

Fall 12-11-2014

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Recommended Citation

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

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Research and Statistics EDUC 322

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November 6, 2014

Introduction

This research paper focuses on an issue that affects many elementary students, often going unnoticed, disregarded, and unaccounted for. The problem can be found existent in the classroom, underneath the watchful eye of a teacher who may be unaware of any issue impeding their students' learning process and levels of achievement. This study serves not to identify higher levels of achievement, but rather to lay the ground work for the idea, substantiated by evidence of feedback and response, that students who can be classified as introverts experience a higher level of comfort within the classroom walls when certain adaptations are set in place. From the student's perspective, these "walls" may feel to them as emotional confines, in the most confining sense of the word. Certain adaptations have been implemented in a fifth grade southeastern elementary classroom. Do introverted students benefit from certain adaptations, which may help them reach a state of proverbial escape from the emotionally and mentally draining distractions of the classroom, and make them feel at peace? The significance of this study stands tall and begs the attention of all teachers, based on the idea that every classroom will most likely have introverted students, and that at some point in time every teacher will deal with an introverted student. This study examines the perceptions of a fifth-grade classroom, its introverted students, and their response to interventions.

Review of the Literature

The most introductory and most commonly accepted theory for explaining individual differences in the realm of introversion is provided by Hans Eysenck. Eysenck used a sophisticated statistical method for the time of 1976, by identifying traits of introversion via response to examination. He writes in his book *The Structure of Human*

Personality that introversion affects every aspect of the person's life. He says that qualities of introversion often go undetected, and can cause students to feel out of place (1971 p. 354). He entitles a further method of examination the *Eysenck Personality Questionnaire*. Based on the examined feedback and decoded evidence published in his book *Know Your Own Personality*, Eysenck's study identifies that there are great differences in the way the nervous system of an introvert functions. Introverts, he found, can be assumed to have "such weak neural inhibition that stimulation of the senses easily prompts activity in the brain, and can often overwhelm the emotions" (1975, p. 119). The idea that major differences between extroverts and introverts exist has been accepted for a good while. The ever-popular Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator drew in more interest and awareness to the subject, yet we still not very little, for if prior research has told us anything, it is that we generally know very little about the introverted students within our immediate classroom and how to accommodate them. A more recent study in 1997 by psychologist Dr. Elaine Aron produced the theory of "The Highly Sensitive Person," which states that introverts are often highly affected emotionally and mentally by people's words and actions. In other words, things really affect them. Aron's study, which will be referred to in the following comments as well, asks the questions: "Does time alone each day stand as important to introverts as much as food and water?" and "Do noise and confusion contribute to an increased negative impact on introverts in the classroom?" The study answers these questions with a resounding yes. Based off of pure feedback from 5th grade students, Dr. Aron found that up to 23% of students in the classroom have introverted qualities and tendencies (Aron, 1997). That's more than one out of every five students, which is astounding. Even more recent observations have been

done, like that of Susan Cain who is the author of the bestselling book *Quiet*. Even though there is a large number of students (23%) that portray introverted qualities in the classroom, she mentions that teachers actually can find a balance in their instructional strategies and adapt the way they teach in order to assist the introverted students in becoming more comfortable in their classroom environment. One of the main strategies she mentions is working independently. This should allow the student to focus better and feel more at rest, away from other potentially emotionally overwhelming aspects of normal classrooms. (2012, p. 247, 256) Despite the progress made in these study, there have been little other significant scientific inquiries examining the impact that adaptations, specifically, might have on introverted students. Our study continues the idea of a need for intervention to assist introverted students in feeling more comfortable, based upon the current understandings of need. This understanding is stated clearly by Deborah Smith, who holds a doctorate degree in Higher Education from Georgia State University. She states in her article “Managing the Classroom: Perspectives from an Introvert and an Extrovert” that one of the biggest struggles facing educators is managing personality types in the classroom. She goes on to mention that there is a great need for adapting not only our instruction but also our classroom to suit and make comfortable introverted students (Smith, 2006). This is the current understanding of the issue. Our study investigates these adaptations. Dr. Katie Hurley of Psychotherapy explains it best in her article “The Introvert in the Classroom,” “School is designed for the extroverts of the world... For seven hours each day, kids move from subject to subject, activity-to-activity, learning and interacting as they go. Once or twice each day they enjoy recess, usually outside, and they always have time for lunch with their classmates, often in a very noisy

room with terrible lighting” (Hurley, 2014). The penetrating idea is that more awareness and attention should be paid to the introverts in our classroom, and that something should be done to provide them with more comfort.

Methodology

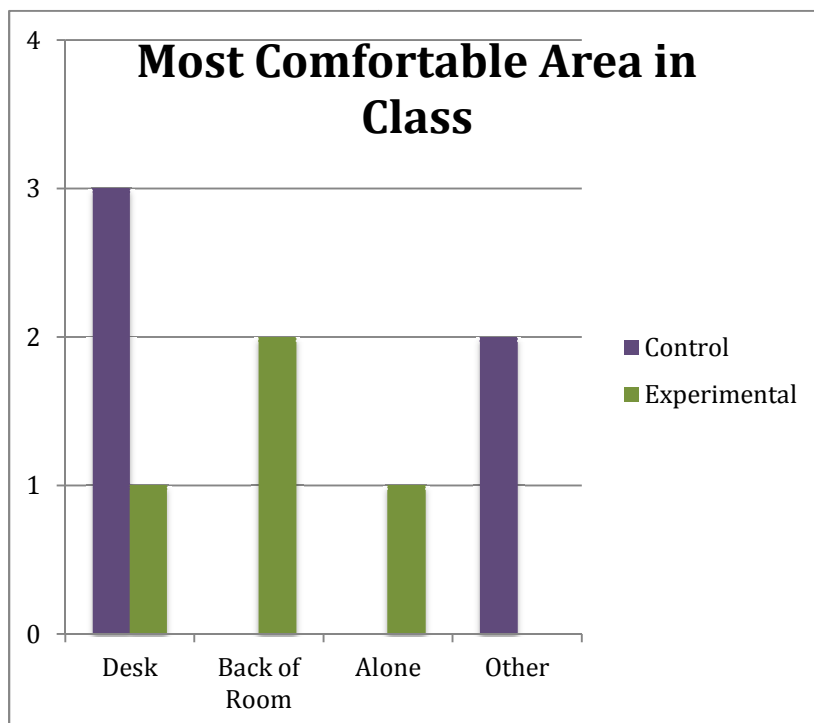
Because no prior studies could be found exemplifying the correct procedure of investigation for this issue, our sampling came from one school, in which two classrooms were used. A local elementary school and their facilities served as the location of our research. One class, the control group, did not experience our adaptations. We'll call this group class A. The class that did experience our adaptations will be called B, the experimental group. For the first few weeks I observed both classrooms and got to know the gatekeepers and stakeholders a little better, namely, the students and the teacher. Through the observations I was able to see how the classroom operates and idealize what procedures our research might use. The next step was to give a questionnaire to the students on which they might answer questions leading toward proper personality identification, namely, introverted or extroverted qualities. A copy of this initial survey is attached in Appendix A. The entire class was given this survey, which totals fifty students, twenty-five being in each room. The surveys were coded by degree of introversion in each answer. The lowest score of introversion possible was a zero, and the highest was sixteen. The highest scoring five from each classroom were selected as those that would be examined as the main focus for our study, and response to adaptations of the classroom. Once the results of the initial survey were decoded, we found that group A was the most introverted of the two classrooms, with six students scoring nine or above out of a possible 16 on our decoding and measuring scale. B had only one scoring at nine

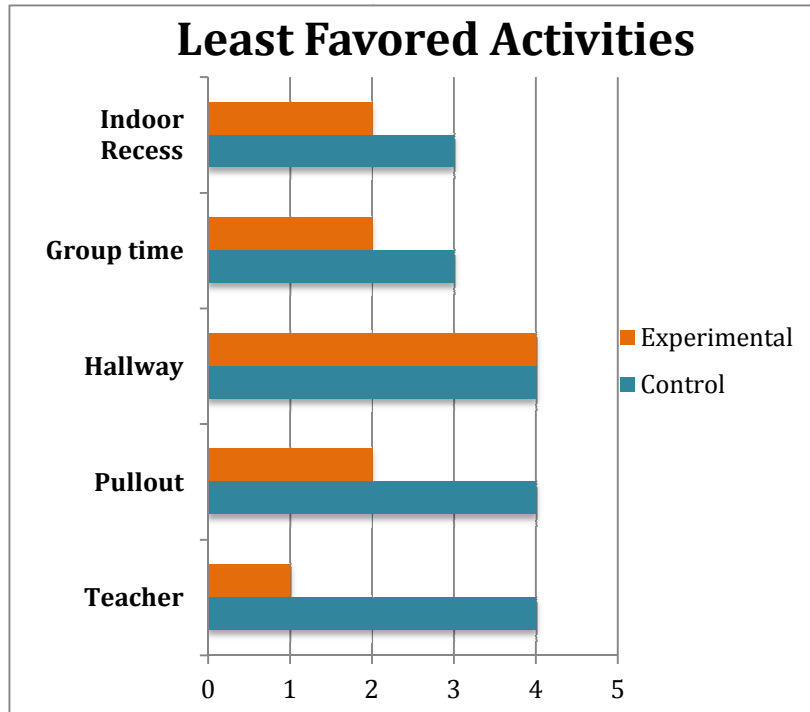
or above, but five students scoring at eight or above. After a meeting with the cooperating teacher we decided that our adaptations would consist of those things which would allow our introverted students to feel more at rest, and as though they had an “escape” available to them should they need one. The first adaptation consisted of the student requesting to leave the classroom for a short period of time to get a drink of water. This was to serve the student as a break from the emotions and other distractions of the room. The introverted student would benefit from this by being able to separate themselves from a large group of people, and calm their emotions. We know the basic definition of introversion defines a person concerned primarily with his or her own thoughts and feelings, and a person that can be easily overwhelmed by others. By leaving the room the student would be able to regroup their thoughts and feelings and feel more comfortable when they reenter the classroom. The second adaptation available to the students was what can be referred to as a screen. This screen consisted of a cardboard or plastic tri-fold that was set up on a desk at the back of the classroom to “screen” them from the rest of the class, allowing them to focus on their schoolwork, or simply take a break from its distractions if needed. The idea that they are secluded would hopefully allow them a mental and emotional break. The cooperating teacher noted the use of these adaptations, and this data was collected during observations throughout the school week. All students in each classroom were allowed to use the “screen,” while only those five students identified as most introverted were made able to use the “water break.” The purpose for this was simply so no student that needs a break would be excluded from being able to use it.

Results

Our research lasted roughly three weeks, allowing the students plenty of time to test the new adaptations to their classroom. After the three weeks of experimentation had concluded, a final questionnaire (Appendix B) was given in order to assess the feedback of the students identified as introverted, and compare the level of student comfort before the adaptations to that of after the adaptations. During those three weeks, the screen was used the most. The first use of the screen was not used until a week after the adaptation was introduced, but once it was made properly aware to the students, it was used more frequently, and most often during the second week. The water break went surprisingly unused during the three-week period, so no data could be recorded regarding that adaptation, but has been utilized by some students after the three weeks of data gathering and experimentation. The final questionnaire given to the introverted students provided feedback concerning the least favorite activities and the most comfortable places in the classroom. From the control group (A), three students said that their desk was most comfortable place for them in the classroom. One student mentioned “reading class” as most comfortable, which can be interpreted as a point-in-time when they’re most comfortable, and another said “recess”. The certain activities mentioned as least favorable consisted of, and these are quotes from the options listed in Appendix B, “Hallway walking to pullout,” “Hallway waiting for [partner teacher] to open the door,” and “Class time when teacher is teaching and students are listening.” Four out of five students marked those as not enjoyable. These were followed by “Class time when working in a group,” and “Indoor recess,” each of these options had three out of five students marking them as less favorable.

From the experimental group (B), two students noted the “back of the room,” where the screen had been set up on a desk as a quiet corner, to be the most comfortable place for them within the classroom. One of these students specifically noted the “test folders” (which were in the back of the room). One student mentioned “away from everyone” as the most comfortable place, and one also said that his/her own desk chair was the most comfortable place. The activities noted as least favorable consisted of “Hallway waiting for [teacher] to open the door,” with four out of five students marking this, followed by the expected “Indoor recess,” “PE,” “Dismissal,” “Music class,” “Class time working in a group,” and “Hallway walking to pullout,” all with a score of two out of five. The following graphs visualize main results.





From the information evidenced in the graph, we can see the data supports the idea that introverts from the control group feel most comfortable in places that have been modified and adapted for them, away from large groups of people. In addition, we can also see that they, as a group, marked a lower overall level of discomfort within the classroom than those students did that were in the control group.

Conclusion

Despite the evidence of the data gathered, it is improbable that we can conclude with the idea that we have concretely identified ways that might assist introverts feel more comfortable in the classroom. It remains to be seen whether or not the data can be consistent throughout different classrooms, and if the adaptations alone directly influenced comfort levels, or if the idea alone of adaptations being provided prompted and influenced inaccurate responses. It can be said, however, that there is good grounds for further research, and the results have hinted at encouraging results to come should

further research be conducted.

The study does show that students who are presented with adaptations will use them. If nothing else can be gained from a teacher's perspective, it is that students will utilize adaptations if teachers will provide them. Teachers that are currently practicing their trade can be encouraged in knowing that there is both evidence of improvement in comfort levels through simple adaptations like these, and also room for improvement in both experimentation and theory.

The fact of the matter is, that even though studies like these may not always provide inconclusive and unarguable evidence in factual data for improvement without variable, studies like these do provide each teacher with valuable insight into the thoughts and feelings of their introverted students, and should not be ignored. Adaptations like the ones used in this study may prove to be very valuable in assisting your teaching of those introverted students who need them, and would benefit from them.

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Appendix A

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> |

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