

Attending to Your Needs as a Teacher: The Impact of Being an Introvert when
Teaching Foreign Languages

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at
the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont

July 2008

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role that being an introvert plays in foreign language teaching. As a Spanish teacher and an introvert, I expend extraordinary energy to compensate for my natural tendency to recede. The profession I have chosen requires exceptional and constant effort.

I define **introvert** in the context that I understand it. I recognize the limitations of the label and try to look beyond those.

I share different pieces of **my own life story** and share different contexts to illuminate how I have become a successful introvert teacher.

I speak to the **paradox** that what I love most about Spanish (the travel and adventure) is the polar opposite of what I am comfortable with as an introvert.

I highlight the **strategies** I have learned to help me survive in this profession in the hopes that they will be useful to other introvert teachers.

I reveal ways in which I believe my introversion allows **my students** to be more successful in the foreign language classroom.

I am what I am.

Popeye

Appreciate your uniqueness.

Captain Kangaroo

It takes all sorts to make a world.

Proverb

Maybe being oneself is always an acquired taste.

Patricia Hampl

Within you there is a stillness and a sanctuary to which you can retreat any time and be yourself.

Hermann Hesse

Life begets energy – energy creates energy. It is only by spending oneself wisely that one becomes rich in life.

Eleanor Roosevelt

But your solitude will be a support and a home for you, even in the midst of very unfamiliar circumstances, and from it you will find all your paths.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Words for Introverts to Live By

Be Playful.

Take breaks.

Appreciate your inside world.

Be authentic.

Enjoy curiosity.

Stay in harmony.

Revel in solitude.

Be grateful.

Be you.

Remember, let your light shine.

- Marti Olsen Laney

Vignette #1

It is the first day of the school year, and all the teachers in the district have come to the high school that I teach at for our teacher workshop. I arrive at school early to give myself some time to acclimate before the hoards of people arrive. Luckily, my classroom is upstairs away from the noisy food court where people are starting to gather to drink coffee and eat scones. My colleague, Deb, a German teacher, stops in to my room and asks, "Are you ready to go downstairs?" "I guess so," I reply hesitantly. Together we walk down the stairs, and before we open the door to enter the crowded cafeteria, we both take a deep breath and smile at each other. "Here we go," we both say.

Vignette #2

We have a block schedule at my school. This means that there are four, eighty-two minute classes every day. We alternate red days and white days. Red days are classes 1,3,5,7 and white days are classes 2,4,6,8. Normally, teachers teach three classes on one day with a planning period and two classes on the other day with a study hall and a planning period. As an introvert, I have always found the days with three classes much more demanding and exhausting. Imagine my dismay when I received my schedule for the past school year. I taught all four blocks in a row on red days, meaning that I had all of 20 minutes to myself during the school day! Not an introvert's dream!

When introverts decide to be teachers, they must recognize and overcome these intense situations. I will share how I deal with them and offer insights into the introvert's world as foreign language teacher.

INTRODUCTION

I have been teaching Spanish for nine years, and I have grown accustomed to the challenges of teaching – the everchanging mandates from the Department of Education, the various districtwide initiatives, the ancillary school-specific responsibilities that accompany teaching, the complaints from parents, and the diverse learners in my classroom to name a few. Over the past decade I feel that I have overcome these obstacles en route to providing my students with a good understanding of the Spanish language and instilling in them a love for language learning.

My biggest obstacle, however, does not involve any of the challenges listed above. My biggest obstacle in teaching is not the demanding administration, the stressful duties, the dissatisfied parents, or the whiny students. My biggest obstacle in teaching is . . . ME.

I do not purposefully try to self-destruct nor do I want to make my job harder for myself. Yet, who I am sometimes makes it difficult to teach. In fact, many would say that I am in the wrong profession. At times, I wonder if they are right. However, so many other things about my teaching prove to me that I am in the right profession: my relationships with my students, the fun I have planning my units, my own personal growth, and the chance to share my passion with others every day. I simply need to know how to function given my limitations as an introvert. At the same time, being an introvert allows me to teach in a way that many extroverts do not, and I am learning to appreciate my gift of being an introvert in my extroverted profession.

WHAT IS AN INTROVERT?

Introverts draw energy from their *internal world* of ideas, emotions, and impressions. They are energy conservers. They can be easily overstimulated by the external world, experiencing the uncomfortable feeling of “too much.” This can feel like antsiness or torpor. In either case, they need to limit their social experiences so they don’t get drained. However, introverts need to balance their alone time with outside time, or they can lose their perspectives and connections. Introverted people who balance their energy have perseverance and the ability to think independently, focus deeply, and work creatively. (Laney, p. 19)

The strongest distinguishing characteristic of introverts is their energy source. The most well-known standard for indicating introverts and extroverts is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assessment. The MBTI instrument helps people identify which of sixteen personality types best describes them. The types represent a person’s preference in four separate categories of two opposite poles:

- Where one focuses their attention – Extroversion (E) or Introversion (I)
- The way one takes in information - Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)
- The way one makes decisions – Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)
- How one deals with the outer world – Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)

I am an ISFJ which can be described as Introvert Sensing with Feeling and Judgment.

People’s preferences for one pole over another such as Introversion versus Extroversion fall somewhere along the continuum of Very Clear, Clear, Moderate, or Slight. (To see this continuum, see Appendix A) For instance my preference for feeling is quite clear. On a continuum of 30 points, I rated a 23 for Feeling when I took the MBTI assessment. I had a moderate preference for Judging with 11 points. When it came to Sensing and Introversion, I had a slight preference of 1 for each. However, on a self-assessment for introverts in Marti Olsen Laney’s book, The Introvert Advantage, I rated in her highest level of introversion, “pretty darn introverted” (p. 32). The difference in the outcome of the two assessments may be due to the nature of the questions in the two assessments,

and not so much due to my mindset at the time, as I took the two assessments within a week of each other. There are 93 questions broken into three parts on the Myers-Briggs Assessment. Part One is called *Word Phrases* and it asks you to choose one of two ways that is closest to how you usually feel or act given a certain situation. Part Two, called *Word Pairs* asks you to choose the word that appeals to you more. Part Three, also called *Word Phrases*, also asks you to choose the answer that comes closest to how you usually feel or act. The MBTI assessment assesses four different categories with Introvert/Extrovert being one of them. The questions in Laney's book only assess whether or not you are an introvert. She poses thirty True/False questions and the more Trues you answer, the more of an introvert you are. The assessments are quite different as are my results. Regardless, on any assessment I have ever taken to determine whether or not I was an introvert, the results always indicated some level of introversion. I am an introvert and I identify clearly with many of the introvert characteristics.

The following are type descriptions for an ISFJ and I feel that they describe me very well:

- Practical, realistic, considerate, and responsible
- Focused on the needs of others; take responsibilities seriously and expects others to do the same
- Respectful of established procedures and authority; value harmony and cooperation
- Likely to see facts clearly and accurately, especially those that have a personal meaning for them
- Likely to make decisions based on personal values and concern for others
- Sympathetic, tactful, and supportive of others
- Usually seen by others as quiet, serious, conscientious, and traditional

The above characteristics describe me when you take all four of my categories and put them together. They do not describe all introverts because some introverts are intuitive

rather than sensing, thinkers rather than feelers, and perceivers rather than judges. To learn more about these types, visit www.cpp.com and click on MBTI.

When you separate introversion from the other four categories, you are able to see what all introverts, no matter where they fall on the continuum, experience in one way or another. While the Myers-Briggs descriptions of types tend to polarize introverts and extroverts, there are various degrees of introversion both among people and within people as individuals depending on the context. Jean Kummerow produced a document in 1987 for the Center for Applications of Psychological Type in Gainesville, Florida. In it, she explains the difference between extroverts and introverts.

ORIENTATION OF ENERGY – EXTRAVERSION-INTROVERSION ATTITUDE

(Direction of focus, source of energy)

E Extrovert

Energized by outer world
Focus on people, things
Active
Breadth of interest
Live it, then understand it
Interaction
Outgoing

I Introvert

Energized by inner world
Focus on thoughts, concepts
Reflective
Depth of Interest
Understand it before live it
Concentration
Inwardly Directed

I agree that I am much more energized by my inner world, although I do gain energy from new experiences in the outer world such as traveling to Spanish-speaking countries to increase my cultural knowledge and improve my Spanish. The experiences exhaust me, but they inspire me at the same time, giving me energy to use later on. I am both active and reflective. I participate in many things, but I must reflect in order for my experiences to mean anything. I always ask my players and students to reflect as well, but there are many extroverts who dislike this process. The introverts eat it up. I definitely

delve into specific topics rather than cover a wide variety of topics. I do this with my curriculum in my classroom as well. I refuse to just glance over topics because I need to “cover” them in a certain level of Spanish. Instead, I stick with one focus for a while and make sure that the students understand it fully before we move on. This helps the introverts who need the time to process as well as the extroverts who need deeper understanding. I tend to want to figure something out and try to understand it before I try it or live it, but I do find that by experiencing life, I obviously understand it better. I just always try to be as prepared as possible and do my research ahead of time. I do like to interact, but need to concentrate to fully comprehend something. I am also outgoing in my life, but always try to make inner connections.

In 1985, Kummerow provided a guide for talking with introverts. She suggested the following:

- Include time for I’s to get to know you and trust you
- Encourage responses with questions like “What do you think about _____?” but don’t overwhelm the I with too many questions
- Allow time for I’s to think before responding; don’t expect immediate answers to questions (sending agendas before meetings helps)
- Have more individual or one-to-one activities than group activities
- Do not assume an I is uninterested; they may just be taking time to process information

These guidelines certainly hold true for me. I need to establish trust with someone before I am willing to open up and talk with them. I do not like too many questions, but do like to be asked my opinion. Otherwise, I will not offer it up as freely because I will be too self-conscious about it. I do need time to respond, however, and having the questions ahead of time helps. I interact much more at staff meeting when I have the agenda ahead of time and can prepare my thoughts. I do not mind group activities, but I do prefer to work by myself or in pairs. I do

need time to process and might not jump in right away so I appreciate when people can give me time to process before they force me to interact.

The Center for Applications of Psychological Type also published the “Effects of Each Preference in Work Situations.” It says the following about introverts at work:

- Like quiet for concentration.
- Tend to be careful with details, dislike sweeping statements.
- Have trouble remembering names and faces.
- Tend not to mind working on one project for a long time without interruption.
- Are interested in the idea behind their job.
- Dislike telephone intrusions and interruptions.
- Like to think a lot before they act, sometimes without acting.
- Work contentedly alone.
- Have some problems communicating

Quiet is absolutely necessary for me to concentrate, which is hard for my students and even my family to understand. Both sometimes get upset when I ask them to be quiet. Details are extremely important to me. I do NOT have trouble remembering names and faces. In fact, that is one of my strengths. I do not mind working on one project for a long time without interruption. I hate interruptions – my students will tell you that I get very angry when the phone rings during class, even when it is administration. I must think before I act. I have difficulty making decisions and need time. I love working by myself, but am able to work in groups. I sometimes have problems communicating, but I feel that this is a piece I have worked at and really mastered.

Laura Hamilton, who currently provides training and consulting for individuals and groups in the Central Maine area regarding MBTI, includes the following slide in her powerpoint for training sessions:

Extroversion

- Initiating
- Expressive
- Gregarious
- Participative
- Enthusiastic
- Sociable
- Outward focus
- Energized externally

Introversion

- * Receiving
- * Contained
- * Intimate
- * Reflective
- * Quiet
- * Independent
- * Intensive
- * Energized internally

Laura also lists stressors for introverts which include working with others, talking on the phone a lot, interacting with others frequently, having to act quickly without reflection, too many concurrent tasks and demands, getting frequent verbal feedback. Laura helped me to understand that my teaching day is full of these stressors. An extrovert when teaching is the leader on the field giving the orders. Their auxiliary functions are in the tent sending out messages that aid the leader in her guidance of others. For an introvert, the leader is in the tent giving the orders and the auxiliary functions are actually completing the tasks. This scenario is much more draining.

I feel that I do a good job of balancing my alone time with my interactive time. I am involved in many activities that involve many people, but I recognize when I need to take a break. I am an introvert who functions very well in the extrovert world and I have learned how to take care of myself as a person and as a very busy teacher of foreign languages.

MY OWN LIFE STORY

I choose to teach. Many people say that I did not choose the profession, but rather the profession chose me. Whether that is true or not, I ultimately have a choice to teach or not to teach. I choose to teach.

I choose to teach even though it is exhausting and perhaps not what my introvert type would have me do. I choose to teach because I have learned over the years to function in a world of extroverts and I know that I can continue to compensate for my shortcomings with all of my strengths.

Marti Olsen Laney offers the following points to ponder in her 2002 book The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World.

75 percent of the world is extroverted

Being introverted affects all areas of your life

Introverts feel drained and overstimulated

(p. 15)

It must be said here and I understand that there are varying degrees of introversion. At different stages and situations in my life, I have fallen on different points along the continuum. The truth is that many introverts function extremely well, or thrive as Laney would say, in the *Extrovert World*. We have adapted in order to keep up with the other 75% of the population. Our world seems to cater to extroverts and introverts seem to have to defend themselves.

Gretchen, the student

As a child, I did not know what the word introvert meant, but I did know that crowds intimidated me and that I liked to be alone. I would spend hours by myself in my

room, playing house and even school, caring for and teaching my dolls all kinds of new things. I had lots of friends and was involved in numerous activities: girl scouts, little league softball, pee wee basketball, rainbow girls, dance, and pee wee soccer to name a few. I continued with my sports and dance through high school and became involved in many other clubs at school as well. I did school well and I gave 110% to any team or activity I took part in. When I came home, I would crash and hide away in my room to try and restore all the energy I had depleted. I didn't realize that is what I was doing. I just knew that I was absolutely exhausted.

I think somewhere along the way in grade school in an advisory class or something we must have done some form of the Myers-Briggs test to determine our type and I remember realizing that I was an introvert. Among all of my extrovert friends, being an introvert seemed like a bad thing and I tried not to be such a recluse. But at times I had to say no to social gatherings because I was so drained from everything else. I didn't want to seem like a square so my mom let me use her as the excuse sometimes. "No, I can't. My mom won't let me," I would tell my friends when the real reason I wasn't going to the movies was so that I could be by myself. When I did decide to socialize, I did so with a few friends instead of a big group. Parties were not my thing. When I did attend them, I had to fuel up ahead of time by laying low, and then I always made sure that I had time after to relax and unwind alone.

Luckily, I had a supportive family who understood my needs and helped me to learn strategies to cope. I remember preparing for a current events presentation in seventh grade. I was very nervous and wasn't sure how to tackle the task. My mother suggested that I write down what I was going to say on note cards and that I space out the words so

that they would be easier to see. We practiced together and I felt very prepared and confident. The next day, I was sweating bullets, but I stood in front of my social studies class and gave my presentation. When I finished, my teacher pointed out all of the nice things I had done. He mentioned my note cards, my eye contact, and my pacing. I felt so wonderful and I learned that preparation before a public appearance was helpful and earned praise. To this day, I do not give a speech without writing everything down word for word and spacing it out on the paper. I envy people who can speak off the cuff, but I recognize that I can't and I do what I have to do to be successful in that situation.

I encountered another teacher in middle school, my science teacher, who also recognized all of the work I was doing to plan and prepare. However, his remarks to me were not full of praise. He told me that I would burn out before I graduated from high school. He perhaps did not recognize that I needed to do all of that preparation so that I could participate in school during the day. I think that his comments pushed me to work even harder to prove myself and I wanted so badly to go back to his classroom five years later and show him my valedictorian medal, but he was no longer teaching in the district.

The college years

My years in college mirrored my high school years in many ways. I played sports, studied hard, and socialized with small groups of people. Sharing a room with a roommate, I had to find other places where I could be alone. I cherished the time that I had alone in our dorm room, and always arranged to be there when my roommate was at class. On nights when we would both be around, I would seek out a quiet corner of the library. I tried hard not to insult her with my avoidance behaviors and I suppose that it worked because we are still friends today. One thing I will always remember is that my

roommate had a close group of friends that she liked to watch Beverly Hills 90210 with. They would always invite me to go and watch it with them, but after going to classes all day, practicing field hockey with my team, and then eating in an overcrowded dining hall, I recognized the opportunity to be alone. I tried to explain to them that I just wasn't up for it. I still didn't have a great understanding or appreciation for being an introvert so I always felt guilty even though I knew I was doing the best thing for myself.

Without my family around in college, I had to learn how to deal with being an introvert and hope that the others around me would appreciate me for me. I was not always successful at that. For instance, as a senior captain of our field hockey team, I retreated inward when we started losing. My coach called me on it and I was forced to come out of my shell and lead. We ended up winning the championship, but being an introvert almost cost me dearly.

I did find many other introvert friends at Tufts and they came to be my family sharing their love and support. They, along with my extrovert friends, showed me that I had a lot to offer and encouraged me to take risks. I somehow found the courage to apply to study abroad in Spain for the second semester of my junior year. That experience forced me to explore many aspects of my being that I had never known. Madrid was a very big city, and most of the other students in my program were extroverts so I had to find new ways to cope. I enjoyed traveling with my extrovert classmates and learning different strategies from them about how to navigate through the unknown. I didn't have to be scared, I just needed to be willing to take a few risks here and there. When I took risks and experienced success, I felt accomplished and began to extend myself a little bit further.

I found refuge in the quiet museums of Madrid as well as in *El Parque del Retiro* that came to be my sanctuary. I would escape to the park at least once a week to read or just to sit and watch the people. I even wrote my final piece of work that semester about my beloved park. I have travelled back to Spain twice with students and I always make a special trip to *El Retiro* usually accompanied by my introvert students while the extroverts are off shopping on the busy streets.

I returned to Tufts for my senior year and as my years at Tufts University ended, I emerged *Summa Cum Laude*. I really wanted to go back to my middle school science teacher then and show him that diploma!

The Peace Corps

After graduating from Tufts, I embarked on a completely different adventure. I joined the Peace Corps! I'd like to know how many Peace Corps Volunteers are introverts. There is an interesting dynamic of being a volunteer and I know that it is different depending on where you are placed. I believe that I had an easier time of it than some of my extrovert counterparts. I was used to being alone with myself and keeping myself company. I was okay with sitting alone in my hammock in my house made of adobe brick.

I believe that my site suited me well because of that. I did have to learn to function in my new society and I imagine that at times the Hondurans thought I was quite odd spending so much time by myself because they were never alone. Many families shared one home and parents and children all slept in the same room, even the same bed. There was never really a chance to escape. Thinking back on it, I think my "mother" in the village must have been an introvert. She had a house full of children, but her favorite

time of the day was her walk to and from the smaller village where she taught. In any event, my experience in the Peace Corps forced me to work with groups completely different from anything I had ever known. I was teaching adults many years older than me how to farm and cook and make natural medicines, and they loved it! They loved me! I liked teaching, and I made my own schedule so that I was never too overwhelmed with the amount of people that I had to see. The experience was invigorating and I didn't have my family to support me, my friends to support me, or even another English-speaking person to support me. I was completely on my own and I did it!

I developed a new comfort zone and I persevered through the most difficult times of my life. Even after being sexually assaulted and medically evacuated to Washington D.C. for two months, I returned to finish what I had started. I told trainees of my dreadful assault in an attempt to educate them about the dangers of village life. I put myself out on a very long limb, and I made my way back to the trunk of the tree. I was still as much an introvert as ever, but I had many new extrovert skills that I had been taught by the Peace Corps and that I learned myself along the way.

Upon returning from Peace Corps, I decided to stay with my family in Maine for a while. I had envisioned returning to Boston, or perhaps going to New York or Washington D.C. to be a translator, but I found that Maine was a perfect combination of the excitement of a city and the calm of Honduras, and I decided to stay where I felt safe and comfortable.

Teaching

I began working as a one-on-one education technician with an autistic boy because I was intrigued by education and it was a way to get a foot in the door. Halfway

through the year, a teaching position opened up in a local school. They needed someone to teach French and Spanish, and I applied. I knew very little French, but I got the job anyway. I was thrown right into the classroom, teaching almost 300 students. I had four classes of 6th grade French and nine classes of 8th grade Spanish. I learned right away that what I loved most about the position was my time alone planning. I was completely overwhelmed with my hectic schedule of having students all day, and I looked to the veteran teachers for help. They aided me with in-class strategies of how to manage the students and their behavior, but I received no advice (other than to have a few beers after school) about how to take care of myself and my needs.

I began to work toward my teaching certification, thinking that I would learn helpful hints and strategies about how to survive in this profession. However, between learning about one room school houses in *The History of American Education* and how to use songs in my Foreign Language Methods course, I learned nothing about myself. In fact, my needs did not seem important at all.

While obtaining my certificate, I switched jobs and ended up teaching at my old middle school. The course load was much easier, only six different groups of students and a total of about one hundred students. My fellow teachers were more than willing to help me by teaching me the ropes of the school, and offering hints about how to deal with certain students, but once again I was left to figure out on my own how to take care of myself.

I soon decided that middle school was not the best place for me to teach foreign languages, and I took the position at the high school where I am still teaching today. Five years later, I am able to tell you that in my experience no one in public education helps

you to figure out how to take care of yourself as a teacher. No one is concerned about your needs except for maybe your fellow colleagues who probably don't have the answers because they are not introverts, or if they are, they are struggling just like you and probably don't have time to help you.

The School for International Training

I realized that myself as teacher matters when I went to The School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont to obtain my Masters in Teaching. My professors asked me questions such as "Who are you as a teacher? Why do you teach the way you teach? What are your beliefs about teaching?" Well, I had no idea how to put any of that into words because I had no idea. No one had ever asked me those questions before. I could tell you what everybody else thought, but my own beliefs? Well, I just wasn't sure.

I came to terms with myself as teacher over my two summers and interim year teaching practicum at SIT. It felt good to be reflective and have the time to focus on me. The program suited me well as I had small classes and lots of time to myself. I realized that I have a lot to offer my students that I hadn't even begun to reveal to them yet, and I was excited about teaching.

Personal Dilemmas

Unfortunately, after finishing my course work at SIT, I returned home to some difficult issues and I lost track for a little while of the importance of me in my teaching. I floundered for a little while with my personal battles and began to question everything. I sought help and found it in the form of a new yoga instructor, Laura, whom I had some private sessions with. Laura trains and consults individuals and groups on understanding

their personality types and how it shapes every minute of their day. She and I discussed the fact that I am an introvert who spends the majority of my time in an extrovert world. I shared with her that I am in a constant state of anxiety and exhaustion. She explained that teaching is extremely difficult for introverts and encouraged me to ask myself if I might be in the wrong profession. I was crushed. I wondered if I should continue teaching.

Rather than throw in the towel, I thought it better to investigate my introversion a little more. Laura and I worked on identifying triggers for my anxiety and exhaustion. We discussed strategies to overcome my fears and fatigue. I did a lot of reading on the topic of introversion and employed methods that I had learned at previous points in my life to help renew my belief in myself and my teaching. I have so many tools that I can use as an introvert teacher. My biggest challenge is using them consistently, but they do help and allow me to continue in this profession.

This brings me to two other points to ponder put forth by Marti Laney (p. 15):

Nothing is wrong with you.
Being introverted is something to be celebrated.

PARADOX

The paradox, of course, in all of this is how does someone who needs to be alone to recharge, set off on journeys that take her halfway around the world? What enticed me to study abroad in Spain or to take the bigger leap of joining the Peace Corps? What in those opportunities draws an introvert out of her comfort zone to face the risks of other cultures so unfamiliar? Why would an introvert frequently seek out positions, honors, roles and activities that go counter to her introversion? Why did I constantly push beyond the limits of my own natural style?

During my college years, I had not yet come to terms with being an introvert. In fact, I did not even like to talk about the fact that I was introverted. It didn't seem to get me very far on the outgoing college party scene. Perhaps I wanted to study abroad to prove that I could do it – prove it to my professors, my friends, my family, and myself. I *was* a Spanish major after all. Why a Spanish major? Why such an extroverted line of study for an introvert? When I was struggling to declare a major, I attended many sessions on how to choose what was right for me. I went to the career counseling center and took all of the tests that determined appropriate jobs, but the desk jobs that appeared on my lists were not appealing to me. I suppose that being surrounded by such diversity at Tufts awoke in me a desire to see the world. I was told to go with my passion when choosing a major, and I knew that I wanted to be fluent in Spanish. I had invested so much time in it with little to show for it, and being a perfectionist, that did not suit me. I figured by majoring in it that I would have to become good at it. The opportunity to travel came along with being a Spanish major. How could I possibly expect to speak fluently without visiting a Spanish-speaking country? So, I signed up . . . ready or not.

The Introvert Advantage by Marti Laney is a powerful text and one that I identify deeply with. In chapter ten, she talks about how introverts can extrovert and shine our lights into the world. The process she describes of an introvert coming out of her comfort zone explains exactly what I did when I traveled abroad and why I had to do it. I am thankful that I recognized it on my own and did not have to wait for someone to tell me to branch out. Laney enlightens us with the following observations (Laney, p. 283):

[Living] requires new behaviors and tolerating the strange feeling of not quite being you.

Growth means feeling a little bit new to yourself. An insulated life limits you from having experiences and meeting people, both of which might help you and bring you delights you never imagined or thought possible.

Just as muscles do not gain strength when they're not used, parts of our personality will not be strengthened unless you flex them every now and then.

As an introvert, you need to remind yourself that though you are burning fuel rapidly when you are extroverting, you are also gaining new ideas, relationships, and experiences.

I gained many new ideas, relationships, and experiences in my travels, and I began to feel more confident about my own ability to interact and survive in another culture. As my supervisor for this paper, Alex Silverman from SIT, ponders, "Can it be that a self aware introvert will deliberately find ways to overcome the limiting aspects of her personality?" Or, I ask, can an even not so self aware introvert also seek ways to find balance in her life?

After my adventures abroad, I came home to Maine where I feel safe and comfortable to be near my family, my support group, and to refuel. While I was refueling, I decided that I wanted to stay here in Maine, and take small trips here and there to further explore my extrovert side. I realized that I could continue to live the

excitement of my experiences by sharing them with others as a teacher. I was secure and happy. Still, the sharing of my experiences is draining and passing on my love for language learning and other cultures is also exhausting. I love teaching because I know that I am helping students to discover themselves the way that I discovered and continue to uncover parts of myself. My challenge is taking care of my own needs as an introvert as I burst with my passion for Spanish every day.

STRATEGIES FOR BEING A SUCCESSFUL INTROVERT TEACHER

There are various things that I have learned to do to help me function better in the extrovert world that I immerse myself in every day. I have many outlets that I use out of the school setting to recharge my batteries. I also have many tricks that I use throughout the day to help me survive the jungle of adolescents and the extroverted adults that I work with in my school.

Outside of school

Take writing this paper, for example. I attempted many times over the past two years to delve into this project, but I was hindered by a plethora of things going on around me. I never had enough time to stop and think and focus without distractions. I needed time and space to be alone. This is why the summer program at SIT worked so well for me. I immersed myself in the program, changing my physical setting and focusing only on me and my course work. It was wonderful. However, once I left that setting, I struggled to find the same solitude in my life. During my Interim Year Teaching Practicum I was forced to find time because Pat Moran, my supervisor, came to visit three different times and I had to prepare and reflect.

When it came to completing my IPP, with no strict deadlines to follow, I found myself straying further and further away from this paper as I was constantly drawn to the other responsibilities in my life. I made others a priority instead of myself. Finally, now, this summer, I am a priority. I have made time. Fortunately for me, my husband and my stepdaughter are at basketball camp right now and I have my own personal retreat in our empty house. What a luxury! It is at times like these when I work my best, when I can be

alone with my thoughts. I dread the phone ringing or a friend stopping by. I am content to be alone and think only of me and what I need.

Stopping

Perhaps the above comments sound selfish, but as an introvert I know that if I do not take advantage of these times, I can not continue with my busy life and I will not be happy. These days are vital to my good health and happiness. A couple of years ago, a friend of mine directed me to a book entitled Stopping: How to Be Still When You Have to Keep Going. The author, Dr. David Kundtz, writes about the necessity of Stopping (with a capital S in Kundtz's book) in our lives in order to be able to keep going. While everyone can benefit from the lessons in the book, I believe that it is extremely helpful for introverts in particular. It reminds us that it is not only acceptable, it is absolutely necessary for us to stop and regroup.

Kundtz describes Stopping as “doing nothing as much as possible for a definite period of time (one second to one month) for the purpose of becoming more fully awake and remembering who you are” (p. 14) He offers Stopping as a way to relieve the strain when you are feeling “overwhelmed and overloaded” in your life. Introverts often feel overwhelmed and overloaded. Kundtz explains that you can do Stopping anywhere at anytime. He describes three levels of Stopping: Stillpoints, Stopovers, and Grinding Halts (p. 53).¹

Breathing

Breathing is the key to the Kundtz's Stillpoints and also a key component to many of my strategies. I believe that we all learn to take deep breaths at some point in our lives.² Perhaps the first time is as a child when an adult is trying to teach us to calm

down. They tell us to take a deep breath to calm ourselves down. Essentially, this is the point of the deep breath – to calm. There are ways, however, to make deep breaths more fruitful and they are so crucial for introverts.

Of course, everyone, not just introverts, can benefit from breathing. As an athlete, I have used deep breaths and visualization techniques on numerous occasions. In fact, I even took a course in college called *Playing as One: The Unity of Mind and Body in Sports Performance*. A booklet by the same name written by Tom O’Neil and Alex Saltonstall served as the text for the course. Tom O’Neil was my instructor. The booklet and class taught the importance of breathing to bring your attention inward and away from anything that might distract you as an athlete and prevent you from performing your best. I employ the same breathing techniques I learned in that class in various other arenas of my life. The same principle holds true – the breathing allows me to bring my attention inward and away from anything that might distract me (students, parents, colleagues, administrators) in order to perform my best (helping my students learn).

I learned how to breathe in that course. It sounds odd that one might have to learn how to breathe because we do it all day long every day of our lives, but in order for breathing to help calm it has to be different than our everyday breathing, it needs to be deeper. We need to send the breath down into our abdomen rather than our lungs. This is called diaphragmatic breathing.³

Kundtz tells us that conscious breathing such as that mentioned above brings several profound benefits. One of the benefits he mentions is that “It deepens your awareness of this particular moment and brings you directly into contact with the present” (p. 63). For introverts, it is vital to learn ways to calm down. When we are

overstimulated and overwhelmed, we can't think, we can't be creative, and we aren't very productive. Laney puts forth a *Five-Step Plan to Reduce "Overwhelm."* Step two of the plan is *Breathe and Have A Drink of Water*. Laney explains that we need to remember to take in oxygen. Most people hold their breath when they are in an overstimulated situation. When I encounter situations that overwhelm me and I can't escape physically, I remember to breathe.

Another book which speaks to the power of breathing is The Inner Game of Tennis by Timothy Gallwey. While this book has been the handbook of choice for tennis players, it also has many powerful lessons for the average person, including introverts. Gallwey explains in his introduction, "This book, and the methods it contains, is *not* about fulfilling the ultimate human possibility. Rather it is about a simple way to develop *inner* skills that can be used to improve any *outer* game of your choice" (p. xiv). Introverts need to develop their *inner* skills to improve whatever *outer* activities they do. In my instance, teaching is the "game" and I constantly seek ways to improve. Gallwey describes breathing as a remarkable phenomenon. He elaborates:

Breathing is a very basic rhythm. It is said that in breathing man recapitulates the rhythm of the universe. When the mind is fastened to the rhythm of breathing, it tends to become absorbed and calm. Whether on or off the court, I know of no better way to begin to deal with anxiety than to place the mind on one's breathing process. (p. 86)

Gallwey discusses how he breathes in between points in a tennis match, he place his mind on his breathing. He explains how focusing on his breathing stops his mind from fretting about bad shots or being self-conscious about good ones. Likewise, focusing on my breath stops my mind from fretting about mistakes I have made in teaching or from being overly zealous about my successes.

One last thing that I would like to mention about breathing is a book that I received as a gift from the players on one of my field hockey teams. We had developed a ritual of breathing in our huddles prior to games to calm ourselves down. The players really enjoyed those moments and found them helpful in preparing them to perform their best in our games. At the end of the season, they gave me a book entitled Breathe as a gift. I am not certain whether or not they read what the book was about or if they just saw the title and decided to get it for me. The complete title of the book is Breathe: Creating Space for God in a Hectic Life. I am not a very spiritual person so it struck me as odd, but I read the book anyway and did come away with a few useful tips. Despite the fact that the title is Breathe, the book does not talk a lot about breathing, but it does discuss the importance of taking a deep breath. Author Keri Wyatt Kent asks us to consider that when we are reminding ourselves to take a deep breath in a stressful situation, we are really telling ourselves to connect with God and to pray. She tells us that our brain may need oxygen, but our soul also needs a calming and loving presence. She writes about another kind of prayer that she has discovered that “involves breathing, and listening, and focusing on God, rather than on myself. This type of prayer is incredibly calming because it allows me to connect with God, even when I’m feeling stressed out” (p. 59)

So, breathing has physical, mental, and spiritual benefits. As an introvert, the most important thing for me is that it allows me to focus during a stressful situation. When I feel overwhelmed about school, I use my breath to calm me and to guide me to practical solutions to my problems. I use breathing both in and out of my school setting.

Exercise

As anyone could probably tell you, exercise is good for you. I exercise regularly to take care of my body, but also to help me feel better mentally. As an athlete, I often practiced and worked out with a group of people. As I have gotten older, I find that I still like exercising with other people, but I reap the most benefits when I am by myself. I go for a run or a bike ride. I lift weights by myself rather than in a crowded gym. I enjoy this time so much more and feel much more energized after these isolated activities. My favorite discovery is yoga.

Yoga

I attend yoga classes, but I also do a considerable amount of yoga on my own. Either way, I am able to reflect inward and be at peace with myself. Yoga has physical and mental benefits. The physical benefits include increased flexibility, strength, muscle tone, pain prevention, and better breathing. The mental benefits include mental calmness, stress reduction, and body awareness. Through meditation, exercise, and breathing one can achieve harmony and well-being.

I was never very big on yoga. I didn't fully understand its potential. I thought that it was just stretching and I found that to be boring, plus I stretched all the time after I ran or biked or lifted so why did I need to do more stretching. I first went to a yoga class during my first summer at SIT. Ani, a former SIT instructor, offered classes to students for free because she was working toward her certification. I decided to go to a class and see what it was like. It was wonderful. It both calmed and energized me. I attended Ani's classes at least once a week and they were just what I needed to get me through the summer program.

I sought out a class when I returned home and found another gratifying class with a great instructor. I was thrilled to have found something that allowed me to stop and focus just on me and my body. Unlike other workout classes or sports, I did not feel as though I had to do better than other people in the class. I did not feel as though I was being judged. I was constantly reminded by my instructors that my body would do different things on different days and that yoga was all about working with my body in its present state and appreciating it for what it could do in that moment on that day. Participating in the yoga classes allowed me to be more productive in other aspects of my life. I felt healthier and more clear-headed.⁴

I have continued to do yoga for the past four years. I am more disciplined sometimes and less disciplined others, but I find that it works really well for me as an introvert to do yoga alone at home as well as in a class. My current instructor, Laura Hamilton, is a wonderful woman who is very sure of herself and inspires me to try and be the same. She inspired me to explore my type more, and started me on this journey of exploring myself as introvert. Laura once wrote a response for the Journal of the International Association of Yoga Therapists. I do not know in which edition it appeared, but Laura emailed the final draft of her response to me and her other yoga students. In it, she puts forth her views of yoga therapy.⁵

Through working with Laura, I have come to understand better my own inner state. I have realized my strengths and weakness as an introvert. I thank Laura for inspiring me to begin this journey of self-reflection, and I hope that my journey is able to help others as well. As I have no formal references for Laura's works, I site her webpage in the Works Cited so that you may explore who she is and what she does.

Tibetan Rights of Rejuvenation

I did not think it necessary to share with you my favorite yoga poses as I believe it will be most beneficial to you to develop your own practices. I would however like to share with you the Tibetan Rights of Rejuvenation. Laura directed me to investigate these as a possible alternative to my morning yoga ritual of sun salutations. I went online and found Mary Kurus article entitled The Five Tibetan Rights: Exercises for Healing, Rejuvenation, and Longevity. Kurus cites Peter Kelder's 1985 book The Ancient Secret of the Fountain of Youth which describes an exercise program used by the Tibetan Monks to live long, vibrant, and healthy lives.⁶ I have completed the Five Rites on various occasions, but have never followed them religiously. I do always feel better afterwards and I offer them as a possible strategy to strengthen yourself and your ability as an introvert to function in the extrovert world.

Tapping

I first utilized energy tapping to help me overcome a traumatic event in my life. I later learned how to use it to unblock negative beliefs that were controlling my life. I have not used tapping in my teaching career as often as some of these other strategies, but I do access the skills from time-to-time, especially in the school setting to calm me down and give me the confidence to continue with my day.

The book, Energy Tapping, by Fred Gallo and Harry Vicenzi teaches you how to use your body's energy system to better manage your life. Energy tapping or energy psychology is based on the ancient Chinese art of acupuncture. In lieu of needles, energy psychology uses a simple tapping method of two fingers on specific points of your body. Tapping on various acupoints of your body stimulates a meridian that may have an

energy depletion. Tapping increases the energy and restores balance. The process can help you to eliminate self-sabotaging behaviors (such as those of an introvert when confronted with an overwhelming situation) and to better manage your life. Gallo and Vincenzi admit that tapping on your face and hands may seem a little strange, but attest that tapping will open the door for you to make changes in your life that you may not have thought possible.

Energy levels affect our lives in various ways. Gallo and Vincenzi explain, “When you are involved in a situation that involves an energy imbalance, your energy level is not sufficient to cope, and you resort to behaviors that are associated with low energy” (Gallo, p. 19). When introverts are overwhelmed it creates an energy imbalance and they can resort to the low energy behaviors associated with shame, guilt, apathy, or grief. This often translates into fear of the situation or how we will be evaluated or judged by others, but by using tapping, the energy can be reversed into courage, which is what I seek in my daily life as an introvert teacher. I have experienced the power of tapping in my life and I plan to incorporate it more into my school day to overcome my psychological and emotional obstacles of being an introvert.

Reading

Another strategy that I employ is just trying to read as much as I can about introverts and learn ways in which I can help myself feel better about who I am and come to terms with my type. One of the most helpful books that I came across is *You Can Heal Your Life* by Louise Hay. I gather that many people might find her work corny, but I find it very uplifting and motivational. The affirmations on the front cover (*I am at Peace, All is Well, I Love Myself*) were enough to make me want to read more. Her book made me

realize that I am not alone in my isolationist thoughts and that I can overcome some of the struggles of being an introvert while also cherishing my strengths.

The most beneficial thing for me about reading You Can Heal Your Life was the realization that I am not alone in my thoughts of “I am not good enough.” As an introvert, I am very critical of myself, but it appears as though many people are. Hay shares that the innermost belief for everyone she has worked with is always, “I’m not good enough!” She continues, “I find that when we really love and accept and APPROVE OF OURSELVES EXACTLY AS WE ARE, then everything in life works” (p. 23). I find that I am always apologizing for being an introvert, always trying to make up for being an introvert and she is telling me that I need to love myself for being an introvert in order to be happy. These lessons of loving myself are huge for me, and I understood after reading her book that I needed to be willing to change. I used the affirmation “I am willing to change” and I experienced more happiness in my work as a teacher than I had before. I did not feel as afraid or limited - I felt empowered.

Journaling

Another strategy that I use from time to time is keeping a journal. I wish I could say that I maintain one at all times, but I don’t. I do, however, tend to keep one when I am having a particularly difficult time. The act of writing helps me to process my day so that I am better able to react to any obstacles that might arise. It is particularly helpful when thinking about conflicts that arise at school. I am able to get my feelings out on the paper and then arrive at practical solutions to the conflicts. As mentioned earlier, a characteristic of introverts is that we need time to process before we share our ideas and opinions. Journaling allows that time to process and can be very effective.

I have never read anything on journaling. I have always been encouraged by my parents, friends, teachers, and therapists to keep a journal, but I only do it when it feels right for me. Otherwise it feels like a burden. The benefits seem obvious. I was curious to see what I might find in the internet about journaling so I Googled it, and arrived at Steve Pavlina's site. Pavlina offers that journaling is one of the easiest and most powerful ways to accelerate your personal development. Pavlina explains that journaling can provide huge advantages and offers some insights that I had not thought of.

Journaling allows you to break free of sequential thinking and examine your thoughts from a bird's-eye view. When you record your sequential thoughts in a tangible medium, you can then go back and review those thoughts from a third-person perspective. While you're recording the thoughts, you're in first person mode. But when you're reading them, you can remain dissociated instead of associated. This dissociative view, when combined with what you've already learned from the associative view, will bring you much closer to seeing the truth of your situation.⁷

I use many of the above strategies outside of the school setting to recharge my batteries for my busy days in the extrovert world of school. I use Stillpoints, Stopovers, breathing, exercise, yoga, the five Tibetan rights, tapping, reading about introvert strategies, and journaling. I also enjoy a monthly massage, and use baths to unwind. I use some of these same strategies within the school setting as well along with others that I find helpful.

In School

The strategies that I use both in and out of school include stillpoints, breathing, yoga, and tapping. I use them frequently because when you teach foreign language you need to demonstrate your passion and enthusiasm during every second of class. I am very passionate and enthusiastic about Spanish, but my introvert side makes it hard to display that intense energy all day long.

Stillpoints

I take as many Stillpoints as I can throughout the day. They might be while I am in a classroom surrounded by thirty students or during my quiet preparation time when I am alone. During a class, when I become overwhelmed with my students, I often pause and take a moment when I don't say, do, or think anything. Sometimes this happens after a student has misbehaved. I simply stop and do not react until I have had a minute to process what just happened. My students have grown accustomed to this and recognize it as part of my routine. Sometimes after a student asks a question that requires a thoughtful answer, rather than struggle through it, I ask them to give me some time to develop my response and they are usually respectful of that.

Days at school are very busy, and it is hard to physically escape from all of the people. However, there are times when taking a simple moment amongst all my students to do nothing just does not cut it. I sometimes have to retreat to the bathroom. I have never done this during a class, but I have taken advantage of the time between classes to go to the bathroom and just be with myself for a moment. During this Stillpoint, I try to empty my mind of any stresses of the day and remember who I am and why I am special. The bathroom is the only place in school where I know that I can be alone and not be interrupted. If the teachers' bathroom is occupied, I might sneak into the elevator. It is a short trip from one floor to the other, but it gives me a few seconds of solitude. I might repeat affirmations to myself, but mostly it is just a chance to take a deep breath and gather myself.

Breathing

I spent a considerable amount of time explaining breathing outside of the school setting. It is also one of the most useful things I do during my school day. I take frequent deep breaths and use breathing during my Stillpoints in the bathroom. I also teach my students how to breathe. Many of them like it, but they are not all willing to do it in class in front of their peer group. I believe that some of those same students probably go home and practice the breathing in the quiet of their own room. At least I hope they do. Some of them tell me that they are able to use it in other parts of their life such as at sporting events or before a music performance or a speech in another class, etc.

The most effective breathing exercises I have used with my students include the following. I have them close their eyes and focus on their breath. We practice inhaling through our noses and exhaling through our mouths. I have them place their hands on their abdomens so that they can feel their abdomen rise rather than their chest. We work on elongating the inhales and exhales, and slowing our breathing down. I like to use this as a transition into our Spanish minds. It is a good hook for the kids, and if nothing else it gives them a quiet moment during their hectic day.

We also do some breathing exercises that Laura taught me in which we use our hands to mimic the inhales and exhales. We begin with our hands by our sides, palms facing forward. On the inhale, we bring our hands up toward our shoulders, by bending at the elbow like a bicep curl. On the exhale we push our hands out in front of us. On the inhale, we lift our hands over our head, and on the exhale we drop our hands back down to our sides, but not before crossing them in front of the midline of the body to get the right and left hemispheres communicating. This is a favorite of the students and I

witnessed some of our cheerleaders using it during an intense football game to try and calm themselves down.

Another breathing exercise that we do requires deep concentration. You alternate covering your nostrils and breathing in and out of one nostril at a time. Your hands are in the shape of the Deer Mudra. You curl the index and middle finger of your right hand down toward the base of your right thumb. You place your thumb on the outside of your right nostril and your ring finger on the outside of your left nostril. It is believed that closing the right nostril to breathe through the left creates a feeling of calm and receptivity, and that closing the left to breathe through the right energizes and invigorates. Alternating between the two balances these energies. I enjoy teaching my students these Pranayama techniques and hope that some of them find them useful. I especially want to give the introverts, including myself, a chance to acclimate to the new setting and prepare to learn Spanish.

Yoga

Occasionally during the school day, I will take a brief moment by myself to hold a few yoga poses. This happens most often during my preparation period. I will turn off all the lights in my classroom so that it looks like I am not there. I lock the door and then hide in the corner where you can't see me from the door. I will ease into a pose, maybe downward dog or pigeon and hold it and breathe and rejoice in being alone and being me.

I also share my yoga with my students and along with doing the breathing at the beginning of class, we also do poses sometimes. I do not force everyone to participate, but I do encourage them to try it. Some of them do it on some days and not on other days. We go with the flow. I always model the poses. It is hard to do too much in a classroom

full of thirty people, but we occasionally try balancing poses. We do quite a bit with our legs and backs, and spend most of our time on our neck and shoulders. It is a fun way to relax and allows me another opportunity in the day to take care of myself.

While we use yoga most often at the beginning of class, sometimes students request yoga breaks in the middle of our eighty-two minute blocks. I honor their requests and lead them through a few exercises. I believe that it is very beneficial. I also share with them how I have utilized Stillpoints, breathing, and yoga at various points in my life in other cultures and settings as a strategy to help me adapt to the new culture. It is especially helpful to explain that you can not jump to conclusions when in a new culture and that taking the time to stop, breathe, and reflect before taking action really pays off. These are lifelong skills that I hope to instill in them.

Tapping

Tapping comes in handy when I am confronted with more stressful situations such as an observation by my department head, or a conference with an administrator, or even a teacher meeting that I anticipate to be confrontational. Before any of these situations, I am able to prepare myself by doing some tapping. I tap under my eye, collarbone, or arm which are all acupoints for anxiety. I sometimes also included the acupoints of my eyebrow, under my nose, and my little finger which along with under the eye and under the collarbone make up a treatment sequence for intimidation. I remind myself that I do not have to be intimidated by these people and that I am a good teacher.

I can also do a form of tapping during these situations without being too obvious. I can touch the acupoints and take some deep breaths to calm myself in these situations. This sequence looks like this. You inhale and then touch the side of your hand. You

exhale as you say to yourself, “I deeply accept myself even though I still have (name your problem).” In my case, I might say. “I deeply accept myself even though I still have anxiety about being observed” or “I deeply accept myself even though I still have trouble speaking up in front of these bullying colleagues.” You then inhale touch under your eye and exhale, then inhale touch under your arm and exhale, and then inhale touch under your collarbone and exhale. You repeat this sequence until you feel no more distress. (Gallo, p. 83)

Tapping is a strategy that I like to keep to myself. Only my family and closest friends know about it. I do not share my strategy of tapping with my students because I want to reserve some privacy of my feelings.

Other

The other things that I do at school to compensate for being an introvert do not have specific names, but I will pass them along just the same. They are my little safety nets that I use from time to time to survive in the school setting.

I take you back now to Vignette #1 on page two of this document. There are times in the school year when the entire staff at my school has meetings, and there are other times when the entire district is called together to meet. Both of these situations prove to be stressful to me, and as I described in Vignette #1, I use deep breaths before going into one of these situations, but I also rely on my friends in the building to accompany me to these events. I know that if I can sit with them, I will be more at ease and it definitely makes it easier to walk into a meeting when you are with somebody else.

In Vignette #2, I spoke of the fact that I had a teaching day with virtually no breaks from kids. On these days, I would have to monitor myself and determine what I

needed to help me through the day. Sometimes that meant that I ate lunch alone in my room and avoided the noisy teachers' room. Other teachers would feel bad for me and ask me why I did not join them. I explained that I was an introvert and that I just needed some space. The other introverts understood, but the extroverts would always try to figure out what was wrong – something had to be wrong for someone to want to eat alone. They didn't grasp the need for quiet time. On these days, I also had to be very upfront with my last class of the day. I explained to them at the beginning of the year that I knew this would be a challenge for me and I hoped that they would be patient with me on days that I was overwhelmed. They appreciated that honesty and we developed a very good rapport. They knew when I needed more space and when they could push my buttons more. It ended up being one of my best classes because we came to understand each other's needs so well. Honesty and openness are two wonderful tools. I also find that when you reveal your vulnerabilities to your students on purpose, they are less likely to try and exploit them. They sympathize with you and actually try to help you when they can.

Another way that I prepare for the day is to arrive at school early enough to have some alone time in my classroom to gather my thoughts. I always have everything prepared at least one day in advance, but it helps me to go over it in my head one more time before I do it in front of a classroom of students. Preparation is vital to my comfort level throughout the day. Just as with the speech I made in 7th grade social studies class, the best way for me to “perform” well is to prepare, prepare, prepare. I would love to be able to fly by the seat of my pants like some teachers, but I just can't. I recognize that in myself and I know how to avoid feeling flustered. I feel that it is so important, especially

in a foreign language class, to be prepared and make sure that the students are practicing each of the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking every day. I need to map this out so that I am able to implement it properly during my class time. If I did not prepare, my introvert self would be so overwhelmed in the classroom that I would not be able to think straight and concentrate on what I want the students to do.

The last thing that I do well at school to attend to my needs as an introvert teacher is that I seek out other introvert teachers and I talk with them. We share stories and discuss how we manage to survive our days. We talk about what we do when we go home to refuel. Many of the extrovert teachers gather after school at different establishments to socialize. All I want to do at the end of the day is go home and rest or go for a run or a bike ride by myself. I am glad that the other introvert teachers understand this. It makes me feel good to know that I am understood. Many people are surprised that I need to recharge in this way because I do function so well in the extrovert world. I have overcome the limitations of being an introvert, but I understand how to take care of myself and when to say “enough is enough.”

I look forward to my days at school. I enjoy interacting with my students and encouraging them to be outgoing and take risks in their language learning. I love exploring other cultures with them and pushing them out of their comfort zones. I challenge them to communicate in new ways and be social beings. I think that I do this more because I wish that someone had made me learn differently when I was in school. I remember being allowed to stay in my shell and be my introvert self so I had to learn all of these extrovert strategies on my own. My extrovert students love the dynamics of the class. My introverts struggle a little bit more and I need to be careful to incorporate more

individual, quiet activities for them. Most of all, I need to encourage them to understand and appreciate one another no matter where they fall on the introvert/extrovert continuum.

MY STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM MY INTROVERSION

Ultimately, students benefit from having both types of teachers: introverts and extroverts. When it comes to teaching foreign languages, I believe that my students might have an advantage because I do not want to be in the spotlight and I force them to use the language more and take control which is what you need to do when you start to use a second language.

I used to think that I had to “entertain” my students during class. I would put together a dog and pony show just to keep them engaged. I did have fun doing it because I was using my creative side and pushing my own boundaries a little bit, but I was always completely exhausted at the end of the day. I used and continue to use TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading Writing – use to be Total Physical Response Storytelling), but I have learned to deflect the attention away from myself and put it more on my students. I do feel guilty sometimes as though I should be doing more because I am so used to doing everything in class, but I understand now that it is important for my students to have more autonomy. They work more with the vocabulary than I do, they do acting and have conversations, and they write stories. I merely facilitate the process.

I am good at facilitating and feel as though I run a very organized classroom. The activities are always well planned out, almost to the minute, and I generally accomplish what I set out to do. As I mentioned earlier, I do need to plan everything very carefully prior to the class to ensure that all goes well. I am getting better at adjusting my plans as the need arises. If students need more time to work with a particular skill, I allow for it and push my other activities into the next class period. Flexibility did not use to be a strength of mine, but I am improving. If we finish something early, I am getting better at

being more spontaneous and asking for the students input for how they would like to fill the time. I do say out loud, “Okay, give me minute to think here. We did a good job and finished ahead of time. What would we like to do?” I always praise them for doing good work and try to see how else they would like to practice the skills from the day. They appreciate the opportunity to have input and after the initial “Let’s take a siesta!” remarks, they usually have some pretty good ideas.

I ask my students for feedback quite regularly. At the end of every quarter, students need to fill out a self-evaluation, and they must provide specific comments for how things are going. Encouraging my students to reflect on their learning is very important to me. I feel that it helps them become better students and their feedback helps me to become a better teacher. I randomly ask them to provide me with feedback as to what is helping them in the classroom. I hand out papers with questions such as “What is helping you to speak Spanish? What is hindering you? What do you need to speak Spanish better?” They write back and I usually compile the information and share the responses with them in a brief powerpoint, highlighting what I read. We discuss the responses and try to decide what the class as a whole needs more of. I have them write first because I need to be able to read the information before I can participate in the discussion. I would not be able to handle the verbal feedback because I would not be able to process it quickly enough. I also feel that the written task provides my introvert students the time to process and they are then able to participate more readily in the class discussion.

I utilize strategies to help all students feel more comfortable participating in class. I allow my students time to think which also gives me time to rest. One of the most

effective strategies I have found is a simple – THINK-PAIR-SHARE. Essentially, you give students a few minutes to think on their own about a specific topic. It could be cultural theme, or something to do with a book we are reading, or maybe even a grammar topic. Students can just **think** or even write down their thoughts. The next step is to **pair** the students up to work with a partner and discuss their ideas. Finally, we **share** our ideas in a big group. This is so much more effective than just asking a question and having students reply. A Think-Pair-Share allows introverts time to process, and then validate their ideas with a partner before being asked to share in front of more people. My extrovert students have told me that at first this process seemed to be too slow for them, but they eventually learned to appreciate the process. It teaches them to think before they speak.

Our school district is focusing on literacy, and as teachers we are being asked to use various strategies to appeal to the learning styles of all of our students. My students do fun readings at least once every two weeks which is the equivalent of every five classes. I have over two hundred children's books and magazines of varying reading levels. Students get to pick which book or magazine they would like to read for a period of 15-20 minutes. Sometimes, I have the students work alone and the reading period is silent. I also read my choice of Spanish books during this time, the Harry Potter series. Other times, they get to choose a partner and read a book together. Still other times, we pick a book as a class and take turns reading or I read the book to the class. There is variety with the way that the students are interacting with the texts. On feedback sheets, it is very easy for me to tell who is an introvert and who is an extrovert because the introverts always write "I like it when we get to do silent reading on our own" while the

extroverts write “Silent reading is boring, but I like it when we work with partners.” No matter which type of reading we do, the students are then asked to process the information using a SUM-IT-UP sheet. They need to identify key vocabulary items and provide a brief summary of the text. Again, this is sometimes done individually and other times in pairs.

I have learned that I do not need to lead my students through every reading that they do. Again, I used to feel as though I had to be involved to be a good teacher, but I soon realized that I was doing my students a disservice. It is so much nicer for me to leave them to figure things out on their own, and be there for support if necessary. I also get a breather. I have been using a literacy strategy, The Gradual Release of Responsibility.⁸ I gradually release the responsibility of a learning task to my students. With any skills that we are working on, I first model the skill for my students so that they understand how it is to be done. Second, I re-teach the skill, but I ask them for input. Third, I make the students do the skill, but I am there for support, and finally students are able to do the skill on their own. I love it when students get to this point, but it does not always happen quickly nor simultaneously. Sometimes, the modeling stage lasts longer. Other times, the re-teaching with student input takes longer. If I go the third step and find that students are having too much difficulty, I go back to modeling or re-teaching. Ultimately, we arrive at the fourth stage and this is so empowering for the class.

There are various strategies with which I use the Gradual Release of Responsibility. One of the strategies is coding. Coding helps students to engage and interact with a text and monitor comprehension as they read. They can use sticky-notes to mark passages. They may also use a coding template that I provide or in some instances

can write directly on the text. I have students do this alone, in pairs, or in small groups to appeal to the introverts and the extroverts. My students also complete quadruple-entry-journals, in which I provide them with a column on Spanish words and they fill in the three other columns: English meaning, a clue to help them remember the word, and the word used in context. This is my modification of the Triple-Entry-Journal which sometimes includes a definition in one's own words, and a picture, memory aid or phrase related to the word. In either case, the journal uses a column note taking format to help students acquire new vocabulary. When working with a specific vocabulary list, I tend to have students work alone on the column-entry journals. When working with a text, I tend to have students work in groups.

Another tool that I use to get students to reflect more is journals. In my upper levels, I have my students write to me in Spanish. I then respond and we have a back-and-forth conversation throughout the year. This is different from the journaling that I spoke of earlier in my STRATEGIES sections because it is not only for the author's eyes, but for mine as well. However, it does teach the students the strategy of writing about themselves as a way to learn, but also to process information. I ask them questions when I write back to them that encourage them to really consider their own strengths and weaknesses as well as goals.

As an introvert, I value all of the strategies discussed above because they can be done individually. As a teacher, I understand that I also need to allow time for students to work in pairs and groups. I believe that I have found a good balance of those activities in my classroom. There is much literature on learning styles and how to appeal to both introverts and extroverts in the classroom. In their book, Learning Styles and Strategies,

Harvey Silver and J Robert Hanson offer the following list of attitudes and characteristics in learning situations. You will see that it closely parallels the list of working characteristics on page seven of this document.

Introversion	versus	Extroversion
-likes quiet for concentration		-likes variety and action
-likes to work alone		-likes to work with others
-tends not to be talkative		-talks a great deal
-generally reluctant initially to share feelings and information		-open; eager to share feelings and information
-tends to be hard to get to know		-easy to know
-thinks; contemplates extensively before taking action		-acts/reacts quickly to new situations or new challenge
-tends not to mind working on one project for long periods of time		-tends to be impatient with long-term tasks
-dislikes interruptions		-doesn't seem to mind interruptions
-likes to perform for himself		-likes to perform for others
-careful with details		-tends to dislike complicated procedures
-prefers to listen		-prefers the interaction that comes in talking with others

(Silver, p. 34)

As noted earlier in this section, I allow students quiet times to work alone and also opportunities to work in groups. I offer short-term tasks, but also long-term projects. I allow students to react quickly, but also encourage them to think before speaking or acting. It is tricky to keep everyone happy, but the more I explain to them why we are doing different things, the more they understand. It is important for them to be familiar with the different learning styles in the classroom so that they may better appreciate their coworkers in the future.

Harvey Brightman from Georgia State University also explored learning styles. In an article for the GSU Master Teaching Program he states the obvious: Extroverted students enjoy working in groups. Extroverted students learn by explaining to others. He offers two group exercises for students which appeal to extroverts, but also take into

consideration the needs of introverts: TAPPS and the Nominal Group Method. Both appear to be versions of the Think-Pair-Share.

TAPPS or Thinking Aloud Paired Problem Solving involves the following:

- Teacher poses question provides quiet time for students
- Teacher designates the explainer and listener within each dyad
- Explainers explain ideas to listeners. Listeners can (1) ask questions of clarification, (2) disagree, or (3) provide hints when explainers become lost
- Teacher critiques some explainers' answers and provides closure

In the Nominal Group Method:

- Teachers pose question and provide quiet time for students
- Each team member shares ideas with others in a round-robin fashion
- Team discusses ideas and reaches closure
- Teacher critiques some team's answers and provide closure

I constantly provide opportunities for my students to speak with one another. We frequently make two concentric circles and either the inner or outer circle rotates when I ring a bell to switch partners. The conversations may be in Spanish or English depending on the discussion materials, and most often students have had a chance to prepare ahead of time. In this way, the introverts feel prepared, but the extroverts feel stimulated by the conversations. As I mentioned previously, there was not much of this type of activity during my education. I was allowed to sit and memorize and spit back information rather than discuss it with other students. I was comfortable by myself, but wish that I had been forced to interact, and particularly in Spanish class, use the language more.

Brightman continues to explain what introverted students want. Introverts, he says, want to develop frameworks that integrate or connect subject matter. To introverts, knowledge means interconnecting material and seeing the "big picture." He recommends that teachers teach students how to build compare/contrast tables, flowcharts, and concept maps. I use all of these strategies with my students. We use Venn diagrams to compare

and contrast our culture with Spanish-speaking cultures or our lives with the main character of a book we are reading. We complete plot sequences or series of events to remember the flow of a story or of history. We utilize concept maps to piece together information from a mini-novel or about a cultural topic. I do not remember using these tools to integrate information during my schooling. I mostly remember lists of information. I would have liked to have used these other tools as well to improve my interactive skills.

Overall, I feel that my willingness to try different things allows my students opportunities that they would not otherwise have. It is hard for me to teach people to be outgoing and to be risk-takers when this is something that I have struggled with. I recognize the needs of my introvert students to be quiet, calm, and reflective, and want to allow them those opportunities, but I believe my initial struggles to function in the Spanish world drive me to force them to be more interactive in the classroom. As a result, I am also meeting the needs of my extrovert students at the same time, while simultaneously pushing them out of their comfort zone with the milder introvert activities.

CONCLUSION

It is a difficult struggle to take care of my needs as teacher as well as the needs of my students as learners, but I think that I have found a pretty good harmony. Within each class I provide a little something for everyone and also a little something for me – a chance to stop, a chance to think, a chance to breathe, a chance to remember, a chance to be a better teacher for my students, and in turn a chance for them to be better learners, better people, better explorers of the Spanish-speaking world.

NOTES

¹ According to Kundtz, a Stillpoint is Stopping quickly and doing nothing for just a moment. They are brief and meant to be used anytime. Kundtz advises that they should be used every day and many times a day to help us be peaceful, satisfied, and calm. During a Stillpoint which lasts a few seconds to a few minutes, you simply stop whatever you are doing, take a deep breath and remember what you need to remember. “The very essence of Stillpoints is deep, intentional breathing and a moment of quiet recollection” (Kundtz, p.60). I admit that I do not use Stillpoints as much as I should outside of my work day, but they are very useful to me during the school day, and I will discuss them along with my other in school strategies.

Stillpoints help me get through my work day. A Stopover is what I am experiencing right now in the days that I am writing this paper. A Stopover lasts an hour or many hours, a day, a weekend, or several days. In between my period of writing, I am refueling with an hour of yoga or meditation or just taking a walk and thinking about nothing. “Stopovers are getting away for a while and they have a happy effect: feeling renewed and ready to go again” (Kundtz, p. 74). Kundtz acknowledges that weekends and vacations are good times for Stopovers. He expresses concern however, that many weekends and vacations are not Stopovers because people jam them so full of activities that it defeats the purpose. I find Stopovers, whether they last an hour or a weekend, to be most beneficial when I have absolutely nothing planned and there is no pressure and no expectations. They allow me to return to my life and my teaching (which sometimes seems like it encompasses my entire life) with more energy and enthusiasm. If we do not make time for Stopovers ourselves, sometimes our bodies force us to take a Stopover. We fall ill and are forced to stop. This has happened to me on a number of occasions when I have been so stressed at work and feel as though the world will fall apart if I am not there. Then I get sick, and the school does not implode and I reminded that while I am important, I am not irreplaceable and I do not have to bear the weight of the world on my shoulders. Wouldn't it be nicer to have a healthy Stopover, one that I control?

The final level of Stopping is a Grinding Halt. Grinding Halts mark significant life transitions or decisions, and may not be needed by everyone. If you feel the need for change a Grinding Halt, lasting anywhere from over a week to approximately one month, might give you some productive time to arrive at a healthy alternative. Maybe you are not sure of your profession. If you are a teacher, it will give you time to assess, “Is teaching right for me? Is this what I am supposed to do?” I was able to answer yes to these questions through a series of Stopovers. Do what is right for you!

² Breathing is perhaps the most fundamental activity of the human body. . . Physiologically, breathing is centrally tied to other functions and conditions; it can both affect and be affected by a range of physical and psychological factors which are important to the way in which one functions. Breathing plays a major part in ones ability to perform physically and, we will see, an equally important role in developing awareness, regulating arousal levels, and having a constant means by which to help control concentration, attention, reactions to errors and setbacks, and a range of other mental factors which are closely linked to performance. (O'Neil, p.27)

³ To try diaphragmatic breathing, you can simply focus your attention on your breath. Inhale through your nose slowly to a count of four so that your abdomen fills with air. Place one of your hands on your stomach to feel it expand as you inhale. Pause. Exhale through your mouth slightly faster to a count of eight. Try to clear your mind, count the breaths, and continue for about five minutes. You can use diaphragmatic breaths whenever you feel nervous or anxious. Playing as One offers many other breathing exercises geared more specifically toward athletes, but they are helpful to know.

⁴ It is fairly easy to begin a yoga practice. Yoga classes at gyms tend to focus more on the physical aspects of yoga while yoga centers incorporate both the mind and the body. Some instructors do chanting, others do not. A typical class begins with chanting or breathing, moves on to warm-up exercises, continues with more vigorous poses, transfers into some type of stretching, and relaxation or meditation. The special thing about yoga is that it is “your practice.” You decide what you will and will not do. Yoga should be done in a noncompetitive spirit. You are not out to prove yourself, but rather be kind to yourself.

⁵ Laura writes that the mind is strong enough to influence the body in every possible way. Laura explains that the ancient books on Yoga, such as Yoga Shastra, Hatha-Yoga Pradipika and Yoga Sutra by Patanjali state that the Yamas (mental discipline), and the Niyamas (mental purifications), should be practiced first, and only then followed by the Asanas (physical poses). Laura expands:

“When I began to practice yoga, I didn’t know what I was doing. I only knew that I had to get control of my inner state. I began studying, then meditating. I began with the Yamas and the Niyamas. It wasn’t until much later that the Asanas came into the picture. My yoga practice and my goal in teaching is to help bring people to their divine nature. When people ask to see me as a yoga therapist it is not usually for physical issues, but for mental anguish. I did once have someone who had a physical problem, but it quickly became a discussion of how the inner state has manifested into the current physical condition.”
(Hamilton)

⁶ The benefits of the “Five Tibetan Rites” include the following: looking much younger, sleeping soundly, waking up feeling refreshed and energetic, release from serious medical problems including difficulties with spines, relief from problems with joints, release from pain, better memory, arthritis relief, weight loss, improved vision, youthfulness instead of aging, greatly improved physical strength, endurance and vigor, improved emotional and mental health, enhanced sense of well being and harmony, and very high overall energy. According to Kurus, the Tibetans claim that these exercises activate and stimulate the seven key chakras that in turn stimulate all the glands in the endocrine system. The endocrine system is responsible for the body’s overall functioning and aging process. The man who brought these Five Rights out of Tibet stated that “performing the Five Rites stimulates the circulation of essential life energy throughout the body.”

⁷ Pavlina continues to share 3 powerful benefits of journaling:

- **Solve Tricky Problems**
When you record the situation and re-examine it from a third-person perspective the solution becomes clear. Sometimes the solution is so obvious that you're shocked you didn't see it sooner.
- **Gain Clarity**
A great time to turn to your journal is when you're just not clear about what to do. It's amazing how much clearer things become when you explore them in writing.
- **Verify your progress**
It's wonderful to go back and re-read journal entries from years ago and see how much real progress has been made. This helps you in the present moment too by reminding you that you are in fact growing and changing, even when it feels like you're standing still.

⁸ Literacy Strategy from the Public Consulting Group's Center for Resource Management.

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