

Book Review — *A Child at a Time: Understanding Temperament* by Professor Loraine D. Cook, published in 2024 by UWI Press

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Introduction

This book's nine chapters and 194 pages provides an understanding of temperament from interactions at home and school. It also details how parenting and teaching practices can affect children's reactions and how these practices can be improved when parents and teachers understand children's temperament traits. In clear and simple language the book provides readers with information guided by research and practice on the importance of understanding temperament in addressing personal differences and managing behavioural challenges in children at home and at school. It highlights the interconnection between temperament, personality, attachment parenting styles, and teaching practices in addressing the education of children.

The layout of the book is simple and straightforward. In its preface, the author advocates for a deep understanding of temperament to address children's behaviour. This book is written for parents and teachers and can appeal to a wider audience. The language used can connect with all readers interested in understanding temperament. Every argument put forward is substantiated with the relevant references. The chapters in the book concisely present literature and empirical evidence on temperament in young children, and the influence of parents and teachers in accommodating the different temperaments in their interactions and

disciplinary practices. It also advocates for the implementation of the INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament Programme in schools.

In **Chapter 1** the book provides a contextual understanding of temperament and its differences. In addition, it traces the history of temperament and how it is manifested in newborns and its association with intelligence, personality, and social emotional skills. This chapter succinctly explains the influence of genetics and temperament and how matching the environment with children's temperament (Goodness of Fit) ensures optimal development of children. This chapter also explores the impact of stressors on children's behaviour and concludes that individuals' vulnerability to certain stressors or environments can be associated with their temperament.

An exploration of interactions across ecological systems (mainly the micro-system) on temperament and its influence on the psychological wellbeing of families and students was documented in **Chapter 2**. This chapter details the influence of the development of attachment patterns based on interactions with parents and the regulatory skills of parents. It also explores the role temperament plays in the parent-child interaction and the association between temperament and attachment. Furthermore, parenting styles influence childrearing practices which support parents' understanding of their roles and responsibilities in creating an environment that fosters positive emotional growth.

Chapter 3 explores the importance of positive relationships between the student and the teacher, and the role that school environment plays in children's behaviour. From this chapter it is evident that the approach of teachers to education and learning can significantly impact students' sense of wellbeing and belongingness in their classroom; and how not having goodness of fit can create behavioural and academic challenges in the classroom.

In **Chapter 4** the author explains the landscape of early childhood education in Jamaica and the different school-based intervention programmes/projects that were implemented to reduce behavioural problems and aggression in schools. This chapter points to the importance of early intervention in reducing behavioural challenges, aggression, and violence in schools. All the programmes/projects reported on in the book confirm the importance of social emotional learning (in particular emotional self-regulation) in addressing behaviour challenges, aggression, and violence in schools.

Chapter 5 discusses teachers' assessment of children's temperament based on data collected from a sample of Jamaican students. This chapter focusses on the dimensions of temperament (negative reactivity, shyness, activity level, task persistence, and sociability) and how children with different or mixed dimensions are likely to behave in class and the influence on their academic outcomes.

Chapters 6-8 present detailed descriptions and the approach to the implementation of the INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament Programme. These chapters report teachers' and parents' understanding of temperament and their assessment of the effectiveness of the INSIGHTS Programme. The book reports on teachers' assessment of temperament in some Jamaican children, from which there is a clearer understanding of the core attributes (dimensions) of temperament (negative reactivity, shyness, activity level, task persistence, and sociability) and how children with different dimensions are likely to behave. The book clearly articulates how INSIGHTS into Children's Temperament Programme was instituted in schools and how it

improved parenting and teaching practices. The influence of INSIGHTS on parenting practices provided research evidence on how parents rated the INSIGHTS Programme and how it helped them to change how they approached interacting and disciplining their children. Chapters 7 and 8 seamlessly integrate the quantitative and qualitative findings on the impact of INSIGHTS on their parenting and teaching practices. From the parents' report, the programme was extremely useful and beneficial because it helped them to "reframe how they viewed their children's negative reaction" (p. 105).

The book sought to ensure objectivity in reporting by providing both the positives and negatives of the INSIGHTS Programme, which could help its revision for future implementation. In addition, Chapter 9 reports a case study of one school that integrated INSIGHTS and the outcomes of the students who transitioned to other schools. This chapter is both encouraging and enlightening, because the evidence from one school can provide a framework for future investigation and institutionalization of INSIGHTS into other Jamaican schools.

A child at a time: Understanding temperament adds to the literature on temperament and bridges the gap in research on temperament in Jamaica. The book carefully outlines the landscape of research on temperament by exploring the differences in temperament and the theoretical explanation and understanding of temperament. In addition, it provides a snapshot on how children's attachment styles are related to their temperament and how parenting styles can impact children's behaviour. The importance of self-reflection in reframing our thoughts and approaches when working with children is an important feature of INSIGHTS that should be replicated in academic engagements. Self-reflection contributes to a change in perception about children and encourages more optimal responses from teachers and parents in their interactions with children.

Although the book explains two major theories (Goodness of Fit and the Diathesis-Stress Model), for academics the book could be enhanced with more details and explanations on

how the theories are applied and further empirical data added about their efficacy. In addition, other theories on temperament and personality traits applicable to children could be addressed in the book.

As a result of the gap in research highlighted in the book on temperament in Jamaica, a second volume could be written that provides comparisons of temperament in other Caribbean territories. Additionally, an evaluation of international research on temperament and the application of theories and institutionalization of other programmes similar to INSIGHTS could be considered.

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