



PROBLEM CHILD OR CREATIVE GENIUS - By Melissa M. Williams and Bobby Ozuna

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More and more these days we hear of diagnosable issues in grade school children pertaining to learning disabilities and behavior problems. Over the years I have read and studied many reports trying to explain specific disorders through statistics, research, and analytical jargon. I am not here necessarily to speak from my own counseling background, but rather from personal concern and opinion as an advocate for literacy and encouraging children to believe in themselves. My information and the information from my co-author come from concerned teachers and parents whom we have either spoken to or have actually become over the years.

It's easy to become frustrated with the educational system's process regarding the most effective way to teach our children. What's true for one child is not necessarily true for the other. A standardized test or issue in the classroom has halted the very creative nature of most teachers at times. How do we change something so overpowering? We must commit to our youth, become creative again as adults, and become "teachers" to our children. One of the things to consider is the mandated curriculum involving standardized testing. There is just as much concern within the school system as there is outside the classroom. We can't always place the blame or place high expectations on educators who are required to teach a certain way that may not fit for your child as well as it does for others. Teachers want parental support at home and parent support is necessary to establish success in our youth. Not everyone learns the same way, so it is our job as a community as educators and parents to make time to find the right way for each child.

Unfortunately, many bright and intelligent children have become labeled as "problematic" or even "slow" at mastering certain subjects, when actually all they really require is a different way of learning the material. Take Dyslexia for example, many children who are highly successful in all other subjects acquire this reading disorder that in fact does require a different way of learning. I am very willing to admit to parents and even their children that I had major reading comprehension problems in elementary school when parents tell me their concerns pertaining to their own child's reading difficulties. After my own parents tried different ways to help me comprehend subject matter, we realized that I actually learn best through teaching. Once we found the best learning solution for me, I began teaching my stuffed animals lessons all the way up until high school. This is one example to consider, and just because your child is not on the same "level" in certain subjects as his or her peers, doesn't mean they are slow or even have a disability. We are a highly over-diagnosed society, when really the matter has to do with individual care, attention to detail, and time. Regardless of the reasons behind the child's difficulty in school, they need support and constant reassurance that there is a way to make learning fit for them. If we already know that our teachers have required methods of teaching, then it is up to us as parents to be creative and partner with individualized methods to help our youth learn.

My co-founder of the Read3Zero Foundation for literacy, Bobby Ozuna, works with his own children three days a week, two hours at a time. His son is having difficulty with reading comprehension, yet he is excelling in mathematics while in the 3rd grade. On the outside it is easy to label children as having a learning disability, but after applying new methods, Bobby has discovered a great way to help his son's capacity to comprehend the words on paper. Knowing his child has a passion for music, Bobby started printing out lyrics to his favorite songs. His new homework assignments now include reading the printed lyrics while watching the coinciding music videos on YouTube. This exercise allows him to grasp the meaning behind the written words on paper while applying a visual aid. Now a difficult task that was almost self-defeating at times has become an engaging and exciting way to enhance his ability and confidence to understand words. This is just one method, and may not work for everyone, but by allowing your son or daughter to tap in to a creative side of their brain, you may

discover a way to spark a new light inside of them. By offering a new method that better fits their personality, you can enhance their self-esteem, which build confidence in their own abilities and ultimately, a desire to learn.

In a previous article I wrote titled Encouragement: Building Self-Esteem in Your Children I suggested that if we foster individual talents (which at times may be labeled as weaknesses) in each of our children, we could be nurturing a creative genius in the making. Don't let your child's interest in movies or doodling on paper or even their like for computer and video games scare you just yet. What if they have found their calling in the 3rd grade? I believe that talents in childhood are the pure soul of the person announcing who they are and who they will be if their environment encourages it through balance. Like we said once before, the doodler may just become the next Picasso, the movie buff the next great film-maker, and the gamer may just be creating graphics for his own computer games one day.