

“And *How* Goliath Stamped...”

Fashioning the temperament through story telling so that it becomes a useful tool

by ANNE TANDREE

Economy in teaching

Balancing my attention between the individual children and the whole class was one of the first challenges that I met in my first teaching experience.

I found myself sucked into situations with one child and then another, and I would spend endless time in preparation at night thinking of these particular children. The more I tried to concentrate on the individuals and tried to ‘solve’ problems, the more little individuals reared their heads and demanded my undivided attention. I was losing the class. I needed to find a way to address the class as a whole while giving each individual child the sense that they were being recognised. A colleague suggested that I look at the children’s temperaments and that I consciously address each temperament group in some individual way every day, even better every lesson.

Why the temperaments?

As some of the readers may already know, Rudolf Steiner gave many indications, to teachers especially, about the four temperaments which can be observed in children. In the 2nd Chapter of his *Discussions with Teachers*, Steiner responds to a question about a drawing lesson, with the following: “Here our work of individualising begins. We have said that we can divide the children according to temperament. In the larger groups the children can all take part in the general drawing lesson, but by dividing them up into smaller groups we can individualise to some extent... You will be able to differentiate by your choice of forms, by taking forms with straight lines.”

A knowledge of the children’s temperaments will enable the teacher to learn how to teach the individual child.

Another quote from the same publication (p.12) will remind us what these differences in the temperaments are based on:

In Spiritual Science we consider the human being from various points of view [particularly] the ego, astral body, etheric body and physical body. Now in an ideal man the harmony pre-

destined by the cosmic plan could quite naturally hold sway between these four principles of the human being. But in reality this is not the case with any one person. From this it can be seen that the human being, when he is given over to the physical plane, is not really complete, but that education and teaching would serve to make a complete man of him. One of the four elements preponderates in each child, and education and teaching must bring about the harmonising of these four principles.

If the ego preponderates... [in the child], we have the melancholic temperament. If the astral body preponderates, we have the choleric temperament. If the etheric preponderates, we have the sanguine temperament. If the physical body preponderates, we have the phlegmatic temperament.

Frequently there is more than one temperament within one person. Most people share a bit of all four. And it is important to keep this in mind when we focus on each temperament at a time for the sake of clarity. It is still helpful to observe whether a child has a dominant temperament, for this will show his or her particular tendency to one-sidedness.

Having taught for some years and having had many interesting talks with colleagues I think it is important to say at this point, that in the 21st century this working with temperaments and identifying of children’s temperaments is much more difficult than when I started teaching. The influences on the children which affect their behaviour and even their physical body—such as bad diet, overdose of media, lack of rhythm in their daily lives, even maybe different beginnings of life—cloud the picture we try to make. Nevertheless, although coming to simple conclusions may be more arduous nowadays, careful observation will eventually highlight one particular aspect of a child which can be helped through his/her temperament being addressed.

There are many publications, some by Steiner and others by teachers who have worked with the temperaments in their own particular field. Not wishing to repeat all that has been said and can be

found in these excellent books (see Bibliography), I will endeavour to try and give a useful foundation on which any beginner can start to build.

The most important aspect to remember is that this knowledge of the temperament must be a developing wisdom and become an 'instinctive' tool in the activity of teaching. Applying it as dogma will end with the child not responding to a constricting label; in fact children often rebel under the yoke of dogmatic teaching.

Working with the temperaments in story-telling

Children from different temperaments can help each other to complete a picture. The teacher's role is to give the children the possibility to reflect back to the others their experience of a story. But before this the children need to feel that the teacher has prepared the lesson with them in mind. The children wait expectantly maybe in complete silence, but their inner being is reaching out for the beam which is just for them, the colour that speaks to their soul, it envelops them in a feeling of warmth of recognition and is the beginning of their process of transformation of the content given by the teacher. This process is one of individualising and transforming the content into new skills.

Steiner also recommends that we allow children of the same temperament to influence each other in order to tone down their temperament e.g. by sitting them together in the classroom.

In *Discussions with Teachers* Steiner's work with the teachers on the art of story telling is described and there he pays particular attention to the different ways language can be used to involve children from all four temperaments.

In a summary we could say that the following areas can be varied according to the temperament you are addressing:

- The content of the story
- The pitch of the voice
- The rhythm of the speech
- The speed of the telling
- The gestures accompanying the telling

The content of the story

The choice of a particular story may be made with one particular temperament in mind.

In Class 3 you are telling the story of David and Goliath and many choleric sit up expectantly at the thought of this battle. They admire David's fearlessness. They show little compassion for the defeated. They sympathise with that particular way of solving problems. They wish that teachers and parents would allow them to fight to solve their problems. Most children of this age love this story, and there is plenty of scope for retelling and acting this out the next day.

The sanguines in the front of the class will be quite restless in their excitement and the teacher can address them at the beginning by describing the activities in both camps: the details and the hustle and bustle, especially if you tell it from the point of view of a child being sent everywhere to run errands for David or for Goliath. The colours and the smells will capture the sanguines' attention and will give others the chance to dream into the story as they will take longer to become interested.

For the phlegmatics it is always suggested that food should be mentioned; and without sliding into negative clichés about a temperament, it is my experience that talking about food need not appeal simply to the greedy aspect of a child, but can be used to bring out the importance of feeling well in one's physical body, and especially how it may, in this case, influence the outcome of a battle. In the story it may also be possible to describe how well the parents of the tribe were looking after the young ones who were scared of the noise and the preparation for



Contrasting temperaments coming to expression in Class 3 weaving.

the great duel. Phlegmatic children are often the ones who help the class teacher make sure that every child is feeling cared for.

This particular story may not appeal at all to the melancholics, they might dislike the confusion and the heroism involving violence. The Old Testament doesn't readily inspire compassion. They will need you to provide an entrance for them, through their ability to empathise with suffering, especially the suffering of the down-trodden. A little introduction about David's childhood, leading up to the battle and imagining how David felt the night before will help these children identify with him by recognising the fear or the loneliness and the sense of responsibility. This is also particularly pertinent for children in their ninth or tenth year: they often start to experience fear and loneliness and particularly melancholic children tend to take responsibility for the problems that they see around them.

The pitch of the voice

As you can imagine a class of young children is very sensitive to the human voice; it makes a deep impression on them and teachers must be aware of this as it is their basic teaching tool, especially in Steiner schools where there is little use of electronic equipment and information technology. A teacher with a constantly high-pitched voice will tend to make children nervous and restless; the opposite may be quite restful but may be soporific. By doing speech exercises, by growing aware of one's voice, it is possible to use it as a pedagogical tool.

In the above story it would be appropriate to vary the pitch used very slightly without making a caricature of any of the characters. It is certain that Goliath will have a tremendous roaring voice and the teacher's chest capacity must grow just for this, but when David speaks he will be clear but quite soft; if one could imagine speaking more from the forehead for David and more from the stomach for Goliath the right result might be achieved.

Varying pitch should be used with subtlety. It will, however, be wonderful the next day when you ask the children to come up in front to act parts of the story to see a child puff up his chest and give a goliathan mighty roar. Another child of a less choleric nature may enjoy acting out the gesture of precision of David's catapult—in total silence!

The rhythm of speech

I have already mentioned how to focus the sanguine children at the beginning of the story through the description. It will be appropriate to speak in short words and quite briskly to describe the child (in the

story) as he rushes around watching all the preparations.

When the fight is about to begin, a mood of ceremony can be created by talking slower and emphasising the consonants. The choleric will enjoy the strength of the sounds. These act as a forming force on them.

How can some of the ordinary aspects of life be portrayed for the phlegmatics to enjoy? A fluidity in the speech will resonate well with them and they will strain slightly forward if you speak softer and allow the vowels to sound out. There is no need to rush this part of the story. Let the choleric grow slightly impatient; it will not harm them, and allow the phlegmatics to enjoy your sounds and descriptions. The melancholics would really enjoy hearing one of the beautiful minor Hebrew songs in the middle of the story, they are often the ones whose feelings overflow at the beautiful sounds.

The speed of the telling

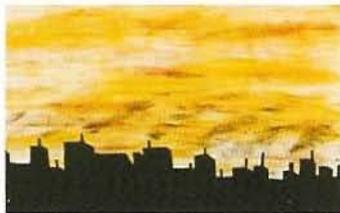
The speed of the telling goes hand in hand with the rhythm described above. It is important to remember, however, to vary the speed. We so often settle in a certain mode that lasts the whole story long. This will not help your images to be alive and colourful. A few pauses in a story will bring back the phlegmatics who may have dreamed off.

The gestures of the story teller

In most stories a minimum of gesture is necessary. It can easily take the children's attention away from the sound of the words. For that reason a few well chosen moments where your gestures accompany an action in the story can complement your particular temperament slant. A slight stamp with the foot at the approach of Goliath will remind the choleric of his weight and therefore of the extraordinary feat performed by David. You can outfox the sanguines by looking quickly from one side to the other during your description; this may be needed to allow them a bit of movement too before you focus on a more quiet and serious part. This is a good time to release tension and make them laugh. It will be so much better if they laugh in the right place rather than upset the melancholics and choleric by bubbling over with mirth at the tragic moment.

How you stand and where you put your hands when you are describing the world of feelings will make a deep impression on the melancholics, you will see it the next day in the recall or later in the year when they act out a play.

So far we have looked at how the teacher can address the temperaments in the class by varying aspects of the story-telling. The next step consists in



The four temperaments in Class 8—by which time they are normally well in hand—expressed through paintings of imaginary industrial revolution scenes.

enabling the children to give each other a different aspect of the complete experience in the next days.

The story recall and the individual work in writing and drawing

The day after the story has been told, you can expect the choleric children to come through the door begging to be allowed to retell the story or better still to act it out. Ideally a small group of children should be chosen, representing the different temperaments, and asked to go out in the corridor to prepare a little scene. While they are outside you can do another activity, which may appeal more to the melancholics:

The children close their eyes and imagine the camp the night before the great duel. The teacher can help by asking children to respond to questions e.g. are there any noises? Can anything be seen? What light is there? What is the sky like? etc. Asking just for describing words (adjectives), children are called to the blackboard to write them down. These will come in useful both for the children's drawings and their writing of the story the next day. Melancholics who often enjoy remembering things of the past will benefit from this exercise as it gives a certain objectivity, a wider context to their one-sided picture. Phlegmatics need a bit of pushing when it comes to articulating their inner life; they will be helped by the other children because once the activity is started, they actually enjoy falling into the pattern of making lists of words. They dislike having

to be the first to do anything that involves work. In these recall exercises sanguines often stare at you blankly as they have forgotten the whole story, or so they think. But they will take up the impulse of the choleric in the acting out or will soon join in the 'game' of finding adjectives. A lot of these will probably have nothing to do with the story in question but sometimes the fact that sanguines are participating and not chatting to their neighbour is enough to satisfy one.

This description is only a taster of what can start to happen in a class when you know the children well. As you get used to working in this way you find that the lessons are enriched by this multiplicity and variety of hues and textures. It penetrates into all the parts of the lesson; it is particularly helpful in the realm of language teaching if you are teaching younger children only through the spoken word.

A codetta on language teaching

It has been my experience when starting to teach 6/7-year-olds French that some of them experience a feeling of insecurity at the first hearing of those different words. A good way of bringing them into the group without singling them out is to make sure that there is an activity in each lesson which meets their particular needs.

The strong rhythmic poem for the choleric, a dancing ring game for the sanguines, a picture dictation for the phlegmatics, and a memory game for the melancholics, for example.

In a balanced language lesson all the above would happen anyway but to prepare them with the children's faces in your mind creates this gesture of community building: acknowledging the wealth of differences living in the children and using these differences for the fulfilment of the whole group, that is the potential gift of working with the temperaments.

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