

Teacher Education Institute (TEI)

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Teaching Phlegmatics

A paradox exists as far as the teaching of phlegmatic children is concerned. In some ways they are the easiest children to teach; in some ways they are the most difficult. They are the easiest children to teach for they will cause very little trouble and they will be quiet and obedient. In other ways they are the most difficult children to teach for they find it very difficult to involve themselves in any sort of interaction in the classroom situation. The danger is that phlegmatic children will be left to their own devices as they appear to be most contented when this occurs.

Phlegmatics are only too happy to stay within their own comfortable little world and refrain from action with the outside world. From their viewpoint, what is the point in moving beyond the status quo. If they make any move beyond the existing set of circumstances something could go wrong and upsets could easily occur.

It is, of course, to the detriment of their development if they are left to their own devices. We have to make adjustments continually if we are going to get the best from our own resources. Sometimes these adjustments are painful and we need initiative and courage if our confidence and growth are to occur.

Phlegmatics need constant encouragement to join in group activities. Teachers should make a special point of interacting with phlegmatic children at some point in the day. Teachers need also to realise that phlegmatics are thorough and methodical; they should prepare material in such a way that these attributes can be used to stimulate interaction.

The lack of willingness to use their imagination can easily result in their repeating exercises to the point of boredom; not because they wish to repeat them but because they lack the initiative to move on to anything new. In many instances they will be quite happy to do the monotonous and repetitive jobs.

In the classroom situation they might well enjoy tasks which are not demanding; for example, copying material prepared by the teacher. On many occasions this can be used as a base for further study which, if carefully structured, can stimulate the child into new areas of work.

From the foregoing we can appreciate that one of the main tasks of the teacher is to quietly and gently draw the phlegmatic child out from his own private and comfortable world into relationships with others. These relationships will never be easy for the phlegmatic especially when he sees, for example, sanguine children entering relationships easily and quickly. In such cases phlegmatic children need support and reassurance; they do bring standards of loyalty and reliability to such friendships and they need to realise that they enter relationships in a different way from the other temperaments.

Their expectations of the standard of their own work are usually quite high (accepting differences in ability). As they work slowly any situation which does not allow them sufficient freedom to complete the work to their own satisfaction will produce frustration and dissatisfaction. They will not make a fuss but will withdraw even more from the situation reassuring themselves that their evaluation of how the world goes around is correct. Many structures existing in education today place phlegmatic children at a disadvantage, for example timetables which result in short periods spent on different subject matter; tests and examinations where work has to be completed under pressure and in a short space of time.