Let's start with the word "introvert." For reasons shown below, it has become a word of whisper where students and adults don't feel comfortable calling themselves an introvert. Introverts are weak, right? Like Emily Dickinson— weird, right?

Unless you're Susan Cain, of course, who writes about how the digital age has paved the way for the introvert to have a stronger voice and allow for greater leaders to rise up in society than would have been possible before.

The past thousands of years — since we descended from trees, even — has been a preying ground for the loudest, most shark-like, smooth talkers. Take Wall Street, for example, where the pit acted as an "eat or be eaten" arena for macho guys and some ferocious women to trade (that is, before the smartphone came into play, but more on that later).

Brené Brown says these episodes of shaming significantly lower a student's self-efficacy and further draw the introvert in for a hand and say something strange, silly, or wrong, the class gawks at them and taunting rumors spread like wildfire.

The traditional classroom has been much like the pit on Wall Street. Of course, a good teacher knows how to prevent a scene like the one pictured above even in the overcrowded classroom; yet, the atmosphere created by the traditional school system creates a culture much like this. Instead of jumping up and down and/or yelling, students still need to raise their hand to share their idea, and no matter how hard a teacher works to create a safe culture, introverts have learned that if they raise the
lifetime. Feeling awkward never becomes fun. By the time high school or college rolls around, introverts have learned to stay quiet in their shell.

Or tweet.

Enter the Online School?

Online schools may be a far more accessible environment for the introvert, allowing introverted students to share without screaming, shouting or swimming with sharks. AN EXTROVERT’S GREATEST OFFENSE IN THE ONLINE ARENA IS PUTTING EVERYTHING IN CAPS. Clearly, this is not as threatening.

Take a look where digital media has led us. Readers of The Huffington Post, for instance, can comment on articles and respond to another reader from another part of the world in a flash. That’s not only amazing: It’s empowering to the introvert. As Tamra Excell (co-founder of the online school Christa McAuliffe Academy School of Arts and Sciences) points out, an introvert can finally have a voice and be listened to without having to shout. She just has to type.

Modeling this reader-comment system, teachers can take advantage of learning management systems (LMS) like Edmodo or NaMaYa and put class discussions online.

To make clearer the value of online discussion, allow me to explore two different modes of schooling: the online school and the traditional brick-and-mortar school.

3 Ways Online School Empowers the Introvert

1. The Power of the Pen

Students type instead of talk, and since a printed word stays longer than a breath, online discussions may be stronger.

This goes to the saying, "The pen is mightier than the sword." Just that the new pen may be a smartphone.

2. More Democratic

An avatar sees no prejudice. As a bonus, students can read and respond to everyone without the social stigmas that may culturally prevent some students from feeling comfortable to talk to each other. Students let go of prejudices that could prevent meaningful discussion.

3. No More "Saved by the Bell"

Without bells, everyone has time to share their opinion. Without the bell system, students can take as much time as they want to craft a response and no longer need to play with the sharks who attack first.

Since extroverts talk first, the introvert has learned that a bell comes soon enough so there’s no need to speak up. In the online arena, there’s no such thing. Students can respond whenever they like, wherever they like. Twenty-four hours provides a far greater window of opportunity than 42 minutes.

Introverts know that it takes time to craft a well-thought-out response. Just shouting out the first thing that comes to mind -- while typically getting the most immediate attention -- tends to lack depth.

What About the Traditional School?

The Socratic Circle can be one of the most effective, if not necessary, classroom designs to allow the introvert to share. Once a teacher has established a Socratic Circle in a safe classroom culture, students know that everyone must participate and everyone needs to listen (and respond) to everyone else. For a helpful guide on how to set up a Socratic Circle, check out Socratic Circles: Fostering Critical and Creative Thinking in Middle and High School by Matt Copeland.

One of the many powers in Socratic discussion lies the ability to rise up the introvert, empowering him to share his often unheard views. Just keep in mind what Susan Cain says in Quiet: “There’s zero correlation between being the best talker and having the best ideas.”

What do you think? Which school design is better for introverts, the online school or the traditional school?

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