

Forget the Labels ... It's all about Encouragement  
"The Key to Success"

By Melissa M. Williams

Diagnosing certain learning or behavior disorders can be necessary at times, and coming from the mental health field and school of study, I've see it happen more often than not these days. I too as a child had major problems with reading comprehension, focus, and memory. Back then we didn't get treated for Attention Deficit Disorder or you would rarely find a child diagnosed with Dyslexia, etc. My parents and teachers noticed that I was struggling and both spent extra time studying with me. My mom went above and beyond to research different ways that children learn. We do not all learn nor test the exact same "cookie cutter" or standard way. Even though I later when on to be a straight A student, I never received more than average on standardized tests, in grade school and after college, for my GRE to get into graduate school.

I was never treated for a learning disorder. I was never told I was slow or stupid. I was only encouraged to do my best. The common thread through out my entire life was encouragement to be and do anything. I always felt smart, despite the fact I was having trouble in elementary school. Without that encouragement at a young age, I believe to this day that I would have suffered from low self-esteem in school.

I highly credit my parents' actions when asked where my support came from in following through with my accomplished goals, including finishing college and my master's program with honors, becoming involved with learning societies, starting a publishing company at age twenty-five and finishing my first children's chapter book manuscript to later start a literacy foundation and teach children the skills of reading, writing, and comprehension. My question to myself is this: Would I have done these things if I were labeled with a learning disability? It's hard to say, since that was the past, but I often wonder. Due to the fact that I am just as sensitive as independent, my sensitivity may have gotten the better of me back then.

The reality of the situation in every classroom is a handful of students will become diagnosed with the intent to ultimately help. However, we must remain sensitive to each individual case. It saddens me when I teach a child who has the imagination of a genius, the voice of a little actor, and the artistic skills of a professional cartoonist at age ten, yet when we begin reading or writing, he or she shuts down or becomes irritable because they "think they are stupid." If you are a teacher or parent who has experienced this with your children, it truly breaks your heart. I often tell my students, if we were all the same wouldn't this be a boring world? It goes the same for learning and later career specialties. If we looked at the differences toward learning styles in a positive way, we could turn low production into over-achievement. The first step is working together with encouragement as the foundation.

Remember some of the most brilliant names in literature, history, psychology, and Hollywood became who they are today because they were different. Those energies that were once looked down upon were channeled into a talent. You may find that your child who is having difficulties in school will become the most passionate and talented of his or her peers. You have this to look forward to. Passion for individuality and creativity is often a direct result if given a little encouragement to be true to yourself.

I say these things not to look down on the realm of mental health, for I have been on both sides of the system. The part that we all must play today as mentors to our youth is to encourage children to be true to themselves and not feel like they have to be like everyone else. The conflicts that arise in all of our lives often have the opportunity to grow us and shape us for the better, not the worse.

I would like to thank those teachers who have changed the lives of students because you have believed in these concepts. I hear your stories shared by parents and children, and you who go above the standardized school curriculum with positive energy are truly a blessing to this world.

For more information about creative writing classes for kids in the Houston and DFW area this fall, please visit my website: [www.MelissaMwilliamsAuthor.com](http://www.MelissaMwilliamsAuthor.com) and for information about the Read3Zero literacy foundation and opportunities for kids to share their creativity please visit [www.Read3Zero.com](http://www.Read3Zero.com).