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# Strength-Stretch-Restore

Setting the Stage for Introverts to Thrive by Heidi Kasevich

## Courduroy

*It was green, made of corduroy, and filled with platitudes. On the last day of school, I was supposed to remove it from my locker and ask friends and teachers to sign it. An introverted and shy child, I was often at a loss for words when it came time to pop the big question: Will you sign my autograph book? By middle school, I had learned how to avoid the bullies and stand by until my closest friends—and favorite teachers—approached me.*

*In the seventh grade, I waited all afternoon for my beloved biology teacher to sign it, hoping that he had noticed more than my perfect marks on his multiple choice tests. His elegantly simple words sent a shot through my heart: intoxicating, yet terrifying, "Reach out, HK, you've got a lot to give." I knew he was right, but had no idea how to "reach out." His words echoed those that I had heard countless times before. "Come out of your shell," "Just speak up," "You are so shy."*

Without adequate understanding of my own inborn temperament, socialized as a girl to "be quiet," and often feeling unsafe in my school environments, I kept painfully silent for years.

## The Extrovert Ideal

Stories abound of introverts of all ages who feel misjudged, overlooked, undervalued, or seemingly unable to stand up for themselves. "The world becomes a terrifying place when you feel as though you don't fit in," remarked one of



Dr. Heidi Kasevich designs and delivers programs nationwide that focus on guiding school and workplace communities to foster inclusive cultures where people of all temperaments thrive. A specialist in educating quiet and women leaders, she is passionate about helping students and adults alike to use self-awareness to optimize their ability to lead in today's world. Kasevich, known for her effervescent presentation style, is a frequent speaker at

educational conferences and associations, and her Quiet Revolution work has been featured on NPR and in numerous publications, including Huffington Post, New York Magazine, and Harvard Magazine. A member of the DEAK group, she is the author of the *Guide to Giving*, a highly acclaimed K-12 philanthropy curriculum, and *Closing the Gap*, an influential girls' leadership curriculum. Her proficiency is grounded in over 20 years of experience as educator and history department chair at schools in New York City, including Nightingale-Bamford, Dalton, Berkeley Carroll, NYU and Cooper Union. Kasevich has served as director of Académie de Paris, an Oxbridge Academic Program, and is program director at the Hotchkiss Student Leadership Institute. A gcLi Alumna Scholar, she received her bachelor's degree from Haverford and doctorate from New York University.

my campers last year at the Hotchkiss Student Leadership Institute.

Do we really want approximately half of our students, those who have introverted temperaments, to think that they are "less than" their extroverted peers? Are we setting up those who thrive on solitude for processing, decision-making and recharging—and who tend to prefer one-on-one socializing as opposed to larger groups—to feel as though they are not normal? Do we want approximately 41 percent of teachers to leave the profession within five years of entering it, a statistic associated with an emphasis on constant social interaction?

Of course not.

Yet we—often unconsciously—still fuel the myth of the extrovert ideal. There is an enduring cultural bias towards dynamic, gregarious, and alpha leaders, which is rooted in the cultural history of the industrial and media ages; it seemed then, as now, as though you cannot succeed in life unless you are a fast-talking salesman.

Talkative people have been rated as smarter, better-looking, more interesting, and more desirable as friends. The so-called "halo effect" ensures that extroverted leaders—giving orders, delivering rousing speeches and loving the spotlight—are often perceived as more effective because they fit the stereotype of a successful leader in 21st century America.

In schools, we define participation as quantity of speech and assign a grade to the number of times children raise their hands in our classes. Students are supposed to do their best work in groups, enjoy busy schedules with nonstop activities, and socialize in noisy, crowded common spaces. Silence often connotes insecurity; resistance, boredom.

## Protecting Introverts

Burnout is a real physical and emotional response deriving from lack of quiet time and space in our lives, on one hand, and the pressure to fit into a one-size-fits-all definition of what it means to be a successful leader, on the other.

It is the introverted half of our population that is most at risk for burnout. With a heightened sensitivity to social and

sensory (noise, light, caffeine) stimuli, it can be difficult for introverts to get the time they need to restore their nervous systems. And an overstimulated, exhausted introvert will retreat to the sidelines, turning inward, avoiding interactions at all possible costs—potentially withholding information that could be critical for caregivers and educators.

Further, self-monitoring, or acting out of character to the point of self-negation, can lead to severe health problems, including anxiety and compromised immune functioning. Adolescents are particularly at risk for compromising authenticity for the sake of social status.

### The Strength-Stretch-Restore Method

A temperament-inclusive classroom is characterized by a balance between collaborative learning and independent work, group work and solitude. It is one that prizes quality over quantity of speech, deep listening, reflective pauses, and writing as varied forms of classroom engagement.

Setting the stage so that both introverts and extroverts can thrive requires intentional work by educators to champion quiet strengths, promote comfortable stretches, and restore the balance between calm and excitement in our school environments.

### Strength

It is critical to begin by linking inborn preferences to character strengths. Introverted preferences include thinking before speaking; looking before leaping; focusing on an area of deep interest; observing and listening. A groundbreaking 2014 Quiet Revolution study conducted by Penn State's John Johnson, of the Values in Action Institute, and the University of Pennsylvania's Scott Barry Kaufman, revealed that there are correlations between introversion and the character strengths of humility, perspective, and prudence.

Prudence, in particular, often has negative connotations: slow, risk-averse, and overly cautious are words that spring to mind. Who wants to be the tortoise rather than the hare? Yet this character strength, when understood as "righteous decision making that is rooted in acuity and practical wisdom," and nurtured in our classrooms, can lead to remarkable outcomes for the leaders of today and tomorrow.

The introverted inclination to carefully weigh options before making a decision—considering what if's and controlling their immediate urges—is fueled by solitude and can be cultivated by normalizing quiet times in our classrooms. Educators can make space for silent time in their classrooms. Through this process, it can be helpful to think of periods

of silence along a continuum, from a few seconds to approximately 20 minutes, and to consider that time to think has benefits for both extroverts and introverts. The good news is that we can build our capacity for solitude over time. The more we practice, the stronger we get. As Scott Barry Kaufman posits, "The mind must have the space to settle down if it is to come up with the insights that make for original creative work."

The Art of Reflection Table

Reflective Action	Outcome
Three to ten seconds of reflective pausing before verbal participation.	To answer questions correctly and offer more complex answers.
One minute paper or metacognitive moments.	To enhance motivation, build self-awareness and deepen knowledge.
Four minutes for beholding an image, quotation, equation.	To increase the chances of active listening and foster higher order thinking.
15 minutes to access the state of flow.	To "get into the zone," a highly creative state where we forget ourselves and feel part of something larger—free from rewards
20 minutes for deliberate practice.	To promote mastery of a topic or task.

### Stretch

As Brian Little of Cambridge University explains, we are born with certain personality traits (our "fixed traits") and then develop others (our "free traits"). The introverted father who throws himself into putting on his daughter's birthday party or the extroverted student who spends hours at the library are both exercising free traits. What do they have in common? They share a dedication to core personal projects—goals that cut to the core of their values and ideals. Pursuing these passions drives us to step outside of our comfort zones. By nature, introverts tend to be drawn to taking deep dives into areas of passionate interest.

Identifying these passions, however, can be easier said than done. The avoidance instinct can override the approach instinct when it comes time to trying something new. In order to help quiet children feel comfortable and not overly anxious when stepping outside of their comfort zones, try providing a "long runway" in order to activate their "go systems" and take flight. Here are some essential tips:

- Rehearse beforehand. Create a roadmap.
- Arrive at an unfamiliar lesson or event early. Observe first, engage second.
- Focus on the positive. Reminisce about previous times of engagement without setting expectations for fun.
- Encourage help from a Bridge Friend. A close intimate provides reassurance.
- Devise an exit plan. The option of leaving early can foster safety.

Parents can serve as critical partners in the long runway approach. For instance, help parents to turn drop off into a game. Provide this script: “Who will be the first one to get to the door?” You can also show parents that you understand that adventure is not a monolithic term. Ask the quiet child, “On your vacation, did you say ‘hi’ to the ocean before it got crowded?” Finally, work with parents to identify a comfortable bridge companion, and encourage well-supervised play dates to nourish such relationships. Pair these friends as frequently as needed to prepare the way for anxiety-free risk taking, in and out of the classroom. Our teaching/parenting motto at Quiet Revolution is, “Don’t force, don’t quit.”

### Restore

When we stretch in the service of a mission, the trick is to know our limits. We need to learn to be vigilant about our own energy management: How can I find the right balance between calm and excitement? The key is to carve out the time and space for what Brian Little calls Restorative Niches, the physical and mental places we go to recharge our batteries after exercising free traits: a walk by a river for an introvert (after a day of classes) or a loud sporting event for an extrovert (after an afternoon at the library). For an introvert, the optimal recharging zone involves calm rather stimulation, alone time rather than social time.

The challenge for many of our quiet children today is that our schools are noisy, loud, action-packed places where collaboration is the rule—and they have no control over their schedules. It can be nearly impossible for introverted kids to carve out the time they need to restore their energy by looking at picture books silently, eating alone, or even just sitting quietly and letting their minds wander with no outside distractions. How can we set boundaries to ensure that students and educators alike have the time and space during the school day for restorative niches?

A “question-storming” session with staff in small affinity groups can work wonders for a such a quiet cultural shift. Are there private spaces where the expectations for social

interaction are non-existent? Are there spaces where eating alone does not connote antisocial behavior or loneliness? Are there places for children and teachers to go that support focus, rejuvenation, and, ultimately, engaged learners?

As you begin to contemplate the restructuring of areas in your classroom or school, consider that a third to half of your students and colleagues need:

- permission to be alone and unseen.
- control over light and noise.
- sensory balance with warm, calming influences.

Educators of our youngest students, who are trained in quiet pedagogy at the Quiet Schools Institute, have had success in setting up “cozy corners,” with comfy cushions, picture books, and “calming caddies” (filled with inviting cards with yoga poses or stuffed animals). Further, building in periods of five- to ten-minute “zen zones” has allowed quieter kids to take the restorative niches they need during the school day—stretching to soothing music, focusing on their breathing, or drawing in gratitude journals.

### The Power of Words

I’d like to end with the most transformative of teacher comments, written by my own introverted son’s teacher.

*“In his caring and understated way, he sets the tone for the class by combining seriousness of purpose, generosity of spirit, and a great sense of humor.”*

These words ignited my quiet son’s confidence. No autograph book needed.

### Resources

- [www.hotchkiss.org/our-school/summer-programs/leadership-program](http://www.hotchkiss.org/our-school/summer-programs/leadership-program)
- [www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/01/why-introverted-teachers-are-burning-out/425151/](http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/01/why-introverted-teachers-are-burning-out/425151/)
- <https://harvardmagazine.com/2003/07/introversion-unbound.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/21/opinion/how-the-modern-world-made-cowards-of-us-all.html>
- <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-metacognition-boosts-learning>
- <https://aeon.co/essays/take-your-time-the-seven-pillars-of-a-slow-thought-manifesto>
- <https://www.quietrev.com/quiet-schools-network/>
- <https://www.wellington.org/blog/making-time-quiet/>