

Coddling Vs. Accountability

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Goals:

- To understand the difference between coddling and accountability.
- To be aware that educational practices born from a desire to give kids “everything” often leads to low expectations and enable underachievement.
- To help educators reform counterproductive beliefs and practices that contribute to coddling of otherwise capable students.



Stand and Deliver “Ganas”

Ganas= Spanish concept referring to desire and grit.

- What was the staff’s mindset toward the students in this clip?
- If you have heard similar language in your buildings, what do you predict the effects would be on the students?

CODDLING

To treat with extreme or excessive care or kindness, pamper

from *In Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*.

Retrieved June 21, 2010, from

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/coddle>

Treat with great care, like an invalid.

Therefore coddling can be seen as:

relationships that are fraught with **lowering expectations**, inconsistency, empty affirmation, and no true accountability to the school or home standards & values.

Accountability

We have a responsibility to set a high bar for every child, regardless of the challenges the child may face, and provide the teaching and support each child needs to meet those expectations. That's the promise of public education and the right of every child.

We have a responsibility to set a high bar for every teacher. The teacher has the most direct impact on a child's success in the classroom.

Accountability means holding everyone with responsibilities to high standards of performance.

Scenarios

Read the following scenarios and answer the following:

1. Determine if there is evidence of coddling.
2. If yes, identify whether it is academic, behavioral, or social emotional?
3. What part of the definition does the example illustrate?
 - Low expectations?
 - Inconsistent application?
 - Empty affirmation?
 - Lack of accountability to the home or school value and rule structure?

#1 Scenarios

Both students are of equal ability and apply themselves the same and have supportive home environments

You are a student who has just received your grade on a major test. Your teacher calls the class up to get their grades and you hear the teacher say to your friend in front of you who receives an 84%, “Jane, you know you can do better than this. This was not your best effort.”

When it is your turn, however, the teacher says to you, “Great job! You got an 80%!” Both you and Jane have an overall grade of B+.

#2 Scenarios

You were told about a care team that was held for a student you work with, Janine, who has demonstrated consistent social emotional concerns. She has poor attendance, her parents have called and excused her multiple times with a sick excuse – but fail to produce a doctor’s note. She is otherwise quite bright and capable, but when she does attend school, she acts out by either sleeping, distracting others, or being chronically tardy to her classes. She is never consequence for these behaviors because the last time they tried, she cursed out the principal. This is taking a major toll on the classroom teacher who is at her wits end. The principal is extremely frustrated because of a lack of cooperation from home.

The care team is constructing an intervention plan that looks like this:

- 1) Janine’s schedule will be modified so that she will have regular breaks in her day. She will go to her specials because she likes those, but at least once a day, she will be excused at the beginning of communication arts (which she doesn’t like at all) to go and meet with the gym coach and shoot hoops for 20 minutes because she likes him and loves basketball. The team said she needed to build a relationship with a trusted adult.
- 2) When she acts out during any part of the day, she gets 3 warnings. After the 3rd warning, she loses points toward a secondary reinforcer. She never has to apologize to staff or students for her disruption.
- 3) The data team will track her behaviors and see what they look like after 6 weeks. The results are not ever shared with the parents because the parents might have a fit.

#3 Scenarios

You have been given the charge of writing an intervention for Michael. Michael is very intelligent, but rarely lives up to his academic potential. He fails to study and take school seriously. He says one day in session, “Why try? I am never going to amount to anything anyway. It’s not cool being smart.”

You sit down with Michael to develop his interventions so that he will not miss any core class time. You develop a schedule with his administrator and parents where he will meet weekly with a successful high school cadet teacher (who happens to have a similar background to Michael) before school to discuss goals and to do tutoring.

Michael keeps track of his grades on a grade sheet, and has his teachers and his parents initial it at the end of the week. You sit down weekly with him to review this document and help him graph his progress on graph paper. He reflects with you about what’s not cool about being smart. Through this, he works on his negative self-talk.

Michael is presented with the opportunity to select from several student leadership positions in the building. His participation as head of the building recycling club is contingent upon a) his attendance at the meetings with the high school tutor, b) his ability to turn in quality home and school work, and c) staying out of trouble.

You are encouraged as you watch Michael grow in his academic engagement and success.

Before this plan, he was scheduled for special education testing by individuals who had not taken much time to develop a relationship with him.

Coddling- What it really is...

- Instead of actually helping, coddling is in reality self-serving for the giver by psychologically affirming one's unacknowledged biases - while simultaneously harming students by locking them into a position of learned helplessness.
- Many educators have unacknowledged biases toward students different from themselves. These biases lower expectations, and miscommunicate relational intentions to students.
- Harlow's Baby Monkey experiment can provide insight into how coddling damages children.

How do we reform our practice?

- In your practice, where do you notice coddling showing up?
- How will you establish accountability in your classroom/school setting?
- True reform requires inquiry and reflection about one's own stance and practice, as well as concerted efforts to change.

Coddling - What Does it Look Like in Schools?

- Setting low expectations for students
- Limited follow through on discipline
- Misuse of timeouts supposedly designed to help students be more attentive upon their return.
- Befriending students in attempts to be liked as opposed to letting students know you care
 - A caring teacher is easily identified by being respectful, kind, fair and structured – from Character Education Partnership
- Making assumptions without knowing the students' background. “Their life is so hard, they couldn't possibly have time or parental support to do their homework.”
 - Kills the spirit of overcoming obstacles, kids get what they want – the path of least resistance, and student fails to grow their character

The Establishment of Accountability Paradigm- Setting Expectations

- Created in part by establishing clear, reasonable and reachable expectations
 - Trampoline and scaffolding
- Expectations need to be high enough so that children can experience the trials & triumph of “stretching” for and reaching a standard (Spirit of Excellence)
- Expectations that are too low promote negligible growth and mastery of concepts.

The Establishment of Accountability Paradigm- discipline stance

- Consistency, consistency, consistency (leads to stronger relationships) (The very first leadership group)
- Be direct and specific about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors
- Stay out of power struggles
- Enforce violations of ground rules [by proxy, can you enforce rules not established or clearly understood?]
- Don't communicate consequences as threats.
- Communicate that consequences rendered will be a result of their choices. Restorative practices will help students take responsibility for their actions.
- Ensure that you follow through on the pre-established consequences, or else your word loses its credibility, and the lessons attempted to teach also lose their effectiveness.
- Help students apply moral and performance goals to real world situations.

adapted from Why Do they Act that Way by David Walsh, 2004

References and Resources:

The Pygmalion Effect

Thank you!

Any questions?

Thank you!!