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Adaptations for the Introvert Personality:
Perceptions of Fifth-Grade Students

Briana Wever

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Introduction

The differences between extroverts and introverts have been well documented for quite some time, as early as Carl Jung's work in psychology. These differences have been publicized through the frequent use of the popular Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator. However, only relatively recently has attention been drawn specifically to introvert individuals, with the best-selling book *Quiet*, published in 2012. The subsequent popularity of this book has stimulated much discussion about introverts and the particular strengths they bring to society, as well as the weaknesses they have that must be taken into account.

Although introverts have been heavily studied in the college and adult populations, and somewhat observed at the high school level, very little formal attention has been paid to how elementary-age students deal with the unique challenges of introversion. Though various studies and informal investigations have addressed the introvert-extrovert dichotomy within a school setting, and have presented various methodologies of coping with these individual differences, few have investigated how the students themselves perceive and appreciate these adaptations—whether adaptations tailored for the introvert personality make any difference to students.

As introverts and future elementary teachers, we as researchers are interested in students' reactions to some of these proposed adaptations. Thus, our study aims to investigate whether students who receive adaptations tailored for their personality recognize these adaptations as helpful or positive.

Literature Review

A review of the literature shows that several authors have investigated introverted students. In an interview in the *Instructor*, author Marti Laney states that the “introverted child

draws energy from within” and needs more preparation time and the opportunity to think before speaking (Trienweiler, 2006). Susan Cain, author of the bestseller *Quiet*, adds that teachers can balance instructional methods to help introverted students become more confident—she mentions lectures and independent work as teaching methods that may assist introverted students in feeling more secure (2012, p. 255). After introverted individuals graduate from school, Camenson suggests that they may prefer different jobs from extroverts, such as writing, artistic endeavors, and freelance researching (1999, p. 1). These suggestions serve to substantiate the idea that introverts and extroverts have fundamentally different interests and comfort areas.

Studies have also been done exploring how introverted students vary from extroverts in their participation and methods of participation in school. Nussbaum, in the *Elementary School Journal*, found that introverted sixth-grade students seemed to prefer a more collaborative approach to group discussions, advancing new concepts instead of contradicting another’s thoughts, as extroverts tended to do (2002, p. 188). Marie Davis adds that though introverts may miss opportunities to speak up, they usually reflect before speaking. She explains that these introverted students may do better in a traditional lecture-based environment or when taking standardized tests (2010, p. 25). These studies, in addition to most others, indicate that introverted students do process information and situations differently from extroverts.

Other individuals have emphasized the importance of teachers’ and others’ taking time to study the needs of and adapt for introverted students. Changes may range from simply taking more time for students’ learning and processing (Baldasero, 2012), to completely re-designing the school to better fit introvert students, perhaps providing online resources that would allow students to work entirely independently and at their own pace (Quirk, 2012). Quirk adds in his article on school design, however, that this independent, self-directed work should not eclipse

collaborative and group projects: “Open collaboration . . . is a tremendously exciting leap forwards” and should not be ignored merely to facilitate the needs of some (2012). Schools and classrooms should clearly cater to the needs of both extrovert students, with collaboration and group interaction, and introvert individuals, with private and independent projects and areas.

Methodology

Participants for this study were selected from the two fifth-grade classrooms at a southeastern United States private elementary school. Informed consent for participation in the study was obtained from each student, as well as from the parents of each student (see Appendix C). The total number of students within the two classrooms was 50. Introverted students within the classrooms in question were identified by means of a 10-question survey (see Appendix A) based primarily on Nussbaum’s (2002) adaptation of the Junior Eysneck Personality Inventory and the Eysneck-Withers Personality Inventory. The survey also included two informal questions from Susan Cain’s (2012) personality questionnaire, as well as one question asking students whether they felt “happy and comfortable” in their classroom, and a final open-ended area for students to write anything they chose regarding their feelings about their classroom. Students chose their responses between “Almost Never,” “Sometimes,” and “Almost Always” for each question on the survey except the last one.

The surveys were then coded based on degree of introversion displayed. The lowest score possible was 0 and the highest 16 (see Appendix A for coding scale used). Only the first eight questions, relating specifically to introvert-extrovert traits, were coded for purposes of this section. The top five introvert students from each classroom were then identified as a primary focus for the study. One classroom was selected, by request of the cooperating teacher, to be the

experimental classroom (the group receiving adaptations), while the other classroom was selected as the control group.

The adaptations were then selected by group consensus of the researchers and cooperating teacher, and implemented over a three-week period. Two major adaptations were in place during this time. The first adaptation was the “quiet corner,” consisting of a three-sided cardboard test screen placed on a desk in the back of the room, so that students’ backs would be to the instructional and group work area. The other adaptation was a “water break” in which selected students could ask the teacher for permission to leave the classroom and walk down the hall to get a drink. The teacher privately asked the student whether he or she was doing this for a break or for water, and recorded breaks taken in tally form on a sticky note. Quiet corner use was marked by the teacher and recorded by the researchers at observation times during the week. The quiet corners were available to all students (extroverts and introverts) within the experimental classroom, while the water break adaptation was available only to those previously identified as introverts, at the request of the cooperating teacher.

These adaptations continued for three weeks. After the period of active experimentation was over, we administered a final survey (see Appendix B), addressing students’ attitudes toward the changes that had been made and seeking for any correlation between students’ comfort level in the classroom and the changes. This final survey completed the experiment in the classroom. The data were then gathered, compiled into a written report, and presented to participating individuals and others.

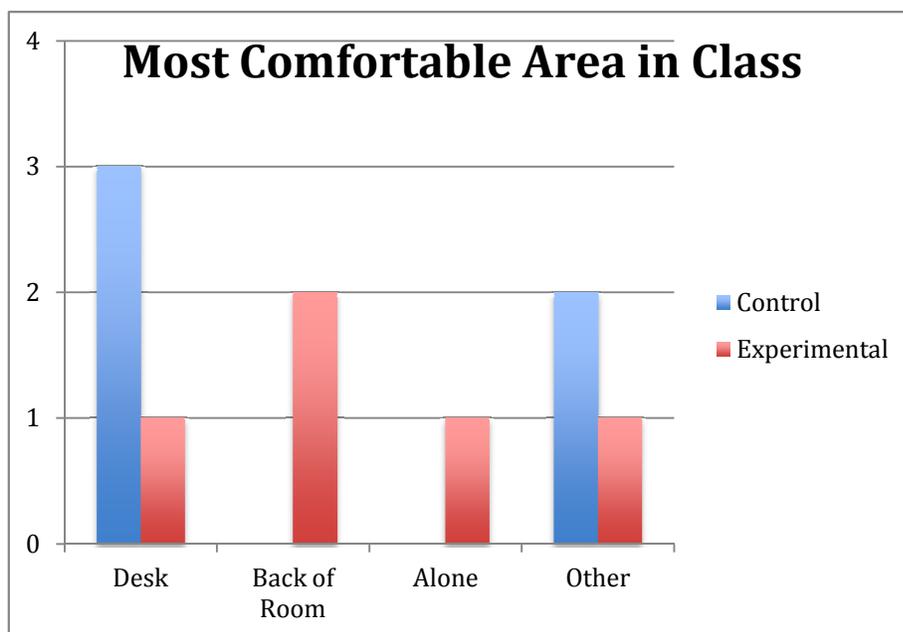
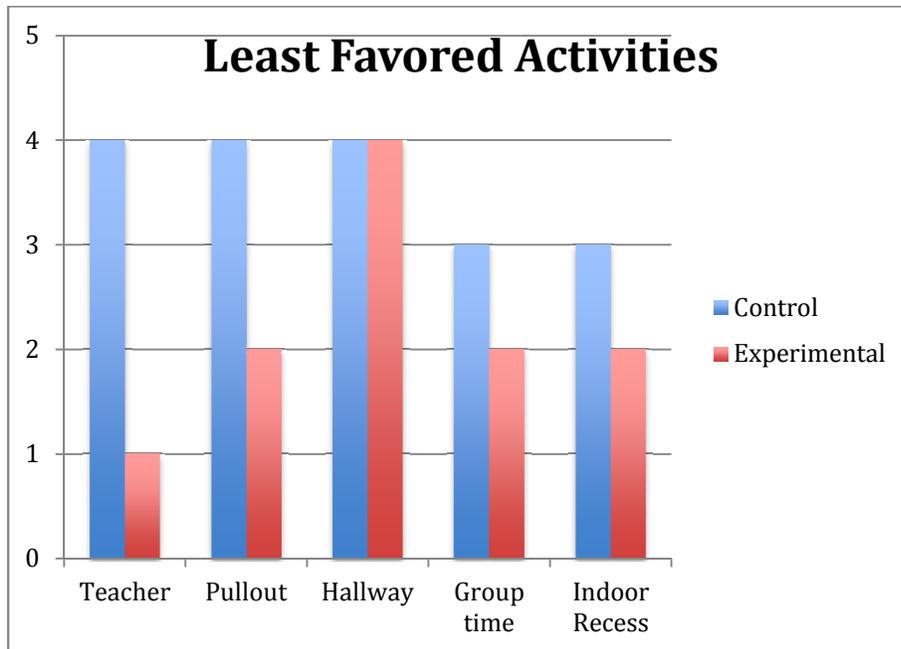
Results

The first outcomes were noticed during the data-gathering phase. The study was begun on October 22, and a full week later the board was utilized for the first time. Thereafter the boards

were used more often, with a height of use peaking two weeks after the initial introduction of the modification (November 4), and tapering off somewhat after that. The water break option was not utilized at all by students during the three weeks of the study period, though at the end of the period one student requested to use the hallway for partner work. Though students previously identified as high introverts (score above 8) utilized the adaptations most often, some students not identified as high introverts utilized it as well. This finding might indicate a flaw in the identifying instrument, or a change in the individuals' attitudes and perceptions from day to day.

The final outcomes were observed from the final surveys administered to students. From the control group, three students mentioned their desk as the most comfortable place for them in the classroom, with one mentioning "reading class" and another recess. The activities marked as least desirable included "Hallway walking to pullout," "Hallway waiting for [partner teacher] to open the door," and "Class time when [teacher] is teaching and students are listening," with four out of five marking them as not enjoyable. These were followed by "Class time when working in a group," and "Indoor recess," each with three out of five marking them as less desirable.

From the experimental group, two students mentioned the "back of the room," where the quiet corner privacy folders had been set up, as the most comfortable place for them in the classroom. One of these students especially mentioned the "test folders." Another said that "away from everyone" was the most comfortable place, and the final stated that his/her chair was the most comfortable place. The activities marked as least desirable included "Hallway waiting for [partner teacher] to open the door," with four out of five students, followed by "Class time working in a group," "Music class," PE," "Dismissal," "Indoor recess," and "Hallway walking to pullout," all with a score of two out of five. Major results are summarized in the following tables.



From this final survey, we noticed that not only did introverted students within the experimental group express a preference for being alone and/or in the back of the room with the test folders, but also they expressed, as a group, an overall lower level of discomfort within the classroom than their counterparts in the control group, as indicated by the experimental group's

lower scores on “least favored” activities. At this point, it is impossible to know whether the adaptations directly affected students’ comfort level in these areas, but the comparison is worthy of note.

Conclusion

Though the project could use further research, we feel that the difference between classes is enough to conclude that within this particular group of students, the “quiet corner” folders did make a difference for introverted students. The study only took place for three weeks, and student use of the boards tapered off after the first week; a longer study time would improve the study, as would a larger sample of students from a greater variety of classrooms, particularly in urban and rural environments and from varied demographic backgrounds. In addition, the final surveys were administered in a different location than the initial surveys, which might have affected students’ attitudes and feelings.

Nevertheless, we believe that this study could provide a springboard for further research on adaptations for introvert students in the elementary grades. Its results indicate that students do indeed perceive some adaptations tailored for their personality as helpful and positive. Further research might involve interviews with students to help determine why students perceive some adaptations (such as the test folders) as of more use than others (such as the water break option). Researchers might also investigate what particular aspects of adaptations are helpful, and how these adaptations could be improved.

Teachers may also find this study and any further research on this topic to be helpful. This study demonstrates that a reasonably simple adaptation, which does not require students to exit the classroom or even go out of the teacher’s sight, can be a positive addition to students’ school experience. In today’s world of group projects and collaborative work, teachers will do

well to consider the needs of introvert students in their classroom by providing similar accommodations on an as needed or an independently chosen basis. Thus, this study may be useful to a variety of individuals.

Though this study is preliminary and could be improved in several ways, it highlights a little-studied subject and topic: introverted elementary school students and adaptations that can be made to improve their experience in the classroom. Based on this study, some adaptations for the introvert elementary student are indeed viewed positively by students.

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Appendix A

Initial Introversion Questionnaire & Coding Scale

Read the question and answer by circling the words that you think are most accurate for you.

1. I usually like spending time with one or two people better than spending time with a bigger group.

Almost Never	Sometimes	Most of the Time
<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>

2. I would rather sit and watch than play at parties.

Almost Never	Sometimes	Most of the Time
<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>

3. I like to be the one talking instead of listening.

Almost Never	Sometimes	Most of the Time
<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>

4. I do my best work on my own.

Almost Never	Sometimes	Most of the Time
<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>

5. I really enjoy going to parties and other large groups.

Almost Never	Sometimes	Most of the Time
<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>

6. I am mostly quiet when I am with others.

Almost Never	Sometimes	Most of the Time
<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>

7. I like being in a busy room with lots of activity.

Almost Never	Sometimes	Most of the Time
<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>

8. I enjoy talking to other people a lot.

Almost Never	Sometimes	Most of the Time
<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0</i>

9. I feel happy and comfortable in my classroom.

Almost Never	Sometimes	Most of the Time
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10. Would you like to say anything else about how you feel about your classroom or about working with other people in class? Write it here:

Appendix B
Final Survey

1. Circle the activities you like best. What would you change about the ones you don't like?
 - Class time when [teacher] is teaching and students are listening
 - Class time when working in a group
 - Class time when working alone
 - Recess
 - Lunch
 - Music class
 - Art class
 - PE
 - Dismissal
 - Indoor recess
 - Chapel in the church
 - Chapel in the classroom with [another teacher]
 - Classroom parties
 - Hallway walking to pullout
 - Hallway waiting for [partner teacher] to open the door
2. In which place in the classroom do you feel most comfortable and relaxed?
3. Which changes that your teacher has made for you are your favorites? If your teacher has not made any changes, just write "No Changes."

Appendix C

Consent Forms

CHILD ASSENT FORM

Our names are Briana Wever and Gerald Tary II, and we are undergraduate students at Southern Adventist University. We are inviting you to participate in a research study. You may choose to participate or not. This form is going to explain the study to you. Please feel free to ask any questions that you may have about the research. We will be happy to explain anything you want to know.

“We are interested in learning more about how we can change your classroom to better fit different students’ personalities. You will be asked to fill out two short surveys. We may also talk to you briefly. This will take about 50 minutes of your time at most, over a period of two or three weeks. All information will be kept confidential. This means that your name will not appear anywhere and no one except the two of us will know about your specific answers. We will use a made-up name for you, and we will not reveal details or we will change details about where you go to school, where you live, any personal information about you, and so forth.

“The benefit of this research is that you will be helping us to understand how to change the classroom to better fit students’ personalities. This information should help us to make classrooms, including your classroom, a better place for students. There are no foreseeable risks to being part of this study. If you do not wish to continue, you have the right to leave the study, without any consequences, at any time.”

Participant - “All of my questions and concerns about this study have been addressed. I choose, as a volunteer, to participate in this research project. My parent(s) or guardian(s) have signed a consent form and it is on file with the researchers.

 print name of participant

 signature of participant

 date

 print name of investigator

 signature of investigator

 date

Parental Permission for Children Participation in Research

Title: A Study of Classroom Adaptations for the Introvert Personality: Perceptions of Fifth-Grade Students

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as the parent of a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to let your child participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all your questions. Please read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission for your child to take part. If you decide to let your child be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

Purpose of the Study

If you agree, your child will be asked to participate in a research study about introversion and how the classroom can be adapted to accommodate it. The purpose of this study is to determine how adaptations tailored to the introverted student's personality affect those students' perceptions of school.

What is my child going to be asked to do?

If you allow your child to participate in this study, they will be asked to:

- Fill out two short surveys at the beginning and end of the study period
- Possibly engage in brief interviews with the researchers

This study will take approximately 50 minutes of your child's time, over a period of two to three weeks. There will be 47 other students in this study.

What are the risks involved in this study?

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

The possible benefits of participation include the development of a classroom more suited to your child's personality differences.

Does my child have to participate?

No, your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect their relationship with Southern Adventist University in any way. You can agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

This research study will take place during regular classroom activities; however, if you do not want your child to participate, he or she may participate in alternate activities as

arranged by the classroom teacher. These may include enrichment and/or practice activities related to school subjects.

What if my child does not want to participate?

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study. If your child does not want to participate they will not be included in the study and there will be no penalty. If your child initially agrees to be in the study they can change their mind later without any penalty.

Will there be any compensation?

Neither you nor your child will receive any type of payment for participating.

How will my child's privacy and confidentiality be protected if s/he participates in this research study?

Your child's privacy and the confidentiality of his/her data will be protected. Your child's name will not appear anywhere and no one except the two of us will know about your child's specific answers. We will use a made-up name for your child, and we will not reveal details or we will change details about where your child goes to school, where he/she lives, any personal information about your child, and so forth.

If it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review the study records, information that can be linked to your child will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Your child's research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. The data resulting from your child's participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate it with your child, or with your child's participation in any study.

Whom should I contact with questions about the study?

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researchers, Briana Wever and Gerald Tary II, at (423) 396-9887 (Briana) or send an email to brianawever@southern.edu for any questions or if you feel that you have been harmed.

Whom should I contact with questions concerning my child's rights as a research participant?

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at

Signature

You are making a decision about allowing your child to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow them to participate in the study. If you later decide that you wish to withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study you may discontinue his or her participation at any time. You will be given a copy of this document.

Printed Name of Child

Signature of Parent(s) or Legal Guardian

Date

Signature of Investigators

Date