

# LEARNING & WELLBEING ENHANCEMENT THROUGH UNDERSTANDING THE EXTRAVERSION-INTROVERSION (E/I) SPECTRUM



Donia Keith 1 June 2023

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*The herd instinct can be very powerful, and if it creates a sense of 'not fitting in' or 'not good enough' this can be a big contributor to poor mental health on campus, including a sense of isolation, depression and even suicide.*

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- *Classroom dynamics, lesson design, and the facilitative role of teachers and tutors are all huge contributing factors to teacher and student mental wellbeing.*
- *One key element that should always be factored in is how every person has either naturally **Extravert or Introvert (E/I)** tendencies. Especially if that person is naturally introverted in a world where in most cultures, extraversion is regarded as the 'norm' and is therefore expected of everyone.*
- *Where these **E/I needs** are not being adequately met, there cannot be effective teaching nor inclusive learning. Instead, both teaching faculty and students can fall victim to disengagement, and debilitating mental conditions also often develop.*

## **CONTEXT**

Extensive quantitative and qualitative research in the UK report high levels of low mental and emotional wellbeing in its education sector. This equally pertains to both teaching faculty and students.

Resultant fatigue, disengagement, sense of isolation, overwhelm and burnout, the serious consequences to physical health, work performance, and even to the taking of one's own

life, demand core causes to be identified, taken into account and satisfactorily addressed without compromise.

One core cause is the lack of clear understanding of the differing needs of engagement between extraverts and introverts within the education process, and how they might best be met. Needless to say, where people have **neuro-divergent** based needs, the effect of E/I considerations will be amplified.

### **EXAMPLE SCENARIO**

Mary is a non-tenured teaching academic anxious to prove her value. So when her senior messages and asks her to stand in for a fellow faculty member and to take a first year lecture that afternoon she doesn't feel she can refuse. Luckily, because she knows her natural tendency is towards introversion, she has pre-prepared strategies that enable her to 'lean into the curve', give a stimulating, inclusive session that will enable help fulfil the course learning objectives and without the need for her to spend all morning preparing overheads.

### **UNDERSTANDING NEEDS**

It is important to be clear that E/I tendencies are not a measurement of sociability or shyness but an innate pre-condition on **how a person energises in order to be at their optimal**. It shows itself in how that person prefers to work, learn, communicate and generally engage with others and, since this is also a fundamental requirement of **quality education**, this consideration should be adequately **embedded** in every lesson design.

The assessment of this is that everyone is both heard and listened to, everyone feels they can contribute and can easily do so and, as a result, everyone feels valued and good about themselves.

Depending on one's natural E/I tendency, (some say it is DNA-based, others environmental, but both are debatable), activities, behaviours and life style will affect one's sense of energy or tiredness, and also **one's sense of belonging and personal security**.

**Extraverts** source a feeling of energy from being at the hub of lots of differing activities and conversations, where they constantly interact with many others and across a wide variety of interests. The ideal method of interaction involves the opportunity to speak a lot, irrespective whether or not it useful. The benefit lies simply in the act of conversation and social interaction, as this is energising to them. Silence is noticed and can feel uncomfortable.

**Introverts** source energy from taking their thoughts inward, like a tortoise into its shell. It doesn't need to be a physical withdrawal; it can even be during a meeting or in the middle of a crowded room. Their interests are more singular and directed where they develop considerable depth of knowledge, in contrast to extraverts who are more satisfied with a surface understanding over a broader range. Introverts work better when they are given

time to reflect and to research before speaking, but when they do they can be even overly talkative in a subject that is of deep personal interest. They consider that words should be spoken only when there is something useful to say. Silence is comfortable and goes unnoticed.

For **Extraverts**, words are cheap currency, and they very quickly forget what even they themselves have said. They will interrupt and dominate until they feel heard. They happily take on the lead role, chair meetings and be the spokesperson, the one at the front, and who can speak 'off the cuff' with no hesitancy and little or no advance preparation.

For **Introverts**, words are like gold nuggets. They speak in a considered way, and remember past conversations accurately. If they are interrupted or what they say isn't adequately acknowledged, they don't persist to share their 'gold' and may even mentally withdraw. Introvert types are more likely to take on the role of the meeting minute taker, and if they have to be spokesperson, the one at the front, they need to be given sufficient time in advance so they can rehearse and feel adequately prepared.

Even a basic awareness of these differences is extremely helpful within teaching and learning frameworks in regard to the impact it can have on **both** teacher and student prevailing sense of wellbeing.

Here is what AI-ChatGBT has to offer on Bing:

*'In education, understanding the different needs of extraverts and introverts can help teachers create a learning environment that caters to both personality types. For example, introverted students may prefer quiet spaces for studying while extroverted students may prefer group work or interactive activities.'*

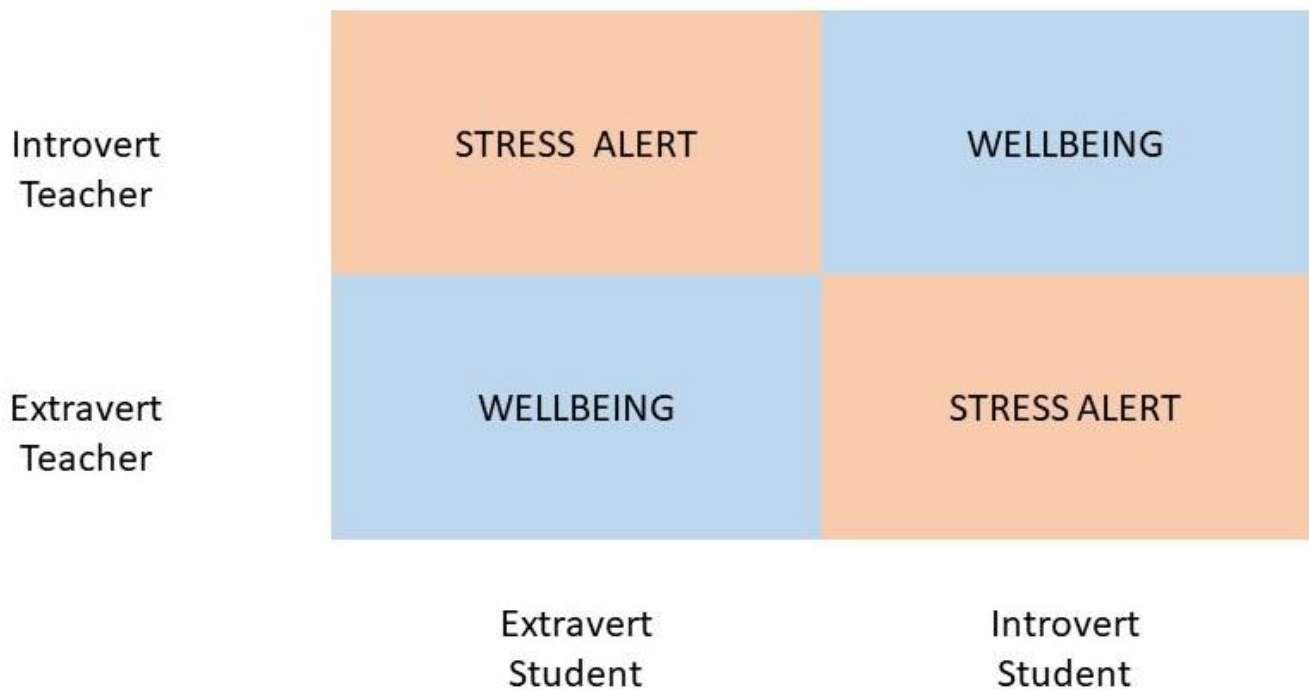
Like all simplifications, this explanation is like the visible 10% of the iceberg above the waterline. Physical space is one thing, but **headspace** is the BIG thing. And the differing needs of E/I teacher and student type are **both** to be adequately factored in such that neither ever feel compromised nor marginalised.

### **STUCK IN COMFORT**

Whether it be subconscious or deliberate, there can be a preference to stay within what is our natural preference and therefore our 'default' position. As a result, a teacher can be seen to apply pedagogical methods which are more suited to how **they** are, rather than take fully into account the spectrum of student predilections.

Alternatively, if teachers come under pressure to change curriculum design in ways that demand another way of doing things that goes against their own E/I tendencies, this can undermine their sense of confidence to do the job to a level where they are satisfied.

The following *Diagram 1* is a simplification of E/I causal sources of positive mental wellbeing or potential discomfort and stress.



*Diagram 1: The Potential Influence of E/I natural tendencies on both Teacher and Student Wellbeing*

Meaningful learning is a mutual exchange and requires **both** teacher and student to be taken outside their 'comfort zone' of preferences, whilst remaining within a 'wellbeing zone'. An open **willingness** is needed for this to happen, which is enabled by **first** creating a learning environment that feels both emotionally safe and where everyone feels they make a valued contribution.

This is facilitated by everyone being led to feel understood and where their communication needs are satisfactorily met.

The following *Table 1* offers insights to highlight awareness and to help create pre-emptive strategies.

In universities and business schools when lecture theatres have capacities where hundreds of students attend at a time, it can be even more challenging to facilitate inclusion at this emotional level. However, positive and meaningful teacher/student engagement and therefore learning is still possible, and there is a growing bank of resources provided by teaching faculty on how this can be achieved.

It is also part-core to the free resources and input provided through the *Caring on Campus* initiative within [LifeRoute](#).

CHARACTERISTICS	POTENTIAL STRESS-INDUCERS		STRESS-AVOIDING / TRUST INDUCING CONSIDERATIONS	
	INTROVERTS	EXTRAVERTS	INTROVERTS	EXTRAVERTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The need for reflective time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be suddenly asked with no advance warning can make them feel 'pounced upon'. They don't want to say whatever 'pops into their head', but to give an answer that they consider to be useful.</li> <li>Without some form of follow-up where they can then share additional thoughts, this can lead to a build-up of frustration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Like to 'think on their feet', and prefer to 'think out loud', preferably with other people around.</li> <li>Want to act right away, get things done and risk getting it wrong.</li> <li>Might inadvertently take ownership of someone else's suggestion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure introverts are given time in advance to 'warm up with the ball'. In other words, that they know what is likely to be discussed. That way they feel fully prepared and are more ready to share of their best.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be clear what on the next actions they intend.</li> <li>Prompt post meeting circulation of notes or what has been agreed. (It may seem tedious to do this, but it can be a huge relationship and time saver in the long run.)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The need for talk time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Others need to be silent when they speak. If others interrupt, they might clam up, unless they feel passionate that it needs to be said.</li> <li>Can keep going over things in their heads afterwards because they either didn't say anything at the time or were dissatisfied with what they said.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to be able to brainstorm with others.</li> <li>Will interrupt and speak over others constantly – even just voicing what comes into mind.</li> <li>Get so carried away they fail to notice if others are being excluded through not getting a chance to speak.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give them a count to 10 to say anything.</li> <li>Encourage them to repeatedly say "May I say something?" until others stop and give them attention.</li> <li>Be aware that for some it isn't enough to text/write to you. Learn how to successfully manage in-person meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to count to 10 before adding to what they say to allow others also the chance to say something.</li> <li>Ensure that everyone has a chance to say something, but don't put anyone specifically 'on the spot'.</li> <li>Give people other options to communicate with you other than speaking with others also listening in.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The need to both work and play with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stress comes where there are no choices but are forced to 'mix' or work with others. It can lead to negative 'kick-backs' such as a loss of peace of mind and tiredness.</li> <li>Meaningful exchange means being part of a small group where everyone can listen attentively to everyone else.</li> <li>Bear in mind that Student Union activities, going to the pub, group gatherings, clubs, conference attendances, are not a solution for introverts to feel a sense of inclusion and belonging.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need frequent social interaction with networking opportunities. Prefer being in good-sized groups where there is always someone free to speak to or do things with. Like to keep adding people to the team. Stress can come in the shape of boredom.</li> <li>Even extraverts can overdo their 'social fix' and then either 'crash' or have been time-robbed and have to rush to get things done.</li> <li>The need to frequently and actively be part of things is like the need for oxygen.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider with any social activity whether the means justify the ends – where the 'ends' will always equate to the introvert feeling tired and the need to catch up on rest.</li> <li>Don't compromise in order to 'fit in'. It's simply a matter of making others clear of the basic needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Life in higher education has become very 'silo' structured, and this can lead to not enough energising peer interaction for faculty especially. Recognise the need to join or form mutual interest groups with others.</li> <li>Retain awareness that the extrovert's need to be part of group gatherings – even in the kitchen – sometimes has to be discouraged if they are to retain a good work-rest-play balance.</li> </ul>

Table 1 : Examples of Introversion/Extraversion considerations that will enhance Teaching & Learning

## ***AN ABC APPROACH***

The approach being championed here is an **ABC** of teaching and learning:

A for AWARENESS; B for BALANCE; C for CLARITY.

**Awareness** of mutual needs, **Balance** of personal growth and contribution with a sense of safety and respect, and ongoing **Clarity** from the teacher of the purpose of what is being taught, that it is clearly understood, and why the specific methods and activities have been chosen.

All are to be taken into account in lesson design and delivery that will contribute to the enhancement of the mental wellbeing of all involved and its consequent education value.

The wonderful aspect of raised awareness and desire to equally accommodate both E/I tendencies is that it also encourages the development of many other social and communication/collaboration skills and abilities. Some may term them as 'soft skills' or non-cognitive skills.

They are the skills that more and more are being articulated by employers as being most required in the workplace; the skills that Artificial Intelligence does not possess. These skills are at their best when they are values-based, which means they underpin what it means to be human – *homo sapiens* – the wise ape.

*Footnote:*

*The insights shared here have their origins derived from the work of Isabel Briggs, who was intrigued by what she observed as people being of different 'Types' in terms of how they naturally think, decide, organise and live their life. She developed her theories based on Carl Jung's work on personality type and her working model, the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, first published in 1962 is widely used worldwide in the field of psychometrics.*

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