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Essay 2 Draft 1

Sponsoring Literacy and Life

Modern parents find themselves inundated with checkmarks and comparisons to ensure their precious jewel is developing at a proper pace. It’s expected for your child to be speaking by three and reading on his own by five. Otherwise, he’ll never graduate or he’ll be unable to provide for himself. Now, as garish and self serving as many of these statistic benchmarks are, their purpose has merit, the majority of children learn at similar speeds, and public education is designed to best match that common rate. Thus, if a child doesn’t match the trend, the education system makes an allowance to help adjust the pace. Unfortunately, most children placed in special education are not given the expectation of achieving a standard literacy level, which can be either detrimental or encouraging to a student’s success.

Literacy wasn’t necessarily guaranteed for me. I didn’t speak or think much as a child. Between failing eyesight, comprehension, speech, and hearing tests, I found myself placed in special education for much of my elementary school experience. Other kids thought I was crazy, which was keen of them because I most likely was. I used to steal chalk from my kindergarten teacher; in third grade I brought my grandfather’s WWII pocketknife to show and tell, and then spent several months attending hearings with my mother to appeal being expelled. I didn’t like reading or multiplication tables, and would dread every encounter with tests of any sort. At home I was horribly behaved; instead of screaming or throwing loud tantrums, I would quietly wreck the living room of our house, displacing every book from its shelf and turning furniture over. Now this behavior is to be expected when raising a child, but mine was more common, more prevalent, and longer lived than typical tantrums. Both external and inward speculation can suggest that this described behavior was , in part, due to a prolonged absence of a theory of mind, or the perception of cognitive people around oneself.

The day that I was slated to get my first speech test, which eventually lead to four years of special instruction, started while I was on the bus. I told someone my name for one reason or another, and then was teased because I had said “Cwis” instead of “Chris.” Michelle, my next door neighbor and sole friend, mentioned it to a teacher, who confirmed that I couldn’t pronounce a single word containing the sound ‘err’.

I remember the lady who was my special-ed teacher. She was my all-in-one aid for hearing and speech therapy, and was always passionate in her belief that we were making progress. We had a small room, and a U shaped desk where the teacher sat on the inside and five children sat around the perimeter. One day she read the story of “Hooway For Wodney Wat,” which depicted a rat who can’t pronounce R’s correctly. While she had been reading, I was swinging my legs under the desk, and kicking off of what I thought was a table leg. She asked the five students around her to please stop swinging their legs a few times throughout the day but I didn’t make the connection and stop. At the end of the day she took me aside and specifically asked me why I hadn’t stopped kicking my feet under the desk. Something about the conversation followed me home; she had been upset with me, and I didn’t understand why.

In that moment I finally got the awareness of myself versus people around me. I remember it like the feeling of breaking water to take a breath. Having someone be honest and level with me that I wasn’t perceiving the entire picture and jarring me out of my introverted shell literally changed my life. It still scares me to think that the moment could have slipped past without the epiphany to accompany it. Both my teacher and the special education system proved to be considerable literacy sponsors for me by keeping me out of normal classrooms and conventional elementary literature, and also by providing me a drive to catch up and learn everything I could about a newfound existence around me.