

MEETING SUCCESS WITH HUMILITY AND FAILURE WITH CONFIDENCE

by Amee Newsome, Grammar School Instructor

Anyone who says they know me should be able to tell you one thing. I am a diehard North Carolina Tarheels basketball fan. I married into the cult twenty-four years ago, and I was quick to drink the Carolina blue Kool-Aid. Devoted fans stick with their team through the ups and the downs, and through February it looked as if this season would test my loyalty. A new coach, new players, and the struggle to find our rhythm threatened to silence my taunting toward those I love who misguidedly cheer for Duke. After a particularly devastating loss to an unranked Pittsburgh team in mid-February, Coach Hubert Davis reignited his team's passion for the legacy that is Carolina basketball and reminded them that failure does not define them. "You can sit here and whine and complain and point fingers and make excuses and continue to be down on yourself," Davis said, "or you can show up the next day ready to fight and compete and get after it." Make no mistake. There was disappointment, but it became overshadowed by determination. There was the feeling of failure, but the knowledge that success was at their fingertips pervaded.

At New Covenant, we speak into what we want our students to become. Our Portrait of the Graduate asserts that New Covenant graduates encounter success with humility and failure with confidence. Society tends to think of education in terms of passing and failing,

and athletics in terms of winning or losing. Winning a game or acing a test is met with celebration, but what happens when we don't achieve what we set out to do? We often forget the lessons to be learned through failure.

In her book on differentiation in education, Carol Ann Tomlinson (2014) points out that research shows us the human brain is malleable. Your intelligence is not determined when you are born but is shaped through your experiences, both successes and failures. The role of the teacher is to provide students with an education that challenges them to learn and grow while also providing the support that is needed to keep moving forward. The path down which we are guiding is not always easy, and it will be met with failure at times. This is a hard lesson for anyone to learn. Children have grown accustomed to receiving trophies at games where no one but the competitive spectators keep score. Parents are tempted to scoop up their children before their knees ever scrape the sidewalk. Young adults have not experienced the reward of hard work because those around them applaud their mediocre efforts and call them great. When we do not allow our children to fail, we are taking away the opportunity for their character to be tested and formed. Students must know that failing is a part of success. Without failure, the taste of victory is not as sweet.

In my third-grade classroom, we boldly raise our hands to share our mistakes with our classmates and share what strategies we have learned to fix them. We celebrate the struggles that help us get where we are. We recently finished a writing project on the mythical story of Icarus. There were many steps to take and corrections to be made, and the process was challenging for even the

best of writers. As each student finished, they were given the opportunity to push the cow buzzer to celebrate the good "moos" that they had accomplished one of the hardest assignments of third grade. They encountered this struggle with confidence knowing that they would have a finished product that they could be proud of. At each step, they were learning what it took to move forward and knew their teachers there to support them along the way. When the final project was complete, the joy on their faces was priceless, and the pain of the process was forgotten as they pushed the buzzer to hear the applause of their classmates.

What does encountering failure with confidence look like at New Covenant? It's a grammar school teacher guiding a student in learning to read after they have struggled with phonograms for months; music teachers aiding a student in mastering a cello solo after hours of practice; seniors presenting their theses after months of research and revisions; or coaches rallying the team to come from behind to defeat a long-time rival for the first time in school history.

Don't be afraid to let your children experience failure. Be there to support them along the way. Help them learn from their mistakes so they move forward with confidence, knowing hard work and lessons learned will one day lead to success just as it did for my Tarheels: a team that decided to learn from their failures and turn their season around, a team that was once counted out but ended up fighting for the national title.

Writer's note: UNC fans are still working on encountering success with humility. Until we've mastered that...GO HEELS!!

Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The differentiated classroom : Responding to the needs of all learners*. ASCD.