



# Helping Children to Be Successful:

## DEVELOPING GRIT

by Rachel Buechler

A little girl sits at the table with the Snap Dressing Frame. She has picked it up several times before today and quickly returned it to its stand after a short attempt. Today she picks it up and places it on the table. She tries the first snap; it doesn't connect. She looks at the snap from the left side, then the right side. She tries again; it doesn't connect. She looks at her teacher for help. The teacher demonstrates how to connect the snap then returns it to its unconnected state. The child moves onto the snap above and, as she pushes down, she hears it connect. She pauses, smiles. Then goes back to try the first one; it still doesn't connect. She squeals in frustration. She takes a moment to look again and again; then she keeps trying. This continues for twenty minutes until she looks at the dressing frame and the three connected snaps. She sighs and smiles then exclaims, "I did it!" Her teacher says, "You did it!" The little girl continues to look at the completed work before quickly taking it apart again to repeat the lesson.

There is so much for us to learn from this toddler's determination to work on mastering this lesson. She is showing us how we can develop a skill that will place us ahead of others in the working world: grit. Grit is what keeps us working with our children, even when it is hard, even when we think we aren't getting the results we want, or the progress is slower than we hoped. No matter what, we keep thinking of new ideas to try and keep believing we will see results. We are displaying grit. How can you help your students, or your own children, develop grit?

### 1. EXPRESS FRUSTRATION

Let the child experience frustration. This is hard to do when we can see the solution to their problem is so easy for us to fix. As they try to fit puzzle pieces into a board, we can see they just need to turn it a little further, and we can feel so helpful if we just showed them how it fit by reaching over to place the piece. If we continue to solve the child's frustrations, we are robbing them of the opportunity to feel greater success in working through the issue. We are also telling them that anytime they are frustrated, they should rely on an adult to solve the issue. We need our future leaders to learn how to problem solve and persist to solution by accepting frustration, then working through it.

### 2. THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF HELP

During the Dressing Frame story, the teacher did show that the snap can be connected and, thus, modeled the action for the child. The teacher also returned the snap to its original state so the child would continue to work from where she left off. Deciding exactly what help



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children need is critical to allowing them to persist with the challenge, but not discourage them by completing it on their behalf. It also helps children to learn when to ask for help.

### 3. ENCOURAGE REPETITION

Even if children don't succeed with lessons, tomorrow might just be the day they will figure it out. Maria Montessori believed repetition was the key to mastering a skill. If an infant went to walk for the first time but fell after one step, and we said: "Looks like that's not the activity for you," they would likely feel discouraged from attempting it again. Our response is more likely to be supportive, helping them up and encouraging them to try again and again until they are walking with stability. This is how we should help our children attempt many lessons in different areas of the classroom or skills at home. There are times when a child masters a difficult skill and then finds joy from repeating the lesson over again, as it gets easier and easier each time. As new skills are developing, mistakes will be made. When mistakes are made, we must be matter of fact about them. As the book,

*The Montessori Toddler*, says, "Mistakes are simply opportunities to learn... if they break or spill things, we can have things at the ready for them to help tidy it up.... We can model being friendly about mistakes by not taking ourselves too seriously when we make mistakes" (Davis, 2018, p.93).

### 4. CELEBRATE VICTORY

The child had picked up the Snap Dressing Frame several times on various days before and realized, through self-awareness, that this was not a task that would give her immediate success. There were other skills that needed to be built first. This shows great knowledge in knowing her own abilities and where she is ready to seek the next challenge. By allowing children to guide their own learning journeys through choice and freedom, they develop more than the academic skills. They build skills in planning, organization, order, and determination (or grit). The growth of these skills allows children to feel internal celebration when they complete activities on which they have been working. This grows confidence as

children learn how to fail and keep persisting until they succeed. As the book, *The Confidence Code*, says, "failing fast allows for constant adjustment, testing, and then quick movement toward what will actually work" (Kay & Shipman, 2014, p. 140).

#### REFERENCES:

Davies, S. (2018) *The Montessori Toddler*. Amsterdam: Jacaranda Tree Publishing  
Kay, K. & Shipman, C. (2014). *The Confidence Code*. New York: HarperCollins



**Rachel Buechler** earned her BA in Education in 2009 before relocating to Charlotte, NC from England, UK.

She joined Charlotte Montessori School in 2010 and was the Lead Toddler Teacher for three years. During that time she earned her Infant/Toddler Montessori Certification. Ms. Buechler enjoys the individualization of the Montessori classroom for each child and watching them follow their own unique interests as they learn and grow in the classroom.

### ADULT INTERVENTIONS THAT DISCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRIT:

■ Jumping in to help before you have assessed exactly how much help the child truly needs. Give only this amount of help. The joy within the child comes from persisting through a difficult task to reaching completion.

■ Saying "good job" or "I like it when you \_\_\_\_". These statements make the success about you and not about the internal development of the child.

■ Moving the child away from a task because you think it looks too difficult prevents developing grit. Let them try; model it. Help them to determine what is too difficult. Don't become frustrated or upset about mistakes made.