

Coddling millennial snowflakes pt. 1

Social Emotional Learning in an Era of Entitlement

The National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health reports that one in five American children experiences social, emotional, and/or behavioral challenges. In the wake of America's 2016 Presidential election, this statistic presumably spiraled as tearful youth showed themselves unable to cope with the outcome of our democratic process. Widespread meltdown inflicted adult counterparts who fared no better.[1] Defeat simply was not acceptable.[2]

Weak-in-the-knee response stands in stark contrast to the rugged individualism modeled in the Old West. Charles Portis' novel, True Grit (1968), recounts a perilous wilderness journey undertaken by a tenacious 14-year-old girl. Seeking the murderer of her father, Mattie gains respect of the toughest deputy US Marshal whom, for his true grit, she recruits to help get the job done. In the face of grievous loss and severe hardship, Mattie remains tough as nails.[3] Rather than sulk or wither in defeat, she maintains keen focus and, when thwarted, courageously doubles her efforts.[4]

Not so in post-election America. More akin to Chicken Little, bummed kids have given way to depression, fear, and anxiety as if they'd heard too many scary bedtime tales of some terrifying Orange Monster, who swallowed sixteen lesser monsters in order to grasp rule of the kingdom.[5] No doubt kids' responses mirror reactions of their parents and teachers.[6] Few among us escape the dogged drama of what Gregory Johnson calls "a myopic, cult-like sectarian, neo-liberal cocoon of copy-and-paste journalism." [7]

It's no wonder a Washington, D.C. clinical psychologist told

The Atlantic that his clients are showing higher levels of dismay over the election outcome than what he'd previously observed in 25 years of practice. NBC news reported that Democratic staffers were so distraught that "therapy dogs," including two golden doodles, were brought to Capitol Hill to help the bereaved cope with reality.[8]

The Therapeutic Classroom

To soften knowledge that, indeed, the sky is falling, educators at all levels pull out all stops by extending recess periods, offering yoga, meditation, and mindfulness work (K-8).[9] It is undetermined how many youngsters have even the faintest grasp of issues at stake, but no matter. Teachers dutifully create exercises (brainstorming, roleplaying, and listening circles) designed to help youngsters work through their presumed grief. Doing so, educators emphasize "soft skills," such as being introspective and reflective—hardly the stuff of rigorous classical education. But I digress.

In a district-wide letter to teachers and parents, Boston Superintendent Tommy Chang offered students and staff a gaggle of counselors to assuage their seemingly inconsolable heartache. Chang tweeted, "Students, we [heart-emoji] you. You are intelligent and beautiful. We are here for you today and always. Please share your feelings today." [10]

Coddled Campus Crybabies

Immediately following the election, college campus crybabies were equally coddled. Students at Cornell University staged a "cry-in," and Yale University officials helped students vent their "internalized stress" by hosting a "group scream." One Professor at Palo Alto University led post-election "Whine and Wine" group therapy, and free hugs accompanied community speak-outs. Troubled Yale students were excused from midterm examinations, and Berkeley students walked out of classes.[11] Lesson learned: Life's obligations take back seat to one's

feelings.[12]

Other US campuses organized therapeutic poetry readings. Distraught pupils were ushered into binky optional nap- and crying- rooms equipped with adult coloring books, play dough, and healthy snacks. The University of Kansas provided the comfort of therapy dogs; others served cookies, tea and/or hot chocolate.[13]

As a reminder that “people matter,” the Princeton Public Library created a blank wall for Post-it messages, and the William F. Laman Public Library in North Little Rock, Arkansas, created tear-off posters with individual messages of encouragement to reinforce how “awesome” kids are. Students at the University of Iowa were blitzed with handwritten condolence signage.[14]

“Yes!” to Tantrums (Acts of Defiance, Even Civil Disobedience)

Elite New York schools turned a blind eye to violent, anti-Trump protests and walk outs, staged by disgruntled youth and fostered by adult enablers. To spare delicate sensibilities of staff and students, college campuses censored Trump signs and slogans, deemed unnecessarily unsettling to bereaved liberals; and some schools tolerated “F– Trump” Protests. At the University of Texas, representatives of the local Communist Party were permitted to march openly with khaffia-wearing pro-Palestinian groups; however, in the name of peace and harmony, conservative voices were restricted on the University of Rochester campus.[15] Why? Right-leaning messages might crush an already fragile student body refusing to acknowledge Trump as their President Elect.

Dog-Whistle Politics and Sexism

The Presidential election offers a perfect venue for students to cultivate flexibility and true grit by accepting what they cannot change, sorting fact from fiction, and making the most of disappointment, but: Rather than review and applaud

America's election process, rather than guide students to accept defeat, educators instead resorted to excessive coddling, all the while decrying dog-whistle politics and sexism.[16] Using tweets, a video, and a poster, students examined policy goals of the Black Lives Matter Movement." [17] Another classroom activity included creating a timeline for protests against racial injustice and police killings, as initiated by NFL quarterback, Colin Kaepernick.[18]

SEL to the Rescue

Most agree that the staggering pace and ever escalating intensity of 21st century life warrants special attention. Healthy coping requires a unique skill set, hopefully nourished and reinforced early on in the home and at school. That said parents are best equipped to discern and capitalize on unique distinctions of their own child's psyche, temperament, sensibilities, and the like.[19] Accordingly, a perceptive parent intervenes to shape his child's character, set behavioral standards, affirm good choices and, when necessary, correct poor ones—always in a manner consistent with the child's age, gender, and emotional constitution. Unfortunately, too many parents have absconded this role in deference to organs of the Nanny State.

Traditionally, competition, honest evaluation and correction, a deserved "atta' boy," and encouragement to "buck up" went a long way toward establishing what today is called "emotional intelligence." It's thought that grasp of how words, actions, facial expressions, and body language affect relationships measures one's "emotional intelligence." [20]

Today's version of Social Emotional Learning (SEL) claims to teach skills for setting personal goals aimed at working well with others, feeling sympathy/empathy, identifying problems and, while making ethical choices, initiating help-seeking and help-giving behaviors.[21]

This is all well and good, but my questions are these: How are social-emotional benchmark objectives working for kids? Is cooperating with others really accomplished by staging walkouts? Must the focus of sympathy/empathy favor a limited subset of likeminded people? Do political pundits and mainstream media anchors reflect, or instead set, universal behavioral standards? How age appropriate are help-seeking and help-giving behaviors that promote university level “cry-ins” and “group screams”? Lastly, what “ethical” choices rightly affirm “F- Trump” protests and censorship?

Research has shown that learning from failure is a key to success, but it would appear that, unless ascribed to an opponent, failure is no longer an option. Rather than deal with reality, students learn that defeat and disappointment are to be coddled and/or acted out in temper tantrums. In a word, “true grit” is passé. To that, I say, “Come on, America! We can do better than this.”[22]

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Footnotes:

1. www.resourcesforlife.com/docs/item12873 (Accessed 15 November 2016); “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing, 2 Corinthians 4:8 (NAS 1977).
2. “For a just man falls seven times, and rises up again: but the wicked shall fall into mischief,” Proverbs 24:16 (AKJV).
3. “Be strong, and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what is good in His sight,” 2 Samuel 10:12 (NAS).
4. True Grit. (Accessed 15 November 2016)
5. The Tale of Election 2016 w/ Benedict Cumberbatch. (Accessed 15 November 2016)
6. “Then you will prosper, if you are careful to observe the statutes and the ordinances which the LORD commanded Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and courageous, do not fear nor

be dismayed," 1 Chronicles 22:13.

7. Post-Election Fear and Trauma Among College Students and Youth. (Accessed 15 November 2016)

8. Therapy dogs visit capitol hill to relieve post election stress. (Accessed 15 November 2016)

9. In a research article by Meiklejohn, Phillips, Freeman, et al (Integrating Mindfulness Training into K-12 Education, 2012), authors share neurobiology research suggesting sustained mindfulness practice can enhance attention and emotional self-regulation skills.

10. Boston schools offer counseling support for students (Accessed 15 November 2016)

11. Deep radio whine and wine post election group therapy. (Accessed 15 November 2016)

12. "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things," 1 Corinthians 13:11 (KJV).

13. Post election liberal meltdown cry-ins, therapy dogs. (Accessed 15 November 2016)

14. Post election library. (Accessed 15 November 2016)

15. Post election group therapy. (Accessed 15 November 2016)

16. Talking about race without taking about race. (Accessed 15 November 2016)

17. Black Lives Matter lesson series. (Accessed 14 November 2016)

18. Kaepernick & Fellow Athletes Take a Stand. (Accessed 14 November 2016)

19. "Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent], and when he is old he will not depart from it," Proverbs 22:5-7 (AMPC).

20. Imotional Intelegence (Accessed 16 November 2016)

21. Social Emotional Learning (Accessed 16 November 2016)

22. "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence," 1 Timothy 2:1-2 (NKJV).