaller groups, of two or three rather than five or more, and providing clear roles for each member can help quiet students make a contribution.

Studies of college students have found that particularly in larger and unstructured groups, more-vocal members can dominate, even when they do not have the correct answer.

"There are many situations in which so much talk is not helpful, and if there is so much talk, there is less time to sit back and think," said Diana Senechal, a former New York City public school teacher and the author of the 2011 book *Republic of Noise: The Loss of Solitude in Schools and Culture*, published by Rowman & Littlefield Education.

"Those times of not entering the conversation—listening to what others say, thinking about it—can be very important," she said.

Particularly in subjects such as history, which call for students to think about connections between events and people, teachers should encourage all students to practice more listening and contemplation rather than rely primarily on class discussions and group work, Ms.

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Senechal argues.

In one small **case study**, Paul G. Barker, an educational leadership doctoral student at the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, and the president of Our Lady of Good Counsel High School, in Olney, Md., interviewed graduating seniors whose teachers considered them quiet.



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The students said their teachers often perceived them as less engaged in class, but they actually considered the time they took to process ideas before speaking a "learning advantage," Mr. Barker found.

### Finding Entry Points

"When you're teaching something challenging, where the answers don't come easily," Ms. Senechal said, "the students who like to talk will jump in quickly, and then, if the discussion is well-managed, they might find their answers are not complete."

"The quieter students who spend more time thinking about it than talking about it," she said, "may have an opportunity for entry here."

The evolution of educational technology may also help.

Ms. Cain found introverted students responded more frequently in class discussions held online, where they had time to gather their thoughts and could contribute without others talking over them. Similarly, research has shown introverted students answer questions more often when teachers use anonymous student-response systems, often dubbed clickers.



Passion can be the best motivator for an introverted student to get more involved, Ms. Cain said. At City Neighbors, for example, each middle school student is required to read 25 books during the year, and then to discuss them one-on-one with teachers.

The format is more time-consuming than the typical class-presentation book, Ms. MacDonald said, but it provides a safe environment for quiet children and those with reading problems to discuss what they read.

"Somewhere in that 25," she said, "the child will find that one book that they love, ... and when that happens, the teacher is right there waiting for them."

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