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Understanding the heart of special needs and dyslexia. This is episode 76.

The Ten-minute Teacher podcast with Vicki Davis. Every week day you'll learn powerful practical ways to be a more remarkable teacher today.

VICKI: Happy Motivation Monday, teachers. Today we're talking to Melissa Raguet-Schofield @[cloth_mother](#) about her experience and your son's learning differences and his challenges. Tell us a little bit about what your son struggles with as he tries to learn.

MELISSA: It's become pretty obvious he has dyslexia. So he really struggles with reading a lot and some kind of – memorization skills are pretty hard for him.

VICKI: I'm a mom of a dyslexic. Two kids of my three have learning differences and it's not always easy, is it?

MELISSA: No, actually, it's been a really rough experience.

VICKI: You're really involved in his education, aren't you?

MELISSA: Yes, I am. I have kind of had to become involved to get him what he needs.

VICKI: So what kind of involvement have you had to have?

MELISSA: Early on he was identified as a struggling reader. I mean, it was always obvious that reading was difficult for him. He worked with reading specialists at school and he was in this three-tiered response to intervention program at school. But it just really wasn't helping him. And I kept being told, just wait and see, some kids aren't ready to learn how to read at this time. But I just became really determined after he finished first grade and he still really could not read.

To get to the bottom of this and to figure out what was going on – and I just remember sitting down with him one time with a book my mom had sent, it was literally for preschoolers, it had five words on the page, one syllabus words and he just really struggled, he couldn't do it. And that's when I just said to him, "Well, what makes reading so hard for you?" And he said to me, "Mommy, I can see the letters and I know the sounds that they make but I can't put those down together in the right order."

VICKI: And how did that make you feel?

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MELISSA: At that moment my heart kind of stopped because I've been told he needs to work harder, he needs to try harder, he was even called lazy at school. I was told he was challenging and difficult. And that to me – I didn't know what that was. I knew that was something; what he was able to articulate at that point he was 6

years old. I didn't know what that was but that's not lazy, that not "needs to try harder."

VICKI: It's not. And sometimes this is hard, it's not that I need to try harder it's that somebody needs to unlock this and help me, right?

MELISSA: Right. And a friend of mind had actually suggested a few weeks prior to that, she said, "Melissa, he's dyslexic, do you think he's dyslexic?" And I'm a college instructor, I have worked with college dyslexic students and the idea was kind of planted in my head but I rejected it because I thought, "No, no, no, he's not dyslexic. His teachers would tell me if they thought he had a learning disorder." I was really naïve about this.

And so I rejected that idea but when he made that statement to me about not being able to put these letters and sounds in the right order I thought, "What is that? I have to figure out what that is. And that's dyslexia." And the other thing that kind of goes along with that, dyslexics really have compromised working memories but yet they kind of have to do everything with their working memory.

And so I was always told he also had behavioral problems because the teacher would say, "Okay, class, everybody get up, go to the blue bin, get out a box of crayons and get a piece of construction paper and go back to your desk and draw a butterfly."

VICKI: Oh, multi part instructions!

MELISSA: You know, things like this – and all the other kids would have their butterflies and the teacher is hanging them on the wall and Will is walking around saying, "Wait a minute. What about a blue bin? You're going to my limit."

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VICKI: I know it. It breaks my heart.

MELISSA: Right. And I realized he really in kindergarten and first grade internalized this and it was incredibly painful. He would cry and beg me not to send him to school. And I figured this out and I figured out what he needs. That was the hard part. Kind of going that extra step and figuring out he's going to need some extra dyslexia-specific instruction because he just wasn't getting that at school.

VICKI: This is so hard. I blamed myself a thousand ways, I ate something wrong when I was pregnant. But sometimes children are just made different. The beautiful thing, your son drew something and said dyslexia is my gift.

MELISSA: Yeah. And I have told him. You know, dyslexics – what they're essentially trying to do is process and decode language with the right sides of their brain. Our language processing centers are on the website of our brain. So these people, these kids are really wide-brained, they are big picture thinkers, they are problem solvers. They look at things in a different way than I would. That moment I realized

he was dyslexic, I realized what the problem was because he had created a label for himself. The label he had created was “I am not good at reading, I’m not smart, I’m being pulled out of my class for this extra help. I’m still not getting it.

He had a negative of himself. And I told him, “William, you’re dyslexic, and it’s a gift.” And that completely changed everything because now he has a name for what he is. It’s a thing, it’s a real thing. There’s many, many other people in this world just like him and it has really changed his outlook and he has a much more positive outlook about himself.

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VICKI: Melissa, this is obviously Motivation Monday and we wanted to have a story to help all the remarkable teachers out there really kind of get into the world of what’s it’s like to be a mom of a student who struggles. What’s your work to teachers who have that child who struggles or just doesn’t get it? What do you say to those teachers who teach children all over the world that are like your son?

MELISSA: What I really, really wish is that someone would have understood this and known what was going on and I would have really have to figure it out for myself because I rejected that idea for so long, because I kept being told wait and see. And that just wasn’t working for him. So I guess, I just wished that people knew what dyslexia was and how to identify it. Because if I had started getting him help in kindergarten, he would be much farther along now that want he is.

VICKI: It’s so hard because we thought my son had it in K4 but they told us a lot of times kids naturally reverse letters toll after 1st grade, so you really can’t find – that’s what I was told – until later. But then I guess you have to just kind of treat it like, “Okay, they have it” and then you just find out later. It’s so hard, this is hard, you know?

MELISSA: It’s hard. We were told that also, “Oh, it’s normal for kids to reverse letters up until this point. But there are screening tools out there screening tools out there, you can recognize dyslexia in kids as young as kindergarten because there’s so many things that kind of go along with this. I was there was more knowledge about it to really get these kids the help they need because it can be so devastating to them emotionally and in terms of their education as well. The farther behind they get, the hard it is for them to catch up.

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VICKI: Has there been anyone who’s done something right with your son?

MELISSA: Yeah, I found him a dyslexia tutor, I take him to see her twice a week. I wish that we could afford and have the time to go every day. I wish he got that kind of intervention every day. But she is one of the most amazing people in the world and has completely turned our lives around. She works with him using the Orton Gillingham approach which is a multi-sensory approach using specific explicit

instruction for dyslexic kids. And his reading has improved so much, his outlook has improve so much and we are just so thankful to her and everything she's done for us.

VICKI: That's wonderful. We actually use that with my own son so I do know. And I'll tell you this. Last time I had seen the reports, my son who's in 9th grade is reading an 11th grade level. And that's shocking because we know where he came from. But I do know that when you have that intervention, when you have that parent advocate – and Melissa, that's what you are. You are his – I believe – God-given advocate who has been put here to speak for him when he can't speak for himself.

I know that some teachers groan when they see the parent coming with the child with learning difference because they think we're a helicopter parent. When they don't understand that this child is different, they learn differently and we just want you to unlock our child, treat them fairly and hopefully love them and see all their talents because so many kids with learning differences are so talented.

Teachers, as you listen I just hope that you'll look at Melissa's heart and even my heart that we just want you to love our kids and help them be their best.

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