
Personal Experience in a School Setting


By Adele Saccarelli
Founder of Teamwork Wins Ltd.

I remember struggling at a young age with several Invisible Challenges™ (ICs), but I don't remember exactly when I developed my unique coping skills, the skills that would get me through each grade. To say the least, hyperactivity, Dyslexia and auditory processing difficulties are not conducive to traditional methods of teaching or learning.

My hyperactivity did not allow me to stay focused, except on the soccer field, basketball or volleyball court, where I was able to move, but, certainly NOT in a classroom. And no matter how hard I tried, I still ended up annoying every teacher I met. Because I could not focus like the average child, I was unable to learn at a similar pace as the common child and fell behind in my academics.

I was as equally interested as any other child. And I knew that I was intelligent, but because I could not meet common standards in their way, people perceived that something was wrong with me. I had poor grades, by which I was judged, however inappropriately. I knew that this system was not working for me, but everyone insisted that I had to make it work. There was no consideration given to my unique needs to achieve the same understanding as everyone else.


So I discovered one very useful coping skill to get by. Not necessarily a healthy skill, but it was a functional skill. I developed a connection with all my teachers. I knew everything



about them: what made them tick; how they wanted things to look in their mind or in their issues, for that matter; their weaknesses, their strengths; what type of people they liked, who they didn't like; what they were comfortable with. I went above and beyond knowing them. So if I got all this right, maybe, just maybe they would give me a break on what I had trouble with, which was keeping up with the others academically and grade wise. And if you asked them today what they remember about me, they would probably say: "oh she's a great girl, inquisitive, oh, and the perseverance that she had, enthusiastic about learning, but always struggled with the testing." I attempted to express myself in regards to my needs but I was not very smooth in my delivery of communication, so I attempted to make up for it in my personality.

It didn't take me long to realize that the method that I was using in grade school and high school, no longer would work in college. The professors were so far removed and almost felt distant. "Here's the work, here's the deadline" style of schooling was not conducive to my previous coping skills. Receiving the grade of a "42" on my first Western Civilization test confirmed this. I had already slid in to East Stroudsburg University's June/January program where you could attend college in June immediately following senior year of high school. And if you passed with three B's, you were eligible to come back in the Fall, if you received anything below the B's, you had to return in January. Well, I did pass with three B's, but I chose to play soccer in Europe in the Fall instead of attending college.

So how did I pass? Well, let's go back to the momentous day in my Western Civilization class. When my professor, Dr. Muncie, handed back our tests that day in June, 1983, he expressed that



he was very disappointed and couldn't believe that everyone in the class had failed the test. "Obviously, he never taught in the June/January program before. Didn't he understand that these students had Invisible Challenges™ !" I looked at the professor more closely, and I realized that he really didn't get it. That was it, I decided, I have had enough. I then decided that I would tell him the real truth.

So after class, that is just what I did. I went straight to his office and explained to him about these types of students. I had been observing students for years, and I knew the different types! I explained how most of them weren't following him because he was going way too fast. He needed to write some kind of outline on the board. But most importantly, he needed to SLOW down. I finished monologuing, with an attitude of "You gotta get this, it's really important and I am certain that what I am observing and saying is correct," very unlike my usual method of using my bubbly personality to connect to a teacher in a school setting. I looked at this gray-haired man sitting in his office chair, who had this very blank look on his face, and he says to me, "I will make a note of it." I then shared the same blank look on my face that the professor had just a few minutes ago, and nodded, said thanks, quietly, turned around and walked out of his office. "Oh my goodness, what DID I just do?"

I shuffled into our next class the following Monday, after Dr. Muncie probably had plenty of time over the weekend to laugh with his fellow professors over some beers, at how some freshman told him how to teach.

What would he do?

Would he make it more difficult for us, did he listen?

Did he even understand?

Would he be sarcastic?

Would he completely ignore me?


My life was about to change at this moment. I waited in anticipation, a little embarrassed, a little excited.

Which way will this turn? Had I developed a new coping skill or was my college life over?

Dr. Muncie walks in the room, picks up a piece of chalk and says to the class "A little bird told me (winks at me) that I was going too fast for you all and that I needed to slow down and write some sort of outline on the board here, so here goes." He turns his back towards the board, with chalk in hand and starts to teach. I received an 88 on the second test.

The third test I went to his office before class, to see if I could have a word with him. As soon as he sees me, he said, "What did I do now, am I teaching OK?" and chuckled. I said, "No, you are teaching fine. I just want to know if I could take that test in a quiet room, you know, the distractions and all." He said yes and I received a 92 on that test.

I know what he did might seem like very little to the average person, but to me it meant everything. His words, tickled my heart, which caused the smile on my face, my heart and head. At that moment, I knew that I could do this "college thing," and that




I could do anything. For me, this moment revealed that being honest, speaking your truth and asking for what you need is how you can not only “make it by,” but create what you want here on earth. Because he listened to me and really heard me, it showed that I could make a difference in the world, in MY world, in MY creations. Dr. Muncie provided me with the bridge that was necessary for me to connect to the next part of my life. Thank you, Professor Muncie.

This small and kind act by one professor opened me up to other ideas about learning. For the next four years, I worked at catching up with my peers. I graduated in 1989, majoring in Elementary Education with a concentration in Speech Pathology and Audiology. Actually, before me, there wasn't such a thing as a “Concentration in Speech Pathology and Audiology.” There was only an option for a concentration in Math, English, Social Studies, etc., but then I asked “Why doesn't this concentration exist? This is what I want to study.”

I joined a mid-career study group, comprised of older women who were local residents of East Stroudsburg. They assisted me in learning the information that I sometimes would miss in class. I hooked them up with some of my college friends to babysit while we worked and they let me participate.

When I started this 501(c)3 non-profit, Teamwork Wins Ltd, - Answers for children with Invisible Challenges™ (ICs) in the year, 2000, I never imagined that it would be life-changing for all involved. Then again, I never knew that I could finish high school, college and teach in the public school system.



As I watch each one of our programs grow within this organization, I remember my struggles with ICs. I remember how I got by managing my ICs— learning how to influence my teachers. Our goal at Teamwork Wins is to make it easier for future generations, bringing about awareness of Invisible Challenges™ to others.

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