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Failure Facing Pedagogy in First Year Rhetoric and Composition Classrooms

A Thesis by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English

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April 2023

Failure Facing Pedagogy in First Year Rhetoric and Composition Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Failure Facing Pedagogy in First-Year Rhetoric and Composition Classrooms

by Karuna Hin

Failure in academia is commonly defined as not succeeding, missing the mark, or receiving a “below average grade or score” (Inoue 333). However, this perception of failure works to instill a fear in students that may last through their academic journey. Throughout a student’s academic journey, they are taught to operate within the binary of success and failure. “According to self-worth theory, in school, where one’s worth is largely measured by one’s ability to achieve, self-perceptions of incompetence can trigger feelings of shame and humiliation” (De Castella, Byrne and Covington 862). Teachers have attempted to address this problem throughout first-year composition classrooms. One example of this is process based pedagogy that would focus on the steps students would take towards a result rather than focusing entirely on the product that a student produced. Yet, we must ask ourselves: when do we deem the process as successful? The process is deemed successful only after the quality of student’s work has been deemed acceptable by the same assessment metrics as the standard quality-based criteria. What this demonstrates is that there is a fundamental misunderstanding that we associate with failure. Someone who fails is automatically associated with being below those who succeed despite the commonly held stance that failure is the precursor to success.

Unfortunately, it is inevitable that instructors will have to assess students. At the university level it is a fundamental truth that institutions will demand that instructors give students a letter grade at the end and though there are new variations of grading that are always being tested, a letter will ultimately define a student’s efforts at the end of class. With the inevitability of assessment, instructors are presented with the unique position of equipping

students with the necessary skills to cope with failure through their academic journey while balancing their assessment methods to encourage this. This study will examine the history of our understanding of failure and attempt to provide possible solutions through collecting a series of assignments that could help students in a first-year composition classroom.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
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ACCJC	Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
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EPC	Educational Policies Committee
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GSI	Graduate Student Instructor
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1 Musing on Failure

How did I get here? When was it that I became so afraid of failing? Why do I fear failure so much when we are told so often that it is simply a part of the process? I knew that no successful person is born successful and stays successful through their entire life. Yet the thought of a bad grade pushes me to do more not because I strive for excellence but because I fear failure.

This fear followed me throughout my university years and into the present. Not only did I begin associating a poor grade with failure, but I also did everything in my power to avoid academic failure. That was when I found Professor Mary Ressler's story of an activity in her undergraduate class that had students bring in a symbolic object that "represent(s) their experiences with someone who had a significant impact on their learning" (Ressler 105). One student brought in a red pen and shared how a grade school English teacher would mark up her papers and use them as an example of what not to do. For this student, and others who have experienced something similar, this was something that pushed them away from writing and shaped what they believed they could be.

I, like this student, had a similar experience with my papers being marked from top to bottom in my English classes. I think back to these marks and remember believing that if I simply fixed what was highlighted as bad, then my paper would have less marks and be a "good" paper. I knew all these problems were related to the inherent problems within assessment, but there was one question that remained: What have teachers done to prepare me for failure?

In the academic sphere failure is reductively defined as: not succeeding, missing the mark, or receiving a "below average" grade or score (A. Inoue 333). Much of this association is due to failure only ever being introduced into a classroom as the antithesis of success. Since

failure is rarely conceived as anything different, students are rarely taught that it is okay to fail despite failure consistently being painted as part of the process towards being successful. With limited failure-facing pedagogy in the classroom, teachers are doomed to reinforce that failure is something to be avoided without gaining the growth effects of failure that are necessary to the process of succeeding.

However, we must consider the inevitability of assessment for teachers. It would be presumptuous to assume that teachers could avoid the assessment issues when institutions will almost always require teachers to assess students with a letter grade at the end of the course. As teachers we must ask ourselves: How can we teach students to understand failure as more than the antithesis of success? Scholars have taken to answering this question in many ways. Some methods of employing failure into rhetoric and composition classrooms include implementation of process pedagogy, different methods of assessment, and workshop activities. In this project I will seek to demonstrate how current methods of assessment have influenced how students and teachers perceive failure as well as how the first-year rhetoric and composition classrooms are a good starting point for the implementation of methods that would aid students in their academic journeys. I am not an instructor, so I have no data to provide based on my own class because of my own personal fear of failure that prevented me from even attempting to apply for an instructor's position. My decision was rooted in my anxiety towards failing yet. Despite this though, I believe that the voices of instructors of first-year courses are significant. To include their voices, there is a survey distributed to instructors of first-year courses that probes their ideas of failure, how those ideas find their way into the classroom, and what these ideas reflect about the overarching discourse of failure in the academic sphere.

2 How Does Failure Fit into the First-Year Composition Classroom?

In 1922 Allan Gillbert attempted to summarize the responsibilities of teachers of what we would now call first year rhetoric and composition classes. “The teacher of Freshman (English) who gives himself to trivial things and neglects the weightier matters of good literature does not make his course a power for literacy” (Gillbert 400). Though dated in many ways with the use of terms such as “Freshman” and the presupposition that teachers would be men, Gillbert does touch on the fundamental purpose of a first-year rhetoric and composition classroom which proves to be interesting when we look at it through the lens of the present day. We must consider how these concepts have changed throughout the years and how it now incorporates things such as failure facing pedagogies into the classroom.

We must ask ourselves then, should understanding failure be considered a fundamental competency? Fortunately, the direction assessment has trended recently leads us to believe that the answer is yes. Many institutions implement multiple draft writing into the process of writing which certainly encourages students towards understanding the importance of the process over the result. However, when should the process be considered successful? When has a student improved their mark from unsatisfactory to satisfactory? How do we assess a student’s progress? Ultimately, the process will only be deemed successful once the process of writing results in a student receiving a higher mark than they had previously received or would have received otherwise. So, then the question becomes are we teaching students the process of acquiring better grades or the process of composition?

3 The Problem of Assessment

If the process of writing is only deemed successful if a student's grade improves, then process pedagogy is reinforcing the same stigma of fear that has become so common with student hood. A student's value within the academic sphere will always be tied to performance in some estimation and because of this, eliminating in its entirety the problem of assessment is impossible. Jesse Stommel outlines that assessment can never truly reach the goal of learning. "Students are increasingly conditioned to work within a system that emphasizes objective measures of performance, ranking, and quantitative marks" (Stommel 34). In working within this system, students continue down a path that reinforces superficial evaluations of learning.

However, as stated before, the problem of institutions remains. Stommel implores teachers to find their own methods of evaluation that do not involve evaluating their students' performances with superficial letter grades. For Stommel, evaluation is a student driven process that relies on two to three student self-evaluation exercises throughout the course of a semester. Stommel also provides a list of grading alternatives that include: Self-assessment, process letters, contract grading, portfolios, and peer-assessment. Stommel's ideas in grading unearth some of the larger problems within student hood regarding the fear of evaluation. If we have already determined that, to some degree, grade evaluations are not entirely reliable for teachers or students, then to have students work into this system of superficial evaluation is inefficient. However, the alternatives that Stommel and other professors present gives students a clearer definition as to why they are being assessed. Echoing the ideas of Peter Elbow, it is equally important the student understands the "why" and "how" they are being assessed. The strategies we will look at incorporate a student's understanding of the assessment criteria and rewrite preconceived ideas about assessment that have lingered in academia.

4 The Institution and the Teacher

Though the full scope of how institutions are affected by greater bodies of authority and how that affects the local professor cannot be explored in its entirety in this paper, it must be noted that the scope of that conversation is not fully covered here. However, it is important to the overarching goal of this paper that these interactions are taken into consideration because the assessment issue is one that finds itself in multiple spheres not exclusive to just professors and students. The Educational Policies Committee (EPC) cites the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) as an authority body that influences grade distributions which greatly complicates the process. “While it’s very clear that the ACCJC believes that a high grade is *not*, in itself, evidence of effective student learning, there are many faculty who continue to believe that grades on essays and exams are the best evidence of student learning” (Educational Policies Committee 15). It is unfortunate that there is no faculty survey or data provided by the EPC, but this perception of a professor’s “effectiveness” is rooted in our understanding of success and failure as determinant towards the value or ability of individuals.

The EPC continues exploring the various factors that affect grading distributions and separates them into two umbrella categories of things that professors cannot control, such as enrollment procedures of an institution and the ACCJC guidelines, and things professors can control, such as their personal ideas of rigor and job security. However, this conversation that the EPC engages with is significant in that all of the factors that were deemed “in the professor’s control” were tied to their perceptions of how their grading distributions would be viewed by their institutions. Fear of job security and fear of student evaluations were the most notable things cited in this because these were factors that directly generated pressure to “balance” a grading distribution. This study by the EPC is outdated in many ways, specifically how they

view competency within students and effectiveness within professors, but I find some of the broader perceptions of success and failure to still be relevant. The perception by institutions that a professor is effective based on their grading distributions is predicated on the idea that for there to be A students there must also be F students. If every student got an A in a class, the perception would be that the professor is not meeting standards of rigor and difficulty.

Though we have certainly come a long way from this Freirean “banking model”, as indicated by the volume of research in improving assessment methods and student learning/engagement, there are still some aspects of these dated viewpoints that are woven into the society around the classrooms. The professor is fundamentally seen as a distributor of grades that validates their classroom through the grade distributions by the institution. Good grades are equivalent to success just as wealth is the mark of success within the capitalist society. So even when flexibility is granted to the professor, as we have seen in more recent practice, the question remains: how do we tackle the success / failure binary when the problems are so deeply rooted?

5 Fear of Failure

Despite scholars understanding “failure can be an important part of writing development” (Brooke and Carr 62), fear of failure is still a huge part of being a student. The search for self-acceptance is one of the highest human priorities so for students “where one’s worth is largely measured by one’s ability to achieve, self-perceptions of incompetence can trigger feelings of shame” (De Castella, Byrne and Covington 862). When a student feels they do not have the competency or the ability to achieve then feelings of shame will arise along with multiple coping mechanisms such as defensive pessimism and self-handicapping. “In the writing classroom, when assessment is tied too completely to final products, students are more likely to avoid risking failure for fear of damaging their grades, and this fear works against the learning process.” (Brooke and Carr 63). The students' fears will guide their engagement through the classroom and if not addressed it will only work against them.

Frederick Rhodewalt and Kristian Hill dive deep into the psychological processes that drive students towards these sorts of behaviors. “Though their acts and statements self-handicappers proactively arrange circumstances so that failing performances will not be interpreted in ways that threaten self-esteem” (Rhodewalt and Hill 388). That is to say that when students place themselves into situations where failure would be the common outcome, students are able to attribute their failure not to a lack of ability but rather unfortunate circumstances that would have them in an unfavorable position to achieve high marks even if that position was brought upon by themselves. So, if students are already a group that is assumed to have a high fear of failure, we can also attribute them as a group with high probability to create handicaps for themselves to cope with failure.

Fear of failure also discourages risk taking within the classroom.

Creativity is frequently positioned as being vital to educational futures, particularly for the technology-driven learning settings and work lives that students face. However, the rhetoric about creativity lacks sufficient consideration of the link between creativity and failure (Creely, Henriksen and Crawford 2).

Creely links failure and risk taking to creativity because they are inseparable qualities from one another. What Creely ultimately concludes from this statement is that without changing our rhetoric about failure we do not allow students the chance to be creative can create quality failure because the learning environment is already one that does not support the student's creativity or risk taking.

Another way we can think about this is using Albert Bandura's "self-efficacy theory". Bandura describes this as the belief that one has in being able to execute a specific task successfully to obtain a specific outcome. Critically, Bandura differentiates this belief by stating "given appropriate skills and adequate incentives, however, efficacy expectations are a major determinant of people's choice of activities, how much effort they will expend, and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations" (Bandura 194). The efficacy expectations Bandura references is not believing whether an individual has the skills to accomplish a task, but rather what an individual believes they can accomplish with the skills currently available.

Under this logic, a goal has *already* been set within the mind of the individual and the only thing left for them to do is execute. However, what if the goal is simply to not fail? If we already know that students will inevitably face the fear of failure in some facet of their academic journey, then what they can accomplish with the current skill sets is a very dangerous prospect when linking this to the ideas of self-handicapping because that may subconsciously become the goal of a student so that they may avoid failure. By being unaware of their skills, and by

extension unsure or uncertain of themselves, students find themselves accomplishing less than what they are capable of because they do not believe they have the skillset to do so.

The fact that all these factors are identifiable now means that measures to address these fears can be, and have been, produced. Practices that enable students to develop their own dialogues with their failures have been gaining traction. By acknowledging a student's fear of failure as a deeply impactful aspect of being a student professors may be able to incorporate more failure facing pedagogy into their classrooms even if it is something as simple as pointing them towards resources that could aid them in confronting their failure (i.e. a university's mental health resources) or speaking of failure within the classroom that could change a student's perspective on their own personal failures.

6 Voices of Instructors of First-Year Composition

Since I was not an instructor, I wanted to include the voices of some instructors of first-year composition courses to see what they think about failure and how it finds its way into their classrooms. I wanted to look at instructors that were not experienced veterans of teaching to see what their perceptions were about failure because I found this to be a more accurate look at how the dominant discourse of failure could be reflected through instructors who have not heavily studied the topic but are acquainted with it. All the instructors surveyed had already completed the university's composition theory class, which prepares them for the role of instructor through the exposure to the prominent questions that scholars engage with regarding classroom ethics and culture. It is safely presumed that their experience with how failure finds itself into the classroom would be thin and reliant. What the survey questions intend to answer are how does the overarching discourse surrounding failure affect these instructors that are new to teaching? How can we look at these answers as a reflection of the way we perceive failure as a whole?

1. What does failure look like in the classroom?
2. What does progress for a student look like in the classroom?
3. Do you believe your students enter the classroom with a fear of failure?
4. What measures do you take to address this fear if any at all?
5. Do you feel pressure to fail students?

These instructors were part of a university's Graduate Student Instructor (GSI) program allowing graduate students to instruct a first-year rhetoric and composition class. The range of experience was between one to four semesters taught between all five of the instructors

surveyed. These instructors were also part of their universities graduate student instructor program meaning that they were at or around the same standing of an adjunct. Though a short survey, the purpose was less about building a high volume of specified responses to argue a point and more about gauging the ideas and awareness of the instructors who would be in contact with first-year students.

For the first question, the instructors had mixed responses that revolved around how they structured the classes assignments and grading. There was a focus on the actions that could earn a student a failing grade. Things like “If a student doesn’t participate in class”, or “when students don’t show up” regarding attendance. Interestingly there was a bit of variance in the responses regarding who was responsible for the students getting bad grades. Two of the surveyed instructors felt that if a student was receiving a bad grade, it was more a reflection of their efforts or abilities as a teacher. One professor noted that the student’s actions will yield the result of failure or success. What this question demonstrates is that all actions for failure are still linked to a failing or passing grade. Echoing the ideas of Stommel, the assessment problem is very much present here, but perhaps more interestingly failure is still seen as the outcome to be avoided.

The second question works in conjunction with the first question to probe the instructors for their viewpoints on student progress and what that looks like. The instructor answers to this question for all the surveyed instructors focused on the distribution and interpretation of feedback for the student from the instructor. All the instructors mentioned a student’s progress through the scaffolded assignments, inclusion of weekly feedback from the instructor into future works, and classroom participation as marks of improvement for the student. Some of the instructors marked how they shifted their grading schemes from semester to semester as well, making some portions of the class heavier in grade weight, specifically the participation aspect

of a classroom. These ideas reflect the conclusions that Carr made regarding process pedagogy revolving around the improvement of a student's grade or behaviors that would improve their grade. These sorts of responses are a demonstration of how deeply embedded the problems of grading and progress are. I do not believe any of these responses that these instructors have implemented are inherently correct or incorrect, but they are all tied to the grading problem.

This effect is only magnified when looking at the third question. The third question yielded only one "no" answer who argued that it is a case-by-case basis that depends on many factors of the student's personality, upbringing, and other factors outside of the classroom. However, despite this one answer, the awareness of the instructors of the fear of failure within students was present. For the most part, the instructors agreed that students who were entering college would have a fear of failure. Though the teachers know that there is a fear of failure that stems from grades, there is an inherent difficulty in creating a classroom that encourages or supports failure as a third possibility within the classroom while also handing out final assessments that will be meaningful to both the student and the instructor.

When asked what methods these instructors were using there was a variety of strategies that revolved around pass or fail assignments, participatory assignments so that students may get a feel for a certain type of work, and combo grade schemes that mixed contract grading with the classical A – F scale were some of the ideas incorporated into the GSI classrooms. These ideas, though certainly helpful, are more so to reduce the pressure that grades will place on the student. They are relief plans for the students because of the inherent grading problem that could reaffirm fears that are already present in the student. One instructor noted that their methods of reducing this fear of failure was affirming to the student that the tools to not fail were already given to them in the form of instruction. In many of these ideas, the underlying subtext is that the only

two possibilities there are that of succeeding or failing so to avoid failure there are steps to be taken that will lead to an earned good grade. What this demonstrates is the that the dominant discourse of failure is still present amongst instructors even if indirectly. Instructors would continue to gravitate towards the methods that they are already familiar with, or methods that reinforce the success / failure binary as the dominant discourse has already laid out.

This brings us to the fifth question of the survey asking the instructors if the institution directly placed pressure on them to grade in a certain way. Though none of the instructors answered yes to this question, all of them cited members of the faculty that they knew who faced the pressure to fail students because of the institution's standards of rigor echoing the ideas from the ECP's "Promoting Thoughtful Faculty Conversations" where they considered "rigor" and job security as factors that affect grading distributions. Only one of the instructors answered that there is simply no pressure to fail students and that a student's grade would reflect whether they followed the steps from question four. Though anecdotal, it was fascinating to see that the conversation the EPC brought up nearly twenty years ago regarding factors that may affect grade distribution is one that still seems to linger around today. Though these instructors will have the freedom within their classroom to experiment with different assignments and grading schemes there will always be that looming pressure to meet institutional standards to keep one's job.

What the survey yielded was an affirmation that students' fear of failure is something perpetuated by institutions that fundamentally limit what an instructor can accomplish within the classroom given that everything will be tied to a final evaluation grade at the end of the semester. None of these questions were asked with the intent of evaluating or criticizing but to demonstrate how deeply embedded into the fabric of education the success/failure binary is on both students and instructors. However, that is not to say that I believe there is nothing we can do either. What

the survey also demonstrates in hand with all the other scholars is that each instructor or professor is implementing methods into their local classrooms to the best of their current abilities to deter from this fear of failure. I believe that despite the deeply embedded problems that affect the local classroom there are still actions that can be taken to combat this problem. Though certainly a step in the right direction, grading relief and things that can diminish the stress brought about by grades are not the final solution to this problem. We must embrace a failure-facing rhetoric that provides failure to the students not as the antithesis of success but as something that is beneficial to the individual student and something that can be ultimately learned from.

7 Failure Facing Pedagogy

Naturally, there is no true “one size fits all” sort of solution but just as Stommel has attempted to develop his own grading methodology, teachers have attempted to incorporate failure into different aspects of their classrooms. Professor Edward Burger incorporates failure into the classroom by “teaching students to fail” (Burger). Five percent of the grade in Burger’s class is assessed on the quality of their failure, in which students grade themselves based on their own failures in the form of a reflective essay. In this regard, failure or failing is directly linked to a higher grade. By essentially forcing students to fail, Burger argues “students gleefully take more risks and energetically engage in discussions” (Burger). This process is paired with the assignments such as mandatory rough fist drafts that are encouraged to be “poorly written”.

Burger's experiment in their grading process led them to incorporate failure in the form of a participation grade that spans into discussions and assignments throughout the semester. By weaving in the failure throughout the semester students are always engaging with it and have it in their mind. In this way Burger is bending the process-based pedagogy to fit their agenda of eliminating fear of failure. Though Burger does not provide statistics or excerpts of or from their students, Burger is concerned with the culture in and outside of a classroom in how an entire seminar treats and reacts to failure. In many ways Burger’s methodology directly engages with and counteracts the psychological norms that students are hardwired to believe. The competitive aspect of academia is hampered in this sort of classroom model in favor of the failure-facing rhetoric and though Burger does not provide statistics or excerpts from his classrooms, this certainly remains as an intriguing and beneficial idea for teachers of composition to incorporate into their first-year classrooms. It directly addresses the fear of failure and the self-handicapping aspects by asking the students to face, engage with, and share their failures. Fear of failure and

self-handicapping is counteracted through the acts of direct addressment of fears that Burger understands students enter the classroom with and creates a community out of that fear.

However, Professor Asao Inoue incorporates failure into their class in the form of a contract grading system. However, Inoue separates failure into two categories: quality failure and labor failure. Quality failure being the standard method of evaluating a student's work based on subjective standards of worth, and labor failure being the inability of a student to meet certain work requirements such as word count, page count, or deadlines. Inoue provides the statistics of their programs first year composition class under both assessment methodologies speaking towards the inherent racial biases that come with grading quality versus grading through the labor contract grading system that they employ which saw a significant drop in the failure rate between non-white students when the program switched to the contract grading methodology. There were 8.5% fewer instances of failure by racial population suggesting that quality-based grading, at least within the boundary of Inoue's study, is dependent on racial factors.

In addition to the quality-based grading scheme being relatively insignificant in measuring the ability of a student, Inoue argues that quality-based grading also inherently favors those with the circumstances to complete it. Some students will simply possess better circumstances to complete the work and those circumstances will, to some degree, be based on the race of that student. However, with the contract grading method that Inoue incorporates into their class, student failure is associated with not demonstrating a high degree of effort, quantity, or time. Though it could be argued that this is very similar criteria to the regular quality-based grading, yet the difference is that a student may decide what grade they receive based on the amount of work that they want. When juxtaposing the results and satisfaction levels of the contract grading method, we can see how grading is racially equalized at least slightly.

Students of color performed better and were, generally, happier with the course under the contract grading method. “Students find reason to learn and grow as writers when their labor is truly honored, and they listen more carefully to feedback when grades are out of the way” (A. Inoue 343). Inoue is doing many things to change the classroom culture by switching the grading method that they employ into their classroom. By dissociating academic work from receiving a grade, he is indirectly telling students the expectations of the classroom without giving them a superficial template or guidelines to adhere to. On a less direct level, Inoue is redefining failure within writing assessments in their classroom. By prioritizing the amount of work a student produces as the measurement of their effort in the class, failure is no longer being associated solely with the ability or inability to achieve the same grades as your peers. This also clarifies the assessment standards for the student in a relatively unusual way where the students can select a labor goal to meet and then work towards that goal. Success is not producing a vaguely defined product but rather meeting a labor goal that is defined.

Professor Ellen Carillo also builds on the ideas of contract grading through her ideas of engagement-based grading contracts. Carillo builds on Inoue’s ideas by expanding the scope of how we understand assessment through the lens of disability students who may not have the same benefits that able-bodied students may have to meet the labor requirements for certain grades. Engagement based grading lays out a diverse menu of assignments that students may choose to do such as oral presentations, online discussion posts, traditional essays, collaborative note taking, and various other multimodal options. This keeps the power in the students’ hands while allowing them to select their type of work that would best maximize their experience. Carillo characterizes engagement-based grading contracts as a system that “recognize the different ways students engage, as well as the different ways they create knowledge” (Carillo

55). Carillo's engagement-based grading takes the same concepts that Inoue addressed in their grading scheme but worked to include options for the disabled student but make these options present and available for *their* choosing.

Inoue's and Carillo's research into failure in different lenses is important because they are very unlike Burger's methodology which very directly incorporates failure, specifically the experience and application of those experiences, into the classroom. Yet despite their methods being different both can create failure-facing rhetoric in different ways. Where Burger is, in a sense, reclaiming the word and applying it into their classroom, Inoue and Carillo are stripping failure of the harmful meanings that it has always through redefining the word in a form that is less about meeting the quality expectations of others and meeting the labor expectations one chooses. I find this ability to reach a similarly positive result is instrumental in demonstrating the necessity for experimentation within classrooms to find what works. As we have seen there are multiple right answers that can be achieved which makes the prospect of a failure-facing rhetoric incredibly intriguing while also making it very difficult to achieve.

Allison Carr presents a list of assignments that have students draw on their past failures and apply them to a university level assignment. Assignments such as the failure narrative, failure case study, unlearning something, novice narrative, and assessing "quality of failure" (admittedly from Edward Burger's classrooms and admittedly more of an ethos within a classroom than an exercise). In all these assignments students are tasked with engaging with their failures in their lives in some way to produce meaningful work. These assignments are distinctly unique "on making failure – and failure's feltness – more visible and present in the writing classroom" (Carr 12). What Carr presents, as Burger did, is direct engagement with a failure. Firstly, students can potentially reclaim experiences that are muddled in shame. Secondly,

students can bring themselves closer in proximity to their failures making future encounters (or would be encounters) with failure easier to cope with and understand. Thirdly because these activities ask students to look back at their experiences there is the weaving of process pedagogy into these activities making them incredibly useful for instructors.

Unfortunately, Carr does not have any classroom data to demonstrate or disprove the potential usefulness of these activities, but it is safe to say that by incorporating these exercises into a classroom that students will not instantaneously learn all the facets of failure. That is why I find it worth noting the way we talk about failure must come before the application of exercises such as these. Though an instructor who is considering implementing these exercises into a classroom would likely understand the language that must be used when dealing with this, Carr outlines a step along the process of creating their ideal failure pedagogy.

Additionally, Carr outlines three questions they have regarding the creation of a failure pedagogy:

“What happens when failure isn’t the silent antithesis of success or the final and unspeakable consequence of struggle or deviance against social and/or pedagogical norms... I want to know if it’s possible to fail without being erased, cast out... I want to know what becomes possible when we stop thinking about education as a forward-moving, product-oriented march toward some mark of achievement, and instead we start thinking of it as something bent more toward chaos” (Carr 9).

These learning goals are significant to consider because it applies to all teachers in the classroom. What Carr proposes is not necessarily a sweeping reform of the education system that would rid students of their fears but rather the individual methods of teachers to bridge the gap in understanding their students. What each of these professors understood to some degree was that

students do have these underlying fears that drive what they do. Echoing the conclusions that Ira Schorr reached through giving students more agency in the classroom, each of the professors here incorporate some aspect of student empowerment into the classroom that acts as a bridge for students towards understanding some of the broader concepts brought up before. Burger and Carr's direct incorporation of failure into the course flips the success/failure binary where to succeed one must fail. Inoue and Carillo's lay out options for the students to choose themselves to make the grading criteria clearer for students.

8 Conclusions

Though the problems that Paolo Freire and John Dewey outlined decades ago still linger, we have certainly taken steps towards the right direction. What is becoming increasingly understood among professors that implement these failure-facing pedagogies into their classrooms is that the perspective of students towards failure is something that must be addressed. What all of the assessment methods covered shared was this fundamental understanding of the perspective of the student which guides their grading schemes in different ways but all of them work to combat and minimize the fear of failure that students are presumed. There is a necessity within first year composition classrooms to implement a failure-facing pedagogy in whatever way an instructor can. Naturally everyone would rather succeed than fail but it is in these introductory classes such as the first-year composition course that we must equip students with the ability to understand, cope with, and utilize their failures moving forward.

The psychological aspects that lead students to handicap themselves, generate excuses, and place themselves in situations that do not promote their own success is in many ways a demonstration of the failure of instructors to aid students through the formation of their own failure facing pedagogy or pointing them towards the resources that are available around the student to aid them in this endeavor. That is not to say that instructors are responsible for being these sorts of life coach figures in the student's life but rather that to accomplish both the goals of a teacher and fulfill the time of a student, instructors must implement some sort of failure-facing pedagogy within the classroom. As we saw earlier, this is an institution wide problem that is not easily solved through any one method. Echoing the ideas of Carillo and Burger, when the options are made visible and available, this could make all the difference.

Though the surveys could be more thorough and look closer at specific exercises that could be implemented into the classroom, it is important to acknowledge that each classroom will be different and there will not be one end all solution. Echoing the ideas of Freire, Dewey, and Berlin the teacher must take all the aspects of their classroom including the surrounding society and culture to bridge the gap between student and teacher. What Burger, Inoue, and Carr propose in addition to the grading schemes and assignments is that open engagement with a student's failures and what can be learned from these failures. It is presenting failure as a part of the classroom that is not to be avoided or something to develop coping mechanisms around, but rather something that must be directly addressed and integrated into the classroom in some form.

What the surveys yielded was data that supported the lingering effects of a system that has passed but not fully disappeared. The EPC conversation surrounding grading distributions and the factors that influence them allows us to peer into a time where competency and effectiveness were measured through grading distributions. Though this has generally been moved away from what the surveys showed was that our fundamental understandings of success and failure are still tied in many ways to the grades that a student leaves the classroom with. This makes the research and experimentation that Burger, Carr, Inoue, and Carillo perform that much more important though because it reminds us that there is still work to be done. It is worth noting that Carillo's engagement-based grading was in part of a response to Inoue's contract grading to account for students without the opportunity to be a beneficiary in his system. What this shows is that despite some of these methods taking steps in the right direction we are still working towards becoming better than what we currently are.

What each of these scholars has concluded, as indicated through the actions they have taken in their own respective classes, is that there is a fundamental problem with the way

students view success and failure. This is perpetuated through years of vague assessment and fearing failure and the answer that we seem to be arriving at is that there is a need for a failure-facing pedagogy. Though this can have many different forms from classroom to classroom, the continuous thread is the rewriting of commonly held student perceptions of failure and assessment. What is becoming increasingly understood is that success and failure are not simply foils of one another, but complex concepts that could lead to harmful habit building for a student. However, if addressed and integrated into the fabric of a classroom these concepts could be used towards aiding a student's academic journey and beginning the process of understanding failure as something more than the antithesis of success.

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