

Book Review

*Temperament in the Classroom:
Understanding Individual Differences*

By Barbara K. Keogh
Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks
2003, (ISBN 1-57766-601-6)

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One occasionally has the good fortune of unexpectedly coming across a book that is a gem: *Temperament in the Classroom: Understanding Individual Differences* is just such a book. The author, Barbara K. Keogh, professor emeritus at the University of California, Los Angeles, has a long and distinguished record of studying and writing about the various aspects of temperament and the nature, needs, and developmental patterns of children, especially those with an array of mild disabilities and developmental delays.

In this book, Keogh presents the concept of temperament as a lens through which educators and parents can view children as they attempt to find their way in the complex reality called school. She differentiates temperament from other attributes of children, and quotes the definition proposed by Thomas and Chess (1977) that specifically captured the notion of "behavioral style." Thomas and Chess (1977) defined temperament as "a general term referring to the *how* of behavior. It differs from ability, which is concerned with the *what* and *how well* of behaving, and from motivation that accounts for *why* a person does what he is doing" (p.9).

The transactional nature of temperament within family life has been well explored by many research studies during the past 25 years, but temperament has not had the same applications to the classroom. The

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dynamic/interactive nature of schooling, including peer interactions, teacher expectations, school demands, school culture, and instructional expectations, are all components of school life the author has considered in her discussion of temperament within school settings. The inclusion of so many of the diverse factors which contribute to the complexities of schooling for many children contribute to the value of the book for so many education personnel.

Graduate students and teachers, both those just beginning and those who are more experienced, will find the book enlightening, and the subject matter ideal for teacher reflection. The material should also prove valuable for analyses and discussions in professional development workshops as educators strive to understand more about differences in children's temperament styles and its effect on classroom performance. Given the developmental focus of the material, this book should appeal to both regular and special education personnel. There is also a chapter devoted to children with disabilities within a temperament context. Other chapters in the book include: temperament and children's achievement in school, the role of temperament in teacher's academic decisions, the relationship of temperament and behavior problems, assessment of temperament, and the designing of temperament-based interventions in school.

Temperament in the Classroom is not a cookbook with "instant fix" suggestions. Rather, it contains much valuable information for teachers to use to guide their thinking about and understanding of children's individual differences in behavioral styles and *how* children respond to the multitude of classroom demands and situations that confront them each day. It is a fresh alternative to the more behavioral perspectives, which tend to discuss *what* children do and whether it is appropriate or inappropriate for a particular situation. "Sensitivity to temperament allows teachers to think about children differently, to reframe their ideas about the reasons for particular behaviors, and to consider problems in a different context. The overall effect is to lower the level of negative affect and frustration teachers often feel when there are problems" (Keogh, 2003, p.149).

Using the Thomas and Chess (1977) temperament types, which evolved from their clinical experiences, *easy, difficult, and slow-to-warm-up*, Keogh suggests that teacher-child relationships are affected by each of these temperament constellations. "Easy" children are adaptable, sociable, friendly, mostly characterized by a positive mood, and seem to be well liked by teachers and their peers. "Difficult" children are more negative, overreact, are unpredictable, and can present challenges to teachers as they don't do as they are instructed necessarily or have difficulty getting along with peers. "Slow-to-warm-up" children tend to

have difficulty with new situations, transitions, and they may hesitate to get involved. Thomas and Chess's work, supported by that of other researchers, indicates that 40% of children are "easy," 10% are "difficult," and 10% are "slow-to-warm-up."

Of particular interest is a survey of teachers' views of "characteristics of teachable pupils" (Kornblau, 1982) reported by Keogh in the chapter entitled "Does Temperament Influence Teachers' Decisions?" Of the behaviors agreed upon by 85 to 100% of the teachers as the attributes of teachable pupils, 100% of them are attributed to "easy" children as described by Thomas and Chess (1977). Several attributes such as bright, cheerful, follows directions, completes tasks, enjoys school work, considerate of others, pleasant, good natured — to list only a few — received 100% of teacher agreement among those surveyed.

The reality of contemporary classrooms is that they contain a mixture of easy, difficult and slow to warm children. To address this reality, Keogh lists strategies for dealing with difficult children and one for dealing with shy, slow to warm children. In these lists, the category called "know thyself" comes first as a list of suggestions for teachers to use to engage in a process of self analysis. The author suggests that teachers bring their own temperaments to their classrooms and that their own temperaments have an impact on their interactions with the children they teach. These teacher characteristics influence decisions teachers make regarding instruction, classroom organization, and tolerance for certain types of children's behavior. All of these characteristics contribute to the "goodness of fit," that is, the demands and expectations of the teacher and children's temperaments. Keogh suggests that it is essential that teachers understand their own personal styles so that they can better understand how their individual responses influence their relationship with their students.

Also included are lists of problems that teachers might anticipate for slow-to-warm-up and difficult children and specific interventions which might be used to respond to those problems. In addition, Keogh provides many case vignettes of children's varying expressions of temperament in classroom situations and teachers' or peers' responses to them. The three appendices in the book contain valuable information that present research on temperament, scales for assessing temperament, and publications and programs on temperament for teachers and parents.

Finally, the reader gets a sense from this book that Keogh has great respect for both children and their teachers. She conveys a very positive regard for individual differences in children, the complexities of creating effective classrooms and instruction, and the challenge that some children present to even the most sensitive, reflective professionals. Her

writing style is clear and easy to read. It is a small book and education professionals will find that it well worth the time invested to read it. *Temperament in the Classroom* provides excellent material for helping teachers think differently about themselves and their students and is an important contribution to the field of education.

References

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