

Learning Your Style and Another's

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Each of us has style... the way we prefer to interact with our world. Our significant other has style, which may frustrate us at times. Our children have style also. What is this style? How do I understand it and what does it mean?

Extravert/introvert is an important part of style. I am an extreme introvert. I prefer to be alone, like tonight, gathering my thoughts with just the insects' chatter in my window. My daughter is a strong extravert. She is very good at her job as manager of a medical clinic. She juggles people, phone calls and emails with ease. Tonight she will be out with friends talking and laughing.

As an introvert I recoup my energy by quiet time. An extravert recoups by being with others. An extravert thinks out loud. They need to talk to understand their thinking. We introverts, only 25 % of the U.S. need to have reflection time before we speak. I've given speeches for years. As an introvert I plan what I will say and why one idea leads to another. What is hard for me is coffee time after church—I have no idea what to say to whom.

The E/I factor relates to the level of a neurotransmitter, dopamine, in our brains. Newborn nurses can accurately predict whether a child will be an extravert or introvert.

So, what difference does this make in my school? First of all, notice if your principal seems to be extraverted or introverted... note the attitude of your office staff. Why? An extraverted principal is likely to say things off the "top of his head." This is his processing behavior, not necessarily the final answer. An office person may "yell" at you, if extraverted, or say nothing and you have no idea what is frustration to her.

If a student comes flying into your classroom, talking even few are listening, that is an extravert. If another child rarely speaks in group meetings, even though you know her or she has wonderful ideas, you have an introvert. Both students, and probably their parents, would be helped by understanding basic principles of E/I. The extraverted parent can push a student to join more clubs, have more friends over, do, do, do. The introverted student needs quiet time alone. The introverted parent can't figure out what the child wants to go, go, go. In my classroom the extravert dominates discussions – whether or not s/he know anything about the topic. The extravert talks rapidly during small group projects, controlling the results. I use the Introvert/Extravert questionnaire with students to help them feel the differences. It is found in *Psychology for Kids*, by Jonni Kincher.

Another factor that is important to understand is whether the student is a morning person or evening. . Have a discussion with students asking when they feel sharpest brain-wise. There is no sense starting off the day with the most essential information

when your students are not focused enough to process. It will help if you do warm-ups and reviews to get brains tuned in. Some places begin with a bit of exercise, even stand up, switch seats movement. Others begin with a 10 minute game, handshakes and greetings. Discuss homework issues. I'm a morning person, writing this at 5:30 AM. I am very unproductive in the evening. The point is to help students understand their own style. Your role is to make students aware of their own styles and the styles of others. These discussions are important is the beginning of the school year to create a caring community.

Ask students about food and water issues. Who snacks through the day? What kinds of brain foods are you putting into your body? Your brain needs fruits, vegetables and proteins to have the right chemistry to learn. It doesn't work well on sugar and carbohydrates. Challenge your students to find out more about good snacks and diet issues. Ask adults, evaluate school food, access Internet sources. Learn more to sharpen your brains. Have students keep track of how much water they drink. Brains need water. Encourage water bottles to sip while they work.

Another important factor is discuss is one's desire to work in a group or alone. There is time for both during good curriculum but acknowledging preference is important. If a student prefers to be alone, you may want to have a strategy talk regarding how to do the best when contributing to a group and opposite strategies for those who always want to talk with friends to get thinking done. Often this relates to the Extravert/Introvert factor.

You may want to start the important awareness discussion with a simple questionnaire about auditory, visual and kinesthetic preferences. What kinds of things do you do in your spare time? Do you like learning by listening, seeing or doing? In our classroom would you like me to use the chalkboard and put up pictures and illustrations? Can you sit still for a long time or do you get anxious to get up and move? Note that the younger the student the more kinesthetic. Kindergarten teachers don't lecture. Auditory students like to hear books read aloud. Visual students need to see, or make, pictures of the action. Kinesthetic students want to get up and act the action. Kinesthetic students have the most difficulty getting through school. They need to move to learn and too often they are expected to sit still. These three important factors are key to creating a learning environment for all students' success.

It is important for each student to understand personal style for success. It is important that teachers understand the diversity of styles and purposely stretch beyond their own natural ways of functioning. Success for all students means self and teacher understanding. Smiles and satisfaction is routed in successful learning.