



2020 Kevin Cleary Invited Speaker • Heather McCulloch

An Unlikely Orchid

Heather McCulloch

Gunma University

I am the last person that you would expect to be giving a presentation. I am quiet and shy, and I have a small voice. I prefer to stay in the background and not be the center of attention. The funny thing is that I will be giving a presentation at the JALT2020 Conference called “Working with Introverts in the Education Community.”

Why in the world would I be taking the online stage to speak? The topic of introverts is very dear to my heart because it has affected me for my whole life. Now that I am the teacher, I see so much of myself in many of my silent students.



“What’s wrong with me?” “Why can’t I think of something to say in class as quickly as my classmates?” “I’m trying so hard, but why don’t my teachers see that?” “Why am I so exhausted at school?” I am an introvert, and like so many of my fellow introverts, these are the thoughts that repeatedly went through my head as a student. It was Carl Jung (1923) who first coined the words *introvert* and *extrovert*. These words describe where a person gets energy from. An introvert finds energy from within by seeking solitude to recharge depleted batteries. On the other hand, extroverts would absorb energy from the outside world by being around people. Since a third to a half of the population is introverted (CAPT, 2003), chances are there is a student like me in every class. They are easy to recognize. It may be the student that sits closest to the door. Or it could be the one who enjoys talking to a neighbor, but rarely speaks to large groups. It might even be the student that shies away from group work but excels by producing excellent results when working alone. Often, these are the nameless faces that teachers overlook.

I started to realize that I was “different” in junior high school. I enjoyed school, but I started getting tired during the day and felt like I needed time away from my friends and classmates for a little peace and quiet. I had nowhere to seek refuge, so I found myself sitting in restroom stalls far from the center of the school. This was a safe haven where I could have some peace and quiet to recover from all of the noise that I was surrounded by throughout the day.

The need for peace and quiet grew stronger as I forged ahead in high school. My day at school was exhausting from beginning to end. A typical day for me at school consisted of riotous hallways that resembled a zoo, arduous classes that required a lot of group work, sociable classmates that talked circles around me, and demanding teachers that were constantly disappointed with my participation—or lack of it. I loved my friends (both of them) but during lunch, I needed to get away. For my last two years of high school, I ate lunch alone at the end of an empty hallway. If anyone had ever seen me, they would have felt sorry for me. But for me, this time was pure bliss. This was the time that I looked forward to all day. I was finally alone to daydream and salvage the little energy that would help me survive through the rest of the day.

Kevin Cleary Invited Speaker Program

In 2014, the *Kevin Cleary Invited Speaker Program* was begun in memory of a beloved JALT President to bring scholars to address JALT members at our conferences. The first recipient of this award was Milagros Laurel from the Philippines; in 2015, Ken Urano from Japan was the Invited Speaker; in 2016, Debbie West joined us from France; in 2017, Japan’s Fumiko Murase was honored; followed by Mehrasa Alizadeh (from Iran) in 2018 and Chiyuki Yanase in 2019. This year, Heather McCulloch will be the 2020 Kevin Cleary Invited Speaker and will speak on *Working with Introverts in the Education Community*.

Heather McCulloch

A lifelong extreme introvert, Heather McCulloch has had considerable experience being a shy and uncomfortable student in the classroom setting. Nevertheless, she has embraced her qualities of introversion, and accordingly, fostered a desire to help other students and teachers do the same. Ultimately, she aspires to help fellow teachers appreciate the advantages of quiet and reticent students in class. She holds a Master’s degree in TESOL from Biola University, Los Angeles, USA. Having over 20 years of teaching experience in diverse settings and at various levels, she currently works at several tertiary institutions in Gunma, Japan. At present, she serves as the president of the Gunma JALT chapter, showing that even the shyest and most introverted can be a leader.



Nonetheless, I still spend my days at school. This time, though I am the teacher, nothing has changed. I am still overwhelmed by the noise and excitement that dictates a day at school. I have never seen the inside of the cafeteria and I continue to enjoy eating my lunch alone. I am an educated adult, and it is funny that I still see a restroom as a place of refuge.

A few years ago, still wondering why I was so different from my colleagues and friends, I decided to take the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and then the Big Five. I took the tests about 20 times just to get an accurate assessment of my personality. As I was reading the description of the results for my particular type, I quickly became interested in introversion. Since I scored 90% on the MBTI introversion scale and a measly 6% on the Big Five extroversion scale, I knew that was a big part of who I was. I am not a researcher, so I went to the place I got a lot of information from—YouTube. The second video I watched would change my life. Susan Cain (Cain, 2012), in her TED Talk titled “The Power of Introverts” brought me to tears. For the first time in my life, I realized I was not just okay, but I was pretty awesome! I immediately read her book, *Quiet: The power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking* (Cain, 2013) and I did not stop there. I read every book about introverts that I could get my hands on. When I ran out of books, I turned to research articles. I was obsessed. As I read more and more about personality in general, I wondered what influence personality had on learning preference and whether or not my teaching style was effective for all of the personality types.

Teachers all over the world are said to prefer the more talkative students (Meisgeier, 1994), the extroverts. These are the students who often enjoy group work and answer questions quickly. I saw this attitude in my own teachers when I was in school. I dishearteningly remember walking into the classrooms. My teachers barely even looked up to give me an uninterested “hello,” while the more outgoing students were always met with enthusiastic greetings and lively conversation. I felt ignored and neglected even though I was a good student. It did not seem to matter that I did great work. It only mattered if I talked or not. I spent a lifetime comparing myself to those students who spoke so effortlessly in class, receiving favorable recognition from the teachers.

Extroverts offer so much to our classrooms. They are expressive and help us, the teachers, by answering questions quickly. But introverts have some great qualities as well. They tend to be organized

and good at solving problems. The orchid hypothesis (Ellis & Boyce, 2008) compares extroverts to dandelions. They are strong and can flourish anywhere. On the other hand, an introvert is more like an orchid. With the right kind of encouragement, an orchid can grow into a beautiful flower. In the book *Zen Shin* (Ogui, 1998), Ogui, a Japanese monk says, “A flower does not think of competing with the flower next to it. It just blooms.”

In my presentation at JALT2020, it is my desire to help attendees understand what an introvert is and is not. Furthermore, I will delve into explaining the physiological reasons why introverts are who they are. Introverts often feel unseen, as I did. I will be discussing the ways that teachers can see and appreciate all students, so that they can better work together to make a community that includes everyone. If we apply the words of Ogui to our classrooms, seeing the beauty in both dandelions and orchids, our classrooms will “just bloom.”

References

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Learn what kind of orchid you have by examining its leaf structure, root size, and blooms. You can use this guide when repotting an orchid that has no label and if you are unsure which genera it is. The following orchids are commonly sold in nurseries, groceries and box stores and are sometimes sold with no label other than simply "orchid". The most common orchids found for sale are Phalaenopsis, Dendrobium and Oncidium. Brassavola. An Unlikely Scholar is a side quest in Dragon Age: Origins . Dagna wants to join the Circle of Magi to study their history and lore, but knows that dwarves cannot use magic . She is a member of the smith caste , those dwarves responsible for creating the arms and armaments of Orzammar and working with lyrium . At some unspecified point in her life, she found a scholarly fascination with the mages of Thedas and with the practice of magic despite being well aware that she could never become a mage herself. Get tips on choosing an orchid. Discover how to choose an orchid that compliments your care-style and home environment. Tips for choosing an orchid. Winning Strategies. Are your orchid leaves limp and wrinkly?