



NASSET ADHD SERIES

Part # 12 - From Tourette's to ADHD and Everything In-Between: Just the Motivation I Needed to Teach Special Education

By Danielle Hird

I consider myself very lucky. My parents wanted me to do well in school and all other aspects of my life. They were always there for every single parent-teacher conference, school event, sports game, and band concert. It's a whole lot more than a lot of other people can say about their parents.

However, when it came time for high school, my parents were given option to put me in special education (or rather, give me services that I needed—we'll get back to that). There's such a stigma against special education and that students with special needs are not smart. My parents' straight A honors student received good grades, and was smart, so she did *not* need special education services. An entire summer fighting with teachers, principals, and administration, and my parents won. However, in the end, I failed.

You see- I have Tourette's Syndrome and learning disabilities are associated with Tourette's quite often. My parents could not accept the fact that I needed help. I had so many issues prior—new and changing medicines, doctor's visits and lack of acceptance by my peers and teachers. I cannot blame them. They just wanted to be my strongest advocate.

I went through high school with wonderful grades. My parents helped me with school work. My mom read to me and explained books I couldn't comprehend (which was great quality time but nonetheless frustrating and time consuming), assisted me with vocabulary lessons (a.k.a. took over if I could not understand what the sentences were asking), and fought teachers if I did not get a good enough grade. So I graduated high school with an honors diploma and a 4.0 GPA. I got into a wonderful school. However, the school I went to was academically intense and I was *not* prepared.

I remember reading my first assignment. I spend about two hours on the first two pages of the article. I remember thinking to myself, ‘is college level reading *this* much harder than high school?’ But in high school I could not really comprehend either. Throughout college I would start off the semester strong, and 2-3 weeks into the semester, I would give up. I couldn’t comprehend the reading material, I couldn’t process what my professor or classmates were saying (I’m not an auditory learner), and I couldn’t sit through a class without wiggling, ticcing, and doing something other than paying attention. It was hard for me to speak in class. To this day I cannot articulate what I want to say in a coherent way. I would take a few notes of what I would get out of the readings, but I could not summarize it, so answering questions or participating in discussion in class proved to cause me anxiety. My absences grew and my grades dropped. I graduated in four years with a 2.77 (I’m not sure how) but I do know that I did not get very much out of college, sadly. My college did not fail me, either. I failed my college.

I went to a doctor last night and spent an hour with him just talking. His diagnosis? ADHD. We also talked about learning disabilities I may have, although undiagnosed at this time. I always thought it, but I’m glad it’s finally ‘out’ there. We talked about the services I should have received and how it would have been easier to learn *how to learn* when I was younger and in school. We talked about learning styles, encoding and decoding, and different accommodations I could receive in school in the future.

I am in the process of pursuing my Masters in special education. As I cried myself to sleep last night thinking I was too stupid to get my Masters to teach, and that I could never do that—I thought to myself, “What kind of special education teacher would I be if I thought I was too stupid to follow my dreams. As a special education teacher (or any teacher), I have to be an advocate for my students—and students with special needs are *NOT* stupid, just like I’m not stupid. They just have to be taught in a way they can learn effectively. Their teacher has to show them they can follow their dreams, whatever those may be.” Ignacio Estrada has it right: “If a child can’t learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn.” So I woke up with a new motivation—to go out and follow my dreams, and be a teacher who truly understands what her students are going through. And perhaps watch the tearjerker about a want-to-be teacher with a disability, *Front of the Class* again.

About the Author

Danielle Hird is a 25-year old who graduated from Randolph-Macon Woman’s College in 2009 with a Bachelor’s Degree in psychology. She worked as a daycare teacher and a nanny for a while before coming to back to her undergraduate institution to start her MAT in special education. She realized that she wanted to work with even younger children, so she is applying to transfer to a birth to 5 special education program. She lives in Virginia with her fiancé and two yorkies. She is an avid crafter.