Case History 8

As a thirty-year veteran teacher, twenty years in kindergarten, Lisa Figueroa had a good reputation for identifying students who might have problems in school, and she was generally recognized as the teacher in the school with the most expertise in these areas. Two children in her class particularly attracted her attention, Sandra and Daniel. By mid-October, about six weeks into the school year, Lisa felt comfortable enough about her observations to contact the children's parents for conferences. Each student was having difficulties with similar areas of school, but for different reasons.

Sandra
Sandra, Lisa explained to her mother, had a difficult time with handwriting, language activities, and arts and crafts activities. Sandra tended to rush through these activities - jumping ahead before the next set of directions were given. Activities that required practice tended to frustrate her. Sandra frequently interrupted other people while they were talking, had a difficult time taking turns, got into many quarrels with classmates, rocked in her seat quite a bit, and was easily distracted from learning activities. Lisa had to redirect Sandra to the task at hand frequently.

Sandra's mother said that Sandra was like that in preschool. Often when she picked up Sandra after work, she would be sitting in the "time out" chair for one infraction or another of the rules. At home, she tended to flit from one plaything to the next and the living room was always a mess. Sandra was always outgoing and eager to make new friends, but she seemed to wear out her friends before too long.

Daniel
Daniel, Lisa explained to his parents, had difficulty with handwriting, language activities, and arts and crafts activities. He tended to do these tasks very slowly, and he needed frequent reminders about what to do. Often he would sit in his chair seemingly as if he had never heard any directions to a task. His grasp of a pencil or crayon was awkward, and his hand was unsteady - even for a five-year old - as he used those writing tools. His figures were undeveloped compared to classmates. Daniel had a hard time recalling information from the stories that Lisa read to the children. Daniel did not have many friends in the class, but he did not have any enemies either.

Daniel's parents were disappointed by Lisa's report. They mentioned that he seemed to attain several of the major developmental milestones (e.g., beginning to talk and walk). In fact, they enrolled him at the nearby preschool program a year later than his neighborhood peers because he was not yet toilet-trained. They mentioned that he was probably a "late bloomer," and as evidence they pointed to his vast knowledge of dinosaurs.
Lisa had a couple of strategies that she planned to use with Daniel and Sandra. First, she planned to seat him at a table with a couple of the more mature students - ones who had superior social and learning skills. Second, she also planned to use a signal for each of the students to prompt them when it was important to pay careful attention to directions. Third, when she gave directions to the students, she would ask each of them to repeat or paraphrase those directions. Lisa indicated to the parents that she would discuss each situation with the school's students assistance committee to design more interventions for each child.