

Book Review: *The Don't-Give-Up Kid and Learning Differences*

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Gehret, Jeanne. (2007) *The Don't-Give-Up Kid and Learning Differences*. Fairport, NY: Verbal Images Press.

Summary

“My mom calls me the Don't-give-up Kid because I keep finding ways to ask the same question. I want to be an inventor when I grow up, but dad says before I can do that I have to learn how to read and behave at school. That's where I stop being the Don't-give-up Kid. That's where everything goes wrong.”

Alex is a young boy who has trouble reading and paying attention in school. Alex also wants to be an inventor, and creating new and unusual things is one of his strengths. However, during reading time at school, he has trouble paying attention and can often be caught playing with something in his hands or drawing in his book. When he is asked to read, he doesn't know where he should be. When Alex looks at the letters on the page they seem to “jump around,” some even look backwards. He tries to read very slowly so he won't make a mistake, he reads well until he gets to the word “top,” but to Alex it looks like “pot” and the whole class laughs at him. At home, Alex's parents try to encourage him to read stories he likes, such as *Edison the Inventor*, but Alex says he doesn't like to read and tries to get someone to read it to him or play a game instead.

Alex doesn't have any friends; he thinks the other kids think he is stupid. His mother notices all these difficulties Alex is having and takes him to a child psychologist. The doctor told Alex that he is very smart, and that he learns in a different way from other children. His mother reminds him that he is the Don't-give-up Kid, and kids like him who learn differently have to try new ways of learning.

Alex began working with the resource room teacher, Ms. Baxter. Alex liked being in this different classroom. It was smaller and quieter, and he could concentrate better. Ms. Baxter started back at the beginning with Alex. She broke down words and sentences so they wouldn't “jump around” on the page, and she gave him extra time so he wouldn't make a mistake. Ms. Baxter also told Alex a story about his favorite inventor, Thomas Edison. She told him that he had learning differences too and it could take him up to ten thousand tries before he would get a new invention to work. Alex saw the similarities in Thomas Edison and himself, and realized that if he kept trying, he would eventually get it. As Alex continued to work harder, reading became easier for him. Soon he could read signs and cereal boxes. He could even do his older cousin's homework.

At the end of the story, Alex sees all the people around him that do things and learn differently like his sister who still needs training wheels on her bike, or his friend Jonathon who can read well but has trouble writing, or his neighbor Kerri that has to wear

braces to fix her teeth. Alex still can't read the Thomas Edison book by himself yet, but he knows that one day he will.

Critique

This book sparked my interest in reviewing children's books about Learning Disabilities. What immediately grabbed my attention is on the cover of the book. The title has the letters 'e' and 'k' backwards, just like the way Alex, or any child with reading difficulties may see it. Even though I know what the words say, even with a few backward letters, it can be distracting to my eye and mind!

This is really a fantastic story about a child overcoming an obstacle and I love that it incorporated a role model, Thomas Edison. It is not advertised enough that there are intelligent and famous people out there who have learning differences, too. It needs to be advocated much more. For a child, just knowing that there are other people that have been through what they are going through can be a great encouragement. And in the case of some children, like Alex, it may be just what they need to be a "Don't-give-up Kid." There was a powerful portion in the book, quoting Edison. One day Edison was asked, "How does it feel to fail ten thousand times?" "I didn't fail ten thousand times, I succeeded at finding ten thousand ways that didn't work." This is the type of mentality we need to be teaching our students, whether they have a learning disability or not. Our society is obsessed with instant gratification, which may feel great at the time, but does not lead to life-long learning. This book is an excellent example of how we all could try a little harder in our own lives.

The author, Jeanne Gehret, shows us the good and bad sides of learning disabilities, based on her own observations as a parent and an advocate for exceptional children. She writes a beautiful story, a story she first wrote in 1990, and has since written many new editions. She has added minuscule details to the story, but mainly new resources to the end for parents and children: an extensive resource guide filled with ideas, topics, and links to help families with children who learn differently. This book was previously titled *The Don't-Give-Up Kid and Learning Difficulties*. She has since changed the last word to "Differences," and in doing she has opened our eyes to a whole new meaning of the word.

I highly recommend that every parent and educator read this book, for yourself and your children/students. It will inspire you, and through that inspiration, we can help our students to grow.