



What to Do About Failure in Higher Ed

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Welcome to Session Two of Two!

- **Session One: Open Mic!**

- Risk-taking
- Institutional safety-nets
- Failing without failing students
- Sharing our own stories of failure (or being failed) in an open mic forum.

- **Session Two: Intentionality**

- Consider multiple meanings + impacts of failure
- Designing brave and safe spaces for productive failure
- Supporting our own and our students' comfort with failing and rising from failure.
- Crowdsource ideas from the experience and wisdom of the group.

Today's Agenda

Brave + safe space and grounding activity

Jia's Story (TED Talk excerpt)

Dominant Narrative of Failure

Impacts of Failure

Building a (Virtually) Equity Driven Learning Community

Small Group discussion

Large Group discussion

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Brave Space + Safe Space

Brave Space

We exist in the real world

We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.

In this space

We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,

We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,

We call each other to more truth and love

We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.

We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.

We will not be perfect.

This space will not be perfect.

- *Micky ScottBey Jones*

Safe Space

Where “marginalized students could express, interpret and connect over shared experiences of marginalization and struggle as a community without fear of repercussion”. - *Lily Zheng*

Grounding Activity — 3+3+3 Centering Practice

What's up with my body?

What's up with my heart?

What's up with my mind?

What do I need right now?

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Failing Forward or Productive Failure — Definition

Failing forward is about turning mistakes into stepping stones for success — [John Maxwell](#)

“Productive Failure is about engaging students in carefully designed, constrained activities that lead to failure, but then, after that, helping them understand how they were thinking, where and why their thinking was correct and incorrect, misconceived or sub-optimal, and then consolidating their knowledge into the formalized, correct concepts”. — [Manu Kapur](#)

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What I Learned from a 100 days of Rejection



What's the Dominant Narrative of Failure?

- Failure is a badge to be earned on an inevitable path to GREATNESS
- Restricted to a particular type of greatness=accumulation of massive wealth, fame and/or notoriety
- Failure builds character, makes us stronger, and better leaders= narrow definition of leader who is loud, charismatic, powerful, and male
- Rising from failure is reserved for people who are white, male, cisgender, able-bodied (super heros)
- Myth of the “chosen one”= male magical rise from failure, abandonment etc...
 - Think Harry Potter, Luke Skywalker, Superman, Bill Gates

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What's white supremacy Got to Do With It?

The Dominant Narrative reinforces (and is reinforced by) characteristics of white supremacy:

- Perfectionism
- Sense of urgency
- Only one right way
- Individualism
- Bigger/More is better

Failing Forward can dismantle characteristics of white supremacy:

- Perfectionism
- Defensiveness
- Either/Or thinking
- Fear of open comfort
- Right to comfort

Impacts of Failure — Real Consequences for Students

- Loss of a scholarship
- Falling behind academically
- Loss of time and money
 - When a course has to be retaken or a remedial course has to be taken
- *What else?*

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How might we ...

... carefully design and constrain activities that lead to failure ... help them understand how they were thinking, where and why their thinking was correct and incorrect ... and then consolidate their knowledge into the formalized, correct concepts? ([Manu Kapur](#))

... [allow students to] Fail forward [and] turn mistakes into stepping stones for success? ([John Maxwell](#))

... develop students who are proactive, resilient, and enthusiastic about their work? ([Lindsay Tan](#))

Architecting Brave & Safe Spaces Through Equity Driven Learning Community

1. Enable intellectual matchmaking
2. *Create interdependency with intentional communities*
 - *How might you create opportunities that require students to work through cultural, language, and skill barriers, while being dependent on—and learning from—each other?*
3. Create intentional moments for students to get on the soapbox

Small Group — Prompt Questions

- *In terms of facilitating an inclusive classroom, is there a difference between an “It’s Ok to fail” and a “failing forward” culture?*
- *Can we effectively engineer productive failure? How might we restructure our classrooms from a dominant model to a partnership model to accommodate for productive failure by students?*
- *What might a student designed, student-led failure experience look like? Think back to Jia’s experience.*



Resources

Brave Space:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/595e51dbd1758e528030285b/t/5978dca7d7bdcee0e2be6a99/1503506626330/FAQ-brave-space.png>

Why your Brave Space Sucks: <https://www.stanforddaily.com/2016/05/15/why-your-brave-space-sucks/>

In my tool bag: 3+3+3 Centering Practice:

<http://bluewingconsulting.com/in-my-tool-bag-333-centering-practice/>

Failing Forward Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones (Maxwell)

<https://www.amazon.com/Failing-Forward-Turning-Mistakes-Stepping/dp/0785288570>

We can take this powerful mechanism and deliberately design it to learn (Kapur)

<https://bold.expert/we-can-take-this-powerful-mechanism-and-deliberately-design-it-to-learn/>

Resources continued

We can take this powerful mechanism and deliberately design it to learn (Kapur)

<https://bold.expert/we-can-take-this-powerful-mechanism-and-deliberately-design-it-to-learn/>

What I learned from 100 days of rejection (Jiang):

https://www.ted.com/talks/jia_jiang_what_i_learned_from_100_days_of_rejection

Rejection Therapy: <https://www.rejectiontherapy.com/>

The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture:

<https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html>

When “failure is okay” is not okay: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/when-failure-is-ok-is-not-ok/>

Building a Virtually Equity Driven Learning Community:

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/online-course-delivery-and-instruction/building-a-virtual-equity-driven-learning-community/>