

## Using Type at an Urban Middle School: Building Relationships and Improving Student Performance

By Jane Kise

*Summary: A team of students participating in a project using type concepts showed significant improvement in grades, attendance, student-teacher relationships, and behavior over three other teams in the project not using type*



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People take in information and make decisions differently. Further, these variations in behavior are quite orderly and consistent. That, according to Isabel Myers, is the essence of type theory. That essence summarizes why type theory can be effectively used in schools, for what is the essence of education? Learning how to take in information and make decisions about it. While there are many theories that explain learning styles and personality differences, psychological type is unique in that:

- An understanding of type can help teachers understand their own strengths as teachers and how they might adapt their techniques to more easily meet the needs of students who are different from them.
- Lesson plans can be adapted effectively using type concepts without knowing the type of each individual student.
- Besides learning style information, type can be applied to staff team building, conflict resolution, and communication.
- Type can help students understand that while they may differ from their peers, they are still normal. Type only deals with natural differences among normal people.

Often, educators say that they have “done” the MBTI® before, but there is a difference between “doing” type and actually “experiencing” how people with different preferences view classroom dynamics, assignments, relationships and other areas that are as vital to education as what is actually taught. We provide hands-on exercises and lesson plans that allow teachers to experience the different preferences in their classrooms.

At a Minneapolis middle school, one team of four 6th grade teachers volunteered to learn about personality type, incorporate it into their classroom management and lesson planning techniques, and introduce their students to the concepts.

After a semester, the attendance rates for the students assigned to the pilot team were better than for the other 6th grade team. Further, when asked to identify which of their 130 students the teachers knew well, the pilot team listed only four with whom none of them had a significant relationship, while the other team listed 25 students. Thus the training seems to be helping teachers build relationships with their students, a crucial step in the learning process.

As the year continued, the teachers worked to adapt lesson plans, assignments and assessments for the learning styles of students with different personalities. Teachers saw significant increases in student engagement and performance with the new lesson plans. The following chart compares results on two projects in language arts:

**Project not designed    Project designed**

	using type concepts	using type concepts
% of students who received an "F"	26%	8%
% of students who received >75%	58%	70%
% of students who received >85%	32%	55%
% of students who received >95%	9%	36%

Furthermore, the Language Arts teacher reported that there were close to no behavior problems in her classroom while students worked on the project she created using type concepts that took into account the students' personalities and learning styles.

During the next year, the use of type spread to four teams of teachers, all of whom volunteered to learn more about type after hearing about the success of the pilot team.

### The Importance of Personality Preferences

Think of these personality preferences as similar to the inclination you have for writing with your left or right hand. Writing with your preferred hand is more natural and comfortable, and it takes less energy and thought. With practice, though, you could write well with the other hand. Similarly, students are most comfortable when they can use their personality preferences. Even though they can learn to operate outside of their preferences, it takes more effort, which can hamper their learning.

When the teachers start to understand the behavior of students with different personalities, they can adjust the structure and flow of their classrooms to allow for success for more students. Teachers report that using type helps them avoid stereotyping students based on race, gender, or socioeconomic status, instead looking for ways that type knowledge could help the students be more successful.

### Extraversion and Introversion

Type theory holds that people gain energy through either Extraversion or Introversion. At school, students with a preference for Extraversion need action and interaction to learn. Students with a preference for Introversion learn best when they have time for reflection.

When asked to design an ideal classroom, Extraverts draw moveable walls, chairs on wheels, a table big enough to accommodate chairs for up to 50 students, areas for playing games, and music. Introverts draw classrooms with seven to ten students. Their designs often show individual desks with laptop computers and comfortable places for reading. With the concrete evidence of these drawings in front of them, both teachers and students begin to understand the differing needs of Extraverts and Introverts. At a basic level, silent reading and writing activities favor the Introverted students; to gain energy for those tasks, Extraverts need breaks to talk or move.

### Sensing and Intuition

Our preference for Sensing or Intuition describes how we take in information. Students with a preference for Sensing like to start with factual information before moving to broader concepts. Students with a preference for Intuition often start with a hunch or a glimpse of how two ideas connect, later searching for facts to support their ideas.

Sensing students ask questions to clarify assignments. They don't want to waste time doing anything wrong. A teacher who doesn't understand the drive behind the questions may feel that a student is stalling or refusing to take initiative. Sensing students describe their frustrations this way:

"I didn't understand the math homework. The teacher helped me with one problem, but I still didn't get it and she passed me over. She could have showed more examples. How was I supposed to know?"

"It's frustrating because they label you. 'You don't get it? Sound it out, look it up!' That's intimidating."

Intuitives often ask their questions five minutes after a teacher has finished giving directions—and the teachers often rightly say that the student would know the answer if he or she had been listening. One Intuitive student explained why he hadn't heard this way, "When she said that we were going to write reports on someone who had influenced us, I started trying to think of someone that no one else would think of. I missed the rest of the directions."

## Thinking and Feeling

Our preference for Thinking or Feeling describes how we make decisions. People with a preference for Thinking look for logical explanations, cause-effect or if-then arguments, and universal rules or truths. People with a preference for Feeling consider the impact a decision might have on the people involved. Thinking students often seem to enjoy arguments, while Feeling students have trouble functioning in classrooms where putdowns and other forms of disharmony are common.

An understanding of the difference between Thinking and Feeling often helps resolve conflicts. For example, a parent requested a meeting with the school principal because her daughter, who had gotten A's in 7th grade English and liked to write, was barely doing C work in 8th grade English. The girl had said, "The teacher doesn't like me, so I'm not going to do the work." In talking to the girl, the principal discovered that she had a preference for Feeling. The teacher had critiqued the girl's writing without giving any specific praise, assuming that the student would interpret her comments as advice for making her excellent writing even better. When the principal reinterpreted the situation in terms of Thinking and Feeling, it gave the teacher and student a fresh start together.

## Judging and Perceiving

This preference pair describes how we naturally approach life. Judging students seem to have built-in clocks and are able to plan out their work and work their plan. Perceiving students live more in the moment, taking a spontaneous approach to life. They are not lazy or irresponsible by nature. Instead, they understand that being flexible opens opportunities.

Our schools operate out of a Judging preference: think of schedules, due dates, quarterly grades, and class agendas. If Perceiving students aren't introduced to planning methods that use their own strengths, they may begin to feel inadequate as deadline after deadline catches up with them.

Students with a preference for Judging often start working on assignments as soon as they receive them. They feel they can't play until their work is done. Further, they seem to be able to estimate how long it will take them. If for some reason they have to wait until the last minute, they feel stressed in ways that inhibits both their creativity and their accuracy.

Students with a preference for Perceiving do their best work under pressure. If they try to start early, they struggle to find ideas. As the time pressure builds, so does the quality of their efforts. However, they often underestimate how long a project will take. Perceiving students need different time management tools than Judging students. One of the most successful is teaching them to plan backward, helping them identify the steps involved in a project and then develop realistic time estimates for each step. **How long will it take to make a board game? To buy supplies? To plan rules? To design it?** Answers to these questions provide the "real" last minute when they must start.

## A Climate of Understanding

In the schools where we've worked together, nearly 80% of the students that teachers had labeled "at risk" because of either academic or behavior problems had preferences for Extraversion and Perceiving. We would suggest that perhaps school structures rather than these students are often the problem.

While students can learn to use their less-preferred personality preferences, it is easier for teachers to adjust their

styles than for adolescents to adjust theirs! Our overarching goal in using type is to help students and teachers understand themselves and each other. One teacher said, "I was hesitant that kids would understand types, but they did and it was affirming—they weren't defects. Now they say, **"It's not that I'm a bad student—I just need to work on certain skills."**

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