Facilitating Joy in the Literacy Classroom by Recognizing Preferences of Core Personality Styles

Amy L. Ruglio
Macopin Middle School

Facilitating Joy in the Literacy Classroom by Recognizing Preferences of Core Personality Styles

Cover Page Footnote

Works Cited Lee, Jihyun. "Universal Factors of Student Achievement in High-Performing Eastern and Western Countries." Journal of Educational Psychology 106.2 (2014): 364–374. Web. . Kruger Winter, Susan. "True Colors: The Personality of Education." Study Skills by SOAR Learning, 3 June 2024, studyskills.com/educators/true-colors-the-personality-of- education. "Myers & Briggs Foundation." 2003-2024, Myers & Briggs Foundation. N.p., 2024. Web. 28 June 2024. . Nowak, Paul. "How to Speed Read for Increased Comprehension (Explained!)." Iris Reading, 19 Nov. 2022, irisreading.com/how-to-speed-read-for-increased-comprehension. True Colors Global Consulting & Training Company. "Discover True Colors Trainings." What Is True Colors?. N.p., 2024. Web. 28 June 2024. .

Facilitating Joy in the Literacy Classroom by Recognizing Preferences of Core Personality Styles

AMY L. RUGLIO
Macopin Middle School

Joy is the centerpiece at the table of learning. In literacy classrooms, however, we often welcome students to a banquet of texts without adequately assessing their tastes and curating our menus to their palates. It's no wonder. We are pressed forward, making our best efforts to fill the deep gaps of students' skill deficits in a post-COVID world, as we work to meet district benchmarks, prepare for standardized testing, cover curricula, overcome impossible student to teacher ratios, and so much more.

On the other hand, there are more ingredients available to teachers than ever before as we form the recipe for our students' success. The master teacher, as the master chef, knows which are the most potent. There is a way to approach the reading environment that will not cause an educator to collapse under the demands of today's classroom. We can accelerate skill development by inviting students to linger at our tables for long enough to savor new tastes—and to facilitate this, we must prioritize joy.

It is not a shocking assertion that when students enjoy reading, skill gains become more rapidly achieved. According to the article, "How to Speed Read for Increased Comprehension," published by Iris Reading, LLC, a pioneer in speed reading and memory training for Fortune 500 companies, NASA, and multiple prestigious universities, "Passion and enthusiasm draw our attention and motivate us to concentrate and absorb more of what we read, helping us to read faster and remember more information." However, educators do not often pause to recognize the power of this factor. An extensive study conducted by Jihyun Lee (2014) examined reading patterns in students from five Eastern countries with the highest reading performance (China, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan), five Western countries with the highest reading performance (Finland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and the Netherlands), and three other influential nations in the world (the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom). The core of this research centered on discovering similarities in these 13 differing nations and cultures that would be the greatest predictors of students having strong reading skills. The study concluded that the principal components of human learning do not vary across nations, regardless of their vastly different education, culture, and language systems. In every region and country, the primary indicator of reading achievement was how much students enjoy reading. Lee claims that, "institutional and resource variables are not the secret ingredients of high academic performance of students" since school funding, availability of instructional aids, starting age of education, number of hours in school, ability grouping, etc. provided less of a guarantee for strong reading skills than whether students found pleasure in reading. This correlation between joy and reading success builds a foundational claim that students' reading enjoyment ought to be one of the essential goals held by any teacher of reading.

Personality labeling systems such as Myers-Briggs and Don Lowry's "True Colors" are some of the most helpful tools

that educators can harness as they seek to increase students' joy. When teachers recognize how personality styles typically coincide with reading preferences, they can more readily guide students to overcome individual struggles and frustrations. Instructors can encourage students to experiment with new strategies and gain an acceptance of differences between themselves and other readers, ultimately increasing reading enjoyment and volume.

While teaching eighth-grade English over the past 16 years, differentiating for the needs of all types of readers has been a major concern for me as a practitioner. Having applied "True Colors" and Myers-Briggs to my classroom via four years of student surveys and interviews, with over 400 students studied, I have gained insights regarding students greatest likes and dislikes that have enabled me to infuse ever-increasing joy into my students' reading process—first by making the reading environment tailored to more personality types (with an especially significant emphasis on the needs of struggling readers) and also by increasing my knowledge of texts that match different personality styles' reading preferences.

In implementing differentiation via personality styles, the satisfaction I have found in the effort of learning has grown alongside of my students' joy. The gains were evident in the 2023-2024 school year as 58 percent of my students read at least 2,000 pages, nearly 80 percent improved over a year's worth of proficiency according to district standardized benchmarks, and nearly all of my students indicated that they enjoyed reading more by June than they had in September on the end of year survey. My students are comprised of a wide variety of demographics, including individuals with IEPs and basic skills challenges. The top three page-leaders (two of whom have 504 plans) from my on-grade-level classes read

13,115 pages, 7,786 pages, and 7,771 pages each. One boy, who learned to delight in reading once he found the types of books he loved, conquered 5,243 pages even though he was placed in an Orton Gillingham resource class as a dyslexic, resistant reader in the previous year.

I have one 45-minute period a day with these students, their sole source of reading, writing, speaking, listening, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling instruction. Nevertheless, I carve out 10 minutes of silent independent reading time in three class periods a week, usually at the start of class on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I allow students to read any books they choose (beyond the curriculum of academic classes), and they are permitted to abandon books at any point in time, since having zero commitment to texts increases their receptivity towards new styles. At the start of the year, there is a learning curve for students while searching for titles that are most likely to match their tastes. I offer assistance each time a student nears the end of a book with the goal of always having a next choice lined up to prevent gaps in reading, but I strive to let the choice be the student's own. Autonomy is of vast importance if individuals are to ultimately become readers beyond the school day. When a student struggles to find a match, one useful technique is to present a pile of three to five books that fit the parameters commonly desired by that individual's personality style. Since I survey students at the start of the year, I enter independent reading conferences with some knowledge and can usually make several good recommendations. However, if finding a book that suits a student's preferences continues to be difficult, another strategy is to let that student sample genres through shorter texts. Furthermore, adjusting reading levels to find an appropriate challenge can be helpful. Especially for reluctant readers,

easing up on difficulty in self-selected reading may increase accessibility so that conflicts or characters can be appreciated in a way that the rigor of texts in the language arts curriculum may not allow. By the end of the school year, 30 minutes of choice reading a week along with reading in assigned texts does not add up to several thousand pages. Yet, providing students with frequent encounters with books they enjoy will often lead them to read extra on their own time, especially as they reach climaxes of plots they find intriguing.

Another aspect that has increased students' joy regarding choice reading is to make the assessments low-stakes. At the start of every week, a clipboard which I call the "Status of the Class" circulates the room so that students can provide me with their current book titles, page numbers, and favorite vocabulary words from that week's reading. To make this procedure less wearisome, I give a simple reward to a student in each class who furnishes an impressive word. The terms students supply on the "Status of the Class" are also the source for our biweekly vocabulary list, giving students some influence over the words they will be required to study. Throughout the week, I check in with all students individually or in small groups, having a quick conversation with each of them about their books or reading strategies. These reading conferences go a long way towards forging connections that show my pupils that the effort they put into reading is meaningful to me. Towards the end of each week, I ask students to write in their journal regarding their independent book, always allowing students the option to write a free reaction to their book while also providing multiple prompts in case a sentence starter or question is needed. Journal notebooks are graded once a month with independent reading responses comprising one section of the rubric. Since all other independent

reading assessments fall into the class participation category, students have many opportunities to do well with this style of reading without necessitating many formal evaluations. In this way and many others, teaching with personality in mind has accelerated students' growth without requiring extra time and preparation from me as a professional. With so many aspects of our pedagogy that meet with conflict in the day-to-day operations of the classroom, how much more important is it that we embrace methods such as these to increase our joy?

Even though the four categories of "True Colors" and the 16 categories of Myers-Briggs are far too basic to capture the essence of any person with full accuracy, both systems are a simplification that can aid individuals as they strive to understand general types of temperaments, values, motivations, capabilities, etc. As tools used by teachers to deepen their understanding of individual students, viewing the classroom through the lens of personality labels can save time as well as help educators gain greater depth in connecting with the classroom community. Furthermore, when it comes to links between reading preferences and personality types, a myriad of essential applications opens.

One point I do need to qualify is that, overall, the most worrying aspect of my personal research in this field is that there is so little pre-existing data to examine. For this reason, I have used my own students as resources. I did not find any other teacher research published regarding this topic. There is a need for practitioners' studies and statistics to further explore the impact that differentiating based on personality styles can have on reading instruction.

At the onset, my goal was to explore how personality styles could potentially uncover patterns in reading preferences. I was searching for a shortcut to make

conferences with students regarding reading choices more productive and likely to help them find books they would love. I had noticed that students' reading rates increased when they worked through texts they enjoyed. If I could increase the total number of books students read and liked, I could increase their total pages read, and accelerate their reading growth. After half a decade of analysis, disaggregating data from over 25 classes of middle school readers, along with interviewing dozens of humanities teachers, I have gained much more insight than originally anticipated.

Sensory Perceivers (Orange)	Sensory Judgers (Gold)
• Thrive with movement in reading environment • Sufficient "white noise" facilitates concentration • Appreciate alternate structures and spontaneity • Prefer direct, action-based plots that begin with conflict and have humor or characters in danger • Benefit from explicit instruction in preferences and autonomy over reading environment • Measure success by enjoyment	• Thrive with goals for self-improvement or a purpose for reading given by instructor • Appreciate clearly defined structure in reading environment and text organization • Prefer action-based plots, short expositions, realistic conflicts/characters • Measure success by completion
Intuitive Thinkers (Green)	Intuitive Feelers (Blue)
• Thrive with independence and intellectual freedom • Read to think or learn • Perceive reading as a process for gaining meaning and knowledge • Appreciate non-fiction, sardonic tone, fantasy, sci-fi, texts that challenge • Dislike waiting for classmates and discussions • Opinionated, logical, curious, question authority	• Thrive with connection to characters and classmates • Adaptable to various environments • Appreciate character development and likeable or relatable characters • Read to "get lost," experience, relate

● Measure success by competency	● Measure success by how feelings were impacted

The simplest way to present findings is to detail the main features that students in each of the four core personality types have in common. These categories include: sensory perceivers (Myers-Briggs) also known as the "orange" personality type ("True Colors"), sensory judgers also known as the "gold" personality type, intuitive thinkers also known as the "green" personality type, and intuitive feelers also known as the "blue" personality type. The descriptions listed in each quadrant of the table above are how I have witnessed each of the personality types reflected in reading styles as I compared hundreds of student and educator testimonies over the past five years. All of these personalities have strengths, weaknesses, and preferences in the literacy classroom. Every student can benefit from teachers gaining knowledge of their personality patterns. However, data within my classroom studies as well as professional research cause one type to stand out as the group of students most likely to need teacher support to increase their joy in reading and ultimately their success as readers. In *True Colors: The Personality of Education*, Susan Kruger Winter asserts that only three percent of teachers in the U.S. identify as the "orange" personality type even though this temperament makes up 35 percent of the general population. As a result, few of these students will ever have a reading teacher model for them how a successful individual with this temperament approaches a text, unless educators take the initiative to learn about the specific needs of sensory perceivers.

Although findings regarding every personality type currently inform my instruction, my concerns for sensory perceivers were an impetus for how in-depth my investigation of the topic of personality styles and reading needs became. My first formal set of research ran from September 2020 until June 2021 with a general survey of 111 eighth grade students via Google Forms regarding reading preferences and temperament. Standardized testing data was matched with student responses from the survey to add in the context of skill levels. After this, 30 students and eight adult readers were interviewed in small groups or individually for further information collection. Finally, all findings were interpreted and analyzed by five veteran literacy teachers actively working in the New Jersey public school system for increased objectivity. In this study, I gathered data from 40 students who self-identified as "orange." Seventeen of these students claimed to hate reading. Twelve of them reported that they dislike it. In total, 72 percent of my students in the sensory perceiver personality type during that school year had strongly negative feelings towards reading. Furthermore, this group claimed to read for fun or non-essential learning with the least frequency. Also, according to reading benchmarks, the greatest percentage of lower performing readers was comprised of individuals who identified as this personality type.

Since this starting point, I have continued to compile evidence through the same surveys and interview questions for the past three years. Data collected at the start of the year maintain similar percentages of students in the "orange" personality type who do not find reading enjoyable. With four years of data compiled from approximately 400 students, patterns have emerged. The primary determining factors that separate high-achieving sensory

perceivers from those with lower proficiency rates are self-awareness and perceived autonomy in manipulating the reading environment to suit the individual's needs for movement, brain breaks, and sufficient noise/quiet. Typically, students with this personality style note that the proper reading environment is more important to their success than whether they appreciate the text being read, although they do have significant patterns in book preferences. In fact, nearly all sensory perceivers claim that movement while reading is helpful to them and more than half state that they have more success in comprehension while reading aloud with others or listening to the text while reading.

One "orange" who elects to read more frequently than many of his personality group peers and scores well on standardized testing echoed the sentiment of a large percentage of his fellow sensory perceivers when he explained that he likes reading at home better than in school because his reading style causes him stress in class. He is so focused on keeping his behavior in line to avoid upsetting the teacher and fellow students that he reads less efficiently. In a small-group interview during 2021, he stated that at home, "I usually sit in a rocking chair. Having the freedom to move without getting in trouble for disrupting others helps me focus." This boy, like many other students who identify as the same personality type, suggested that figuring out the optimal environment to facilitate movement that enables him to focus is a key factor in reading comprehension and enjoyment. In class, this student would sometimes struggle to efficiently move through pages during individual reading time. However, once we opened a dialogue about his needs within the reading environment and he realized his ability to modify his own surroundings, he learned ways to increase his focus, comprehension,

and enjoyment of in-class reading time. He found that sitting alone on my heater (shaped like a bench and therefore providing more freedom to change positions than a desk) with earbuds in (for white noise, not music) helped. Unfortunately, most sensory perceivers note that the setting in which they read during the school day is somehow too stimulating (others talking or making noise) while also not being stimulating enough (no movement permitted). This, they say, directly reduces their ability to become lost in a text and hinders continued concentration on reading.

Additionally, individuals with the sensory perceiver personality also experience a great deal of consensus regarding books that fit their preferences. Though these readers often mention the genres of humor and horror as enjoyable, their tastes center more on fast-paced plots. According to nearly all 160 sensory perceivers surveyed over the past five years the most important factor for them in a text is for it to entertain. Therefore, nearly all sensory perceivers assert that finding a text that begins with tension or events that grip them as readers is essential. In terms of structure, they are more likely than other personalities to appreciate the alternative forms of plots found in graphic novels, short stories, comics, manga, online writing forums, etc.

Genres that sensory perceivers often dislike include romance, historical fiction, and any texts with exposition requiring a commitment to connect with characters before moving forward. One girl with mid-achieving proficiency who identifies as an "orange" personality type defined for me the texts she dislikes as, "Anything that does not give creative freedom to wonder what is next." She connects with most sensory perceivers' desire for excitement about surprises found in an unpredictable and intense conflict. Likewise, the majority of

students in this personality type claim to dislike all genres of non-fiction except for memoirs with dramatic survival stories. Similarly, sports-based texts are often a source of frustration because many sensory perceivers enjoy athletics, but many books that have sports as a key topic are character-based, not action-based—to make matters worse, those plots are often predictable and have low-stakes problems. Although some sensory judgers and intuitive feelers may gravitate towards those texts, students who identify as "orange" would not be likely to do so.

In literacy classrooms, educators can address the values of all personality styles in the learning environment as well as through the availability of text preferences without putting forth an overwhelming amount of effort. Starting the school year with surveys to learn about students is a common practice for most teachers. After an educator learns how to recognize the patterns of students' preferences via personality types, many timesaving applications emerge. For instance, in this past September's survey, a girl wrote, "For the personality test I got orange. While I was reading the personality traits, a lot of them seemed to describe me. I am curious… I am kinesthetic… I don't like only having a few options. I like a wide variety… I don't like to read anything that has too many words on one page. The reason behind that is because I get distracted a lot." Once I read this, I knew that I needed to ask her follow-up questions about her current strategies for movement while focusing on a text, if she has unintentionally been in trouble in other classroom reading environments, whether she rewards herself with brain breaks after a set time of reading, and what types of conflicts captivate her. This student, who had struggled to move beyond pretending to read and trying to remain out of trouble in previous years' English classes, was fairly easy to instruct

regarding how to modify her own environment by setting a timer for breaks and transitioning to a corner space where movement without distracting others was possible. She also frequently chose to read aloud with a well-focused partner who identified as an intuitive feeler. In June, this same reader presented me with survey feedback commonly reported by her personality type as she wrote, "From September to now, I feel like I have read a whole lot more than previous years. Last year, I would barely read books and skim through pages just to get it over with. Now, I've taken my time reading. And now I read in and even outside the classroom! The me of September would never have thought I would read 2,517 pages in a span of 10 months. And I 100% know that I am a better reader because of that improvement. I feel I have better understanding of what books would keep me reading and which books I will not enjoy." Once the needs of sensory perceivers like this student are addressed, educators can help sensory judgers to work towards goals of self-improvement, can support intuitive thinkers in their efforts to find texts that will challenge them intellectually, and can guide intuitive feelers towards characters with whom they will experience inspiration and connection.

Although students' temperaments will shift over time as their identities change and mature, raising awareness of personality types teaches pupils how to address reading challenges with introspection and resilience. Learning strategies that work for them as individuals fosters the belief that reading skills are enhanced through practice. Moreover, conversing with students about the strengths and weaknesses of the varying personality types enables them to perceive that there are many preferences of value, not one correct answer about who readers ought to be.

I have seen many struggling readers learn how they read most efficiently, learn how to fall in love with books' characters, conflicts, or settings. Through recognizing patterns of students' personality styles, educators can guide their pupils towards a joy that draws them to the lifelong feast of reading. The first step is to perceive our literacy classrooms as an irresistible banquet with a diversity of joy that is available to all types of learners. Truly, when our students sample the abundance of tastes before them, they will learn the enormity of their appetites and will finally crave reading's manifold flavors.

Works Cited

Lee, Jihyun. "Universal Factors of Student Achievement in High-Performing Eastern and Western Countries." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 106, no. 2, 2014, pp. 364–374. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263918808_Universal_Factors_of_Student_Achievement_in_High-Performing_Eastern_and_Western_Countries.

Kruger Winter, Susan. "True Colors: The Personality of Education." Study Skills by SOAR Learning, 3 June 2024, https://studyskills.com/educators/true-colors-the-personality-of-education.

"Myers & Briggs Foundation." 2003-2024, Myers & Briggs Foundation, 2024. https://www.myersbriggs.org.

Nowak, Paul. "How to Speed Read for Increased Comprehension (Explained!)." Iris Reading, https://irisreading.com/how-to-speed-read-for-increased-comprehension.

True Colors Global Consulting & Training Company. "Discover True Colors Trainings." What Is True Colors?. 2024. https://www.truecolorsintl.com/about.

AMY RUGLIO is a middle grade ELA educator who teaches at Macopin School in West Milford, New Jersey. While striving to cultivate a classroom that enriches the whole child and champions every student's aptitude towards content mastery, Amy pursues research interests such as motivation, dyslexia, and cognitive processing. She can be contacted at Amy.Ruglio@wmtps.org.