

Are You Smarter Than a Kindergartener?

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Sally arrived at her Kindergarten class with a determined look on her face. She sat through worship, actively participating when called upon by her teacher. During classes that morning she hung on to her teacher's every word. By recess, Sally's teacher was puzzled. This was totally out of character for the Sally she knew.



Sally was not known as the quiet, studious type. She was one of the more rambunctious students in the classroom, often causing disturbances by talking to other students, and interrupting her teacher, as she endeavored to teach. To have Sally sitting quietly in her classroom for an entire morning definitely had the teacher wondering what was going on with this child.

When recess came around and the children were on their way outside, the teacher called Sally over and asked about her change in behavior. *Well, Sally said, you had a talk with my mother yesterday, and then she had a talk with me about how I was doing at school. She asked me if I knew what needed to happen. Here, Sally paused, so the teacher asked do you know what needs to happen. With a grimace Sally responded Of course. I need to shut up and listen, so I've been trying really, really hard to do that today. And you know what? It is so hard!*

Some days you experience gems like this, and it almost makes you believe in the book titled *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Simple wisdom can sometimes be lost on adults, because many have forgotten the basic lessons life tried to teach them. Instead, they are sometimes too busy striving to develop scalable wisdom hierarchies to answer what they consider to be the essential questions, when what they really need to do is *shut up and listen*. This has its greatest truth when it comes to dealing with the individuals we interface with in our schools.

In our busy world we sometimes expect life to reflect images we see in our favorite television programs. Somewhere between half-an-hour to an hour we witness conflicts resolved, justice prevailing, questions answered and mysteries solved. Everything is wrapped up in a neat little package complete with a bow and we move on. The sad fact is life is never that clean and simple or cut and dried. Life, real life, is messy. When we feel we are the conduit through which all wisdom flows, and we assume the role of sage and master to bring resolution to situations we see unfolding before us, we are, in fact, only adding to the disaster when we include our two cents worth, not fully understanding the situation. It would be far better if we did just *shut up and listen*.

Really listening takes time and energy. It is far easier to express what we think a person should do, or share our understanding, than it is to spend time with them, actually listening to their thoughts and endeavoring to understand what they are feeling. We tend

to find it simpler and more efficient tell them what to do rather than to help them navigate the convoluted process so they are able to reach the best solution for themselves.

As educators, we need to develop, more fully, the characteristic to *shut up and listen*. It is easy to jump to conclusions and have each situation packaged and wrapped in a neat little bundle, complete with a bow on top, before we have all the facts. The unfortunate thing is that even when we think we know all there is to know about a situation, we may only be seeing a tip of the iceberg.

A child in your class has not academically been performing well. Complete with dark circles under his eyes, he is listless, and often sleeping in class. This has been going on since September and school year is half over. You spoke to his parents several times and provided helpful suggestions. What conclusion have you reached? If you are like most teachers you may think that here are two parents not doing their job, and their child is suffering because of it. We have no way of knowing situations a student may be faced with in the home environment, or specific situations our individual families find themselves in. In this case, the teacher had no way of knowing that the family was disintegrating before their child's very eyes, and what the teacher was observing were the effects this turmoil was having on that student. It was not until the parents informed the school they were separating, that anyone outside of that immediate family had any idea what had been transpiring at home.

Part of compassion is listening, not just doing. A female teacher shared with me a concern. After she left my office, in my male wisdom, I took care of the problem. A few days later the teacher returned, rather upset. She wanted to know why I took it upon myself to deal with the situation. I was surprised at her reaction, and explained that she had come to me with a problem and I took care of it, because I thought that was why she spoke to me. She said *No, I came to talk to you about the problem because I needed you to listen to me; I didn't need you to do anything about it!*

God has called us, as educators, to minister to His children and their families. Make no mistake; although we spend time with a child in the classroom, we also affect the family at home. Sometimes people just need us to put down what we are doing, so we can really listen to them. They may want to share their stories, feelings, hopes, dreams, desires and problems. They don't need our judgment. They don't need our insight. They don't need our advice. They simply need us to *shut up and listen*. As Sally said, *it is hard!* Based on this, there are some days I am not too sure if I am smarter than a Kindergartener!