



Serving Lunch

Attachment to Reality

The almost four-year-old boy visiting my classroom was wonderfully verbal. He had just given me a detailed explanation about his family's move into their new home.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Batman," he answered.

"And what is your name when you're not Batman?" I asked.

"Bruce Wayne," he answered."

His mother chuckled. "Isn't that cute? James thinks he's Batman."

James introduced himself to his classmates as Batman. Every activity became a Batman adventure for James. Wooden blocks became grenades against the invisible bad guys on the other side of the room. James as Batman was dangerous and unpredictable.

An attachment to reality is one of several outward signs that healthy learning is occurring in a child. James' behavior was a sign that his normal development had veered off track. James' fantasy of being Batman and imagining learning materials into fanciful objects, such as the Batmobile and the Batcave, indicated that

James had run into a developmental obstacle.

The nature of obstacles is such that they can be difficult to figure out. Fantasy is often a call for more vocabulary and enriching experiences. To help the child reattach to reality we need to feed the child's mind with real objects and experiences that make the real more exciting than the imaginary.

Around the age of four-and-a-half, children experience a growth spurt and legs grow longer. There also is a growth in vocabulary and children, when given the opportunities, can learn upwards of 250 new words a week. At this age, as might be expected, a second language is usually of great interest to the child. When the need for intensive language is not met, children often begin to create fantasy worlds and imaginary friends to help keep the mind engaged, taking a detour from normal development.

I took James' fantasy object of Batman and connected it to a study of bats. A trip to the library armed me with lots of facts and pictures of bats. James and I studied bats, naming their parts of their bodies, delved into terms such as nocturnal, sound waves, amplitude, altitude, radar,

insectivore, and more. This study of bats led us into learning about other flying animals--birds and insects. Visits from Batman began to occur with less frequency and intensity.

The need to feel safe may be a component of superhero fantasies. I invited a police officer to the classroom for a 15-minute visit. Officer Joe told us about his job of keeping children safe. Officer Joe looked around the classroom checking shelves and closets, then made the declaration that our classroom had no bad guys. I watched a look of relief come over James.

In a few weeks, I knew James was back on track when a new student entered the classroom and James extended his hand, saying, "Hello. My name is James. What's yours?"

Being a four-year-old boy is a very fine thing to be indeed. Better than being Batman. An attachment to reality shows development is on course.