

Here We Won't Tell You That You're Not Good at Something

I once heard Yukinori Sawae, Associate Professor at Tsukuba University, speak at a conference. The theme was “The relationship between people with developmental disabilities and sports.” His talk was about creating an environment where even children who are not good at sports or who are clumsy can enjoy themselves and have successful experiences.

He gave an example of a child who had been told that he was not good at school and was not good at sports, but after someone told him that he had good form, he started to run marathons. In the middle of the meeting, I was thinking that this was not only a story about children with developmental disabilities, only about sports. After the meeting, I asked him directly, "This is how I perceived it, but is this different from what you think?" Associate Professor Sawae replied, "That's exactly right!"

“A-kun has had an inferiority complex ever since he was a child,” Mr. Sawae told me. “He was restricted from exercising because of his illness and there were too many things he couldn't do as well as his friends. When he tried, he was laughed at because he wasn't good at what he did. He would try to do it at home in secret, but he just couldn't do it. He didn't want to do it in front of people because he knew he couldn't. A-kun wanted to escape from such situations by giving various reasons and sometimes even lying. The teacher would say innocently enough, ‘Come on. Do it.’ A-kun would scream to himself that he didn't want to do it because he couldn't do it and it was so embarrassing to him, but he was resigned to the fact that they wouldn't understand him anyway.”

This is the underlying reason why A-kun became an eccentric person. It is very cruel to make a child feel inferior from childhood, and I think it is completely unnecessary. We don't need to be made to feel inferior. You can enjoy something even if you are not good at it. Children need a place where they aren't told they're not good at something, and they need a safe and secure environment where they can experience success. That's what children need, and that's the kind of place schools should really be.