

Putting together the puzzle



Aban attends a community preschool 3 half-days a week. He has just turned 3 years old. Aban and his parents attended the open house prior to the first day of school in September. He walked around the classroom while his parents talked to the teachers, and then enjoyed playing in the sandbox outside. His parents and the teachers sat on the edge of the sandbox and chatted while they watched him. Aban's parents told the teachers that he had not ever been in school before, and that he might get upset during the first weeks of school. The teachers noticed that he did not speak, but rather made high-pitched sounds which he strung together in quick succession. His mother explained that she thought he was slower learning to talk because he was learning two languages. The teachers asked if there were words from Aban's native language that would be helpful for them to learn. Aban's mother said he really enjoyed Sesame street and saying "ABCD, ABCD". She also used this to get his attention when he did not respond to her while in the sand box. She said, "Aban, ABCD, ABCD" and he stopped, looked at her and smiled.



When his parents told him it was time to leave, Aban started screaming and his mother picked him up out of the sandbox. He flailed his legs and kicked her. His father took him from his mother and carried him out of the building.



On his first day at school, after his mother left, Aban cried loudly most of the day. His vocalization consisted of "tse, tse, tse, tse, tse" and "na, na, na, na". He tried several times to go to the classroom door and open it. His loud cries seemed to scare some of the children and also worry some of the parents who were trying to get their children accustomed to a new classroom.



Aban repeated this behavior most of the first two weeks, although he did gradually calm down for brief periods of time and look at toys before starting to cry and scream again. Cathy, his teacher, discovered that he really enjoyed music and when they had circle time with a tape on, he focused on the music and clapped his hands, smiling. He did not sit with the children at the circle, but he came closer when the music was on. Each day, Cathy began to put music on as soon as Aban arrived, and eventually he initiated a ritual of coming into the room, pulling Cathy's arm and taking her to the CD player. She showed him the sign for "more" and said, "more music?" when he did this.



Over the next few weeks, Aban came into the classroom more calmly, and to started to engage with the toys for longer periods of time. He particularly liked the drums or sticks that he could tap together or tap on various objects around the room. He often wandered around the perimeter of the room during group activities such as small group activities, snack time, and circle time. When he noticed parents arriving around noon, he started to cry and scream until his mother arrived, going towards the classroom door and trying to open it. Sometimes Hanna, the assistant teacher, would walk with him down the hall, telling him, "She will come, Aban, let's go see"



About a month into the school year, Jane, the center director, asked Aban's mom whether he had ever had any assessments. His mother said that he had started walking slower, but that he had caught up. Jane shared that at school they had not heard him use any words except to repeat one or two-word phrases, mostly from songs, or to use the vocalizations "tse, tse, tse" and "na, na, na". Jane asked if he had ever been to assessed for speech. His mother said, "we did try that but it didn't work", then added, "I think he is getting better, he will be learning to talk soon around the other children. I think in a few weeks he will get better"



Aban's father, but not his mother attended the parent-teacher conference in November. Cathy and Hanna asked Jane to sit in on the conference. During the conference, Cathy and Hanna described some of the things that Aban enjoyed doing at school. His father mentioned that he liked music because his family had many musicians. Jane suggested that Aban might benefit from an assessment to see if his language skills were developing appropriately. She also mentioned that his wife had said that they had tried speech but it didn't work. Aban's father explained that Aban had started to walk slower because he had a hip problem as a baby, and he had to go to therapy where they "forced" him to exercise his legs. But once the therapy was done, Aban progressed quickly from walking to running. They also had him assessed for speech, but his father felt that because the speech sessions were in the same building (a program through the hospital) and Aban had such a bad association with the place, he started crying and screaming when they took him there for speech. Jane explained that if they contacted the school district, the assessment would likely be in a classroom, much like the one he was in now, and that the assessment would be more like play. Jane explained that if he needed help with his speech and language, it would help him be more involved in the classroom activities. Aban's father agreed, and took the school district contact information with him. However, before he left, he said, "I think a few months and you will see progress, just like he went from walking to running". Jane, Cathy and Hanna left the conference wondering if Aban's father would request an assessment, or if he would "wait and see" what happened.

Discussion Questions:

Each of the puzzle pieces emerged over time and through interaction with Aban and his parents. How would you put the puzzle pieces together, and what picture might emerge?

What additional information about this family do you need to know in order to proceed?

What might be some next steps?