Don’t Steal the Struggle

Last week, I heard this story on the radio as I traveled home from CSP. As I listened, I thought about the children I spend so much time with and their parents who care so much about them.

The Lesson of the Butterfly
by Paulo Coelho

A man spent hours watching a butterfly struggling to emerge from its cocoon. It managed to make a small hole, but its body was too large to get through it. After a long struggle, it appeared to be exhausted and remained absolutely still.

The man decided to help the butterfly and, with a pair of scissors, he cut open the cocoon, thus releasing the butterfly. However, the butterfly’s body was very small and wrinkled and its wings were all crumpled.

The man continued to watch, hoping that, at any moment, the butterfly would open its wings and fly away. Nothing happened; in fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its brief life dragging around its shrunken body and shriveled wings, incapable of flight.

What the man – out of kindness and his eagerness to help – had failed to understand was that the tight cocoon and the efforts that the butterfly had to make in order to squeeze out of that tiny hole were Nature’s way of training the butterfly and of strengthening its wings.

Sometimes, a little extra effort is precisely what prepares us for the next obstacle to be faced. Anyone who refuses to make that effort, or gets the wrong sort of help, is left unprepared to fight the next battle and never manages to fly off to their destiny. (Adapted from a story sent in by Sonaira D’Avila)

Two things immediately came to mind. The first was the Growth Mindset and how energy and hard work are the answers to success. The man in the story had no understanding, actually no knowledge, of this concept. This butterfly had no opportunity to survive for it was denied the opportunity to use energy and hard work to escape the chrysalis on its own. My second thought was that this man had acted out of concern, thinking he was being helpful. His intentions were honorable, caring, maybe even loving. But how misguided, even wrong, were his actions when he witnessed the result.

There is such a fine balance to be struck in the role of parenting. How much is enough? How much is too much? What do parents do to support their child’s learning and when do they take it on as their own? Laughingly, I overheard a parent say, “I told him this was his Explorer year, I survived fifth grade myself years ago!”
Now is the time to allow your youngster to experience the struggle. It can never begin too early, so make sure it begins now. As a parent, if you provide the time, the materials and the space for learning, you have done your job. Facilitate the work of the student as best you can, however never let your child think they need your help. Never let them think you do not believe them to be capable. Hold high expectations and let consequences play out. They will never be in a safer place to deal with the consequences than with you at home and us here at CSA and CSPA.

Struggle builds confidence! Struggle builds self-esteem! Struggle allows us to actualize our possibilities! Ultimately, struggle is good!

Don’t steal the struggle!

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