

The Dyslexia Stalker: A Preschool Intervention

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This morning I stalked a parent from my son's preschool class and waited for him in the parking lot. Why would I do such a thing? What would provoke me to lurk next to my car waiting for a man I didn't even know, in a preschool parking lot nonetheless? Well, it was simple. As I was dropping my 5-year-old son off in his classroom, I overheard a father sharing with the teacher, we will call her Ms. T, about concerns he had about his son's reading. I overheard him share that his son, we will him Cash, was not recognizing all of his letters and was unable to identify the sounds letters make and was definitely not reading. He was expressing concern, because like my son, Cash was getting ready to enter kindergarten in just two months. Now, I usually don't listen to other people's conversations for many reasons. Usually I am not interested, or I am preoccupied or I am trying to be polite. But this time, I just couldn't let it go. What really caught my attention and what turned me into a stalker this morning was Ms. T's response and it went something like this:

Cash is fine. There are a lot of kids who go to kindergarten not knowing their letters or the sounds the letters make. In fact, there are a lot of kids who don't have access to preschool and go to kindergarten without any literacy skills at all. Cash will be fine. He will catch up in the Fall, there is nothing to worry about.

As she was talking I was taking my sweet time getting my son settled and lurking around the room pretending to look for his jacket, or something. I wanted to hear more, but this is all she offered to this parent, who obviously knows something is wrong. So, I just couldn't let this be the last thing this dad heard about the subject. I just couldn't let Cash be a victim of the 'he'll grow out of it' mentality. So, I waited by his car, which was conveniently out of earshot of Ms. T's room.

I approached him and told him that I could not help but overhear his conversation and explained to him what I do and that I could offer him some good information if he was open to it. I made sure he understood that I was not making a determination that anything was wrong, but that I thought he should be armed with the correct information about early literacy skills. This father then began to tell me that he hated school and was held back in kindergarten, his writing still 'sucks' and he just stopped caring about school in high school. Ding ding ding....I heard all the red flags go up. He then proceeded to tell me that he reads to Cash every night and they buy him lots of books, but he's just not getting it. He was telling me because he was feeling like he was doing something wrong. He shared that he did not know because Cash was an only child and he had nothing to compare him to. I have an only child as well, so I completely understand this dilemma. I told him it was not his fault and he is not doing anything wrong. He then went on to

tell me how he doesn't understand it because Cash can tell you everything you ever wanted to know about the Avengers, but he can't read yet. So, I left him with some final thoughts:

1. It's not your fault.
2. You're not a bad parent
3. It has nothing to do with intelligence. I have no doubt that Cash is smart.
4. You are right to be concerned.

I then drafted this email to send him resources. Then I thought, everyone should have these early literacy resources, because there is no reason that a child could not be identified in preschool. So, here you go:

For an overview of dyslexia, watch this video. I am not stating that dyslexia is the issue with Cash, but just in case: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zafiGBrFkRM>

Early warning signs of dyslexia: <https://www.learningally.org/dyslexia-awareness-month-do-you-know-the-early-warning-signs-of-this-learning-difference/>

More early warning signs of dyslexia: <http://www.ncld.org/types-learning-disabilities/dyslexia/common-dyslexia-symptoms-warning-signs-in-children-pre-k-to-grade-2>

What every child needs to know before entering kindergarten:

<http://www.greatschools.org/students/academic-skills/1207-kindergarten-benchmarks.gs>

Kindergarten screener: <http://www.getreadytoread.org/screening-tools/grtr-screening-tool>

I have to admit when I drove away I debated with myself about whether or not I had done the right thing, or if I had completely over stepped my boundaries. I called my colleague, Tracy, and she reminded me about the parents that always lament that they wish they had known sooner. Luckily for Cash, his dad was open to my comments and is waiting for my email. If we could identify these kids in preschool...could we actually prevent dyslexia from actually causing academic difficulties with early intervention? I think so (see Dyslexia: An Ounce of Prevention at <http://www.reading.org/reading-today/classroom/post/engage/2014/05/29/dyslexia-an-ounce-of-prevention#.U5eGOig-Ukc>). Now I have to go pick up my son...