

Using Assessment *for* Learning to Advocate for Your Student

by Louise Jovanovic

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As a parent, a teacher and a working colleague, you worry that your child's unhappiness at school is permeating his life. You observe practices in the school that you can see contribute to his inability to see himself as a successful learner. He has some learning challenges and a personal progress plan. You feel stymied by the blocks you see, and wonder how, without compromising your child, your collegial relationships (or your heart), you could move the school's thinking forward. Consider this...

Thoughts About a Plan

1. Connect with a friend who can act as an advocate, a process observer and note taker.
2. Decide what a "quality year" would look like for your child. Make a list of your priorities.
3. List things about school that he likes. Involve him with this, in brainstorm fashion, and include every idea, such as friends, gym class, recess. Further, tease out some ideas like: What does he play at break times? Who are the friends he has the most fun with? Post this somewhere that you can return to it for further conversations. Together, you may be able to add to this list as the year goes along.
4. Before the school year begins, set up a meeting with the Principal. Be honest about your feelings (anxious, concerned, etc), but try to avoid judgmental comments.
5. Express your wish to develop a working relationship with your child's new team of professionals and ask for an early meeting with them. Because he has an IPP, this seems a reasonable request. Ask that the Assistant Principal and the Support Teacher attend so that all players have a common starting point and can contribute their energy and ideas.
6. Possible meeting items are:
 - a) Share your written summary of your child's special interests, talents and challenges. Maybe attach a photo of him when he's happily engaged in some activity.
 - b) Summarize the 'Big Ideas' from his Report – in writing.
 - c) Summarize the 'Main Ideas' from his IPP.

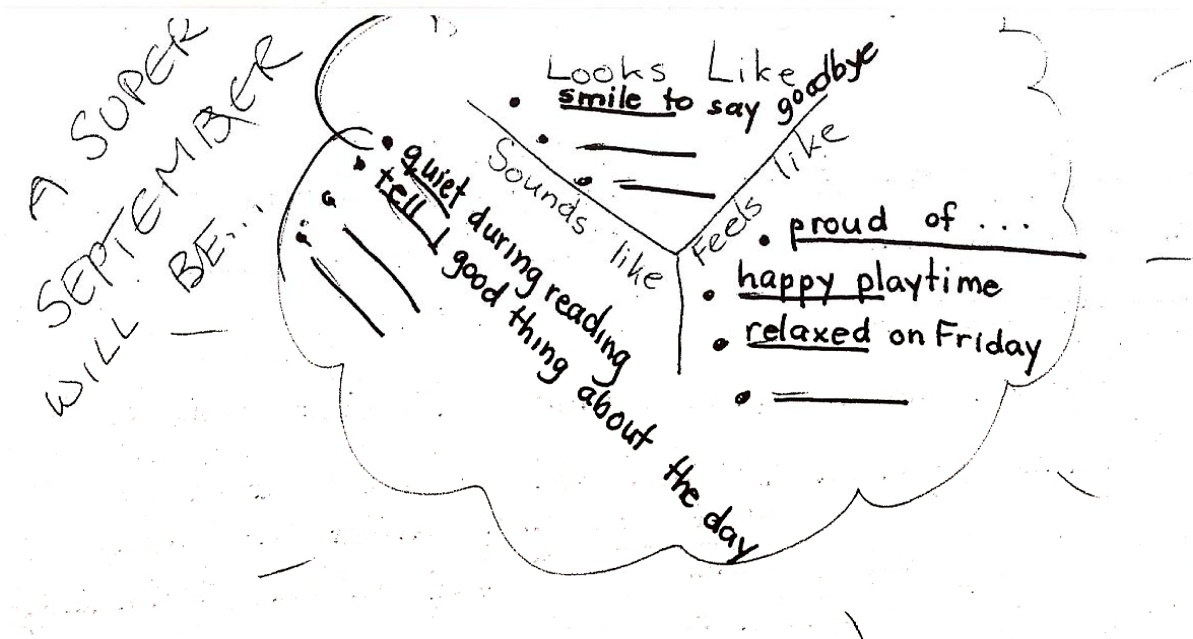
- d) Ask the Team to help you draw the connections between his year-end report and the IPP. This may already be done, but it pays to reconnect the Plan with progress reports throughout the year.

Current Knowledge (strengths)	Next Steps	Ways to Support	
		HOME	SCHOOL
1)			
2)			
3)			

*include who will do what

Consider using the preceding chart:

1. Identify *your* TOP PRIORITY for the first month of school for your child. Ask for the *school's* TOP PRIORITY for him or her. This will be a short term focus and may seem really simple! Identify **who will do what**.
2. Set up a meeting in one month to which you'll bring the information from his IPP and the work you've been doing to support the learning, as on the chart above. Sometimes as teachers, we collect evidence to support our assessment of what's NOT working. While this may be necessary, you can always ask for the evidence to **describe** achievement but not evaluate it. (e.g., 'This writing sample shows...')
3. Continue to ask for these team meetings on a monthly basis – good things take time!!
4. Involve your child in identifying what will the BEST SEPTEMBER BE?
Help him find simple things to put in this picture (see below). At the end of the school day, talk about these things and check (√) off the ones that happened. Add others along the way. Sometimes we can see a Whole Day as 'bad' even if we've only had a 10-minute glitch at 2 pm. You might want to share these observations with the team at month end.



AT HOME

1) Help with the homework. Give specific written feedback to the teacher.

e.g. _____ did this section easily – 5 minutes.

_____ needed my help to understand the directions, then completed the task independently.

We noticed how this story was like _____.

_____ worked on Part I tonight (30 minutes). We will continue tomorrow.

2) Take time for FUN!

3) Think of the teachers with an open heart. They, too, have their stories.

SCHOOL PARENT COMMITTEE

By all means, get involved. Try to focus beyond your own immediate concerns (back of the mind). Consider the following suggestions:

1) Plan a Celebration Circle to start the year. List the things your Parent Group values about the school. Post the list in the staffroom (with snacks!) and in the front hall where other parents may be invited to add ideas. Hang a marker nearby to facilitate this.

- 2) Does the school have published goals? If so, co-construct criteria about what **Parents** (committee) would consider success for these goals.
- 3) Share some of the strategies and activities you've discovered through your reading and attendance at workshops. For example:
 - Learn about each other with '*Just Like Me.*'
 - Make connections between (or draw out of) '*What We Like About Our School*' and connect to '*What We **Value** in Our Community.*'

The evidence from other parents' perspectives would also be interesting to explore. As the year goes along, you may suggest topics for the meeting agendas such as assessment practices and how these might be used to guide instruction. If you have a District Consultant that works in this area, he or she may have some insights about what work is planned for the school/district in the upcoming year.

Because it's all a PROCESS, you may find yourself way ahead along the continuum of understanding. Celebrate the small steps! It's time for another fresh start!