

What Really Happens at Preschool after Parents Leave?

By C. M. Oble

I work in a preschool with conscientious, well-trained professionals. I offer this perspective so that the information I am about to disclose will not shed adverse light upon the individuals who care for the young humans I am about to describe. The staff of the facility, where I work, are not to blame for a preschool system that has been in place long enough to impact several generations of Americans. It will, no doubt, continue to affect vulnerable pre-kindergarten's until enough parents form a coalition and end the mass depositing of children into rigidly structured environments, to suffer, daily, from parental separation anxiety. This article is not so much an argument for policy change, as it is a snap shot of what happens after parents leave their 3 or 4 year-olds while they go off to work or school.

Louis is 4 1/2 years old. He cries everyday when his father drops him off. Although Louis has been in the school for over six months, he has not accepted the morning regimen of parting with his father. He stands at the window and watches his parent walk away and remains there until a staff member coerces him into joining others at the breakfast table. Louis plays after breakfast until "circle time," when the group gathers for the teacher to announce the day's routine. Louis usually gets up from his seated position on the floor and removes himself to another room where he is closer to the door where his father was last seen. Every day one or two staff members must oversee Louis until he returns to circle. During outdoor play, Louis tries, repeatedly to leave in order to search for his father. Often, he spends the time after lunch, sobbing for his father. His only consolation comes when he's asked questions about his father: "What did daddy make you for breakfast?" or "What's a game you and daddy like to play?" Then, cheered by pleasant memories of home, he smiles and reminisces of family events. Louis cannot tell time, but, he seems to instinctively know when his dad is about to arrive and becomes focused on the entrance to the school about ten minutes before his father enters to pick him up. His father and mother both work.

Mearnie is five. He's about to start kindergarten. He is a strapping boy with leadership qualities and a love of tractors, tow trucks, and tussling. He's loud, opinionated, and a bit of a bully. When his mother prepares to leave, she kisses him goodbye and he firmly, yet gently repeats two words: "No, stay" Mearnie softly repeats this phrase as his mother walks to her car. Without tears, he turns toward the others and commences vigorous and rough play, often pushing others and throwing toys. He spends the day egg awaiting first one child then another. He is rude to adults and prefers not to follow rules. His brow is constantly furrowed in consternation and he rarely smiles except when taking a toy away from another child or refusing a request from the staff. Mearnie has anger

issues.

Brenda is four. She is delayed with her speech and it takes much patience and attention to discern what she is saying. "Wu wa mah" means: "I want my mom." Brenda varies between angry, defiant behavior and withdrawn, listless wandering. She is not understood by the other pre-schoolers, so, they simply avoid playing with her, which, effectively isolates her from normal interaction with other children. She likes to show me a photograph of her family on a wall where she points proudly to her father and mother. Her eyes light up and she smiles broadly, showing her tiny white teeth as she repeats the sacred words, "Da Da" and "Mah." Recently I noted that she has begun lying on the ground during outdoor play to stare at the sky. I am not a therapist, but, I feel it's reasonable to say that this child is not bubbling over with joy and enthusiasm. Brenda would like to be with Da Da and Mah. Her parents both work.

Paul is five and has a very high IQ. He uses his intellect to impress and plot against adults. While he is a wonder at problem solving, construction, art, and language skills, he is also a mastermind at bodily traps. He devises ingenious methods to trip and trick unsuspecting staff members who walk around with boogers smeared on their clothing, slip on strategically spilled paint, search for mysteriously misplaced art supplies, and topple as he innocently slides a steady foot into phase. Why? He's being given a steady fare of preschool curriculum and he's bored with it. This little boy has a bright future as an engineer or perhaps an architect, but, he's being given finger paints and crayons, to occupy his day. Sadly, this brilliant child grows more bitter each month at being imprisoned in a preschool where independent thinking is, not only not encouraged—it's actually discouraged. I hope the five mentality of our preschool system will not ruin this extremely intelligent human being.

These are the most noticeable examples of anxiety I have seen. There are others—some behaviors are duplications of those afore mentioned and some are less in severity. All children in my facility display some variation of separation anxiety. It is my opinion that the existing preschool infrastructure is not serving the needs of the children. These little people are crying out for help, but, only those who work in the system are there to hear them; the very individuals who depend on the existing preschool system for their livelihoods. I have given you this information as one who is privileged to be with these precious and fragile little human beings during the time that they are away from their families. Please re-read the scenarios and look deeply for your own meaning. Would you want this for your kids?

## Shattuck Cinema Workers

Organizing on the job isn't easy. There are many obstacles that the boss will throw in the way. In service sector jobs the difficulties are more pronounced. Even without boss interference the high turn over rate is always a challenge. Low wages at a part time job means workers quit and look for other jobs. Bosses hope that if workers do get organized, they will be forced to accept a labor board election as their only means of legal recognition. As legal involvement increases, the workers on the job power decreases. Bosses take hard bargaining stances, which result in very slim possibility of winning a decent contract.

Landmark Theater Company is a sixty theater chain owned by Texas billionaire Mark Cuban. Cuban also is the owner of the NBA Dallas Mavericks. Union

organizing first came to Landmark six years ago in Minneapolis. The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) attempted to organize three theaters through an election, which was lost. The Union left and not much happened after that.

One year later workers at a Landmark Cinema in Cambridge, Mass. did win an election with the UFCW. After many months of fruitless contract negotiations the Union and worker's gave up.

In 2006 the IWW began organizing at Shattuck Cinemas in Berkeley. Thinking that a good contract was possible bargaining began. It became clear soon after bargaining started that the company had no intention of accepting any of the worker's demands and bargaining sessions stopped. An odd relationship between the company and the Union exists to this day. There is no labor agreement. But the Union won "certified bargaining rights" Worker's at the Shattuck are "represented" by the IWW. The company is legally required to talk to the Union if it wishes to make changes.

Before the Shattuck cinema worker's started to organize with the IWW, people weren't getting their raises or evaluations. These were things that were clearly spelled out in the employee hand book and the company just didn't hold up their end of the bargain. People would get like a five cent raise after working there for a long time. So organizing and fighting this was the only way to deal with this disgrace.

They had huge rallies when they went public hundreds filled the parking lot workers on shift would walk out and join in the music and fun. The bosses were scared and agreed to stick to a raise schedule.

The company agreed to bargain but never sat down and actual negotiated a contract since that first going union. Contract or not the union has been a great help in more than a couple ways. People can wear their pins and have freedom of speech and organization on the job, plus job security. But it's the "little" things too when the boss asks you to clean a sticking putrid mess of feces from a sick customer without protection other than vinyl gloves the union makes a world of difference. All worker's were guaranteed bio-hazard protection to clean something like that.

At the Shattuck Cinemas worker's have won as a raise schedule, safer working conditions and respect that comes with having power on the job, as a result of organizing with the IWW. (How you know those aren't just words.)