

Spring 2022 Faculty Inquiry Group Report

During the Spring Term of 2022, Sarah Lushia, Ingrid Nordstrom, Caroline Lundquist, Randy Ware, Tammy Salman, and Gina Szabady read *Failure Pedagogies*, and met to discuss the book's resonance across many aspects of their lived experiences. While these conversations sometimes failed to maintain a conventional sense of "professionalism" as we often shared lived experiences, blended reflection with speculation, and sometimes even overflowed with emotion, they were wildly successful at creating generative, honest, and uncompromising conversations about important issues facing our institution and our world. I want to thank each member of this group for your vulnerability, courage, and deep commitment to better understanding yourself and your experiences with (and sometimes complicity in) systemic failures of all kinds.

Guiding Questions

- How is this book challenging our ways of thinking about (or identifying) failure?
- What concepts or theoretical frameworks offered by the book are most useful? Why?
- What concepts or theoretical frameworks didn't work for you or felt unsatisfying? Why?
- What is the relationship between failure, fear, and performance?
- What kinds of things do we avoid as a result of fear of failure? What kinds of failures do we accept as necessary, unavoidable, or even useful?
- How are the costs and consequences of systemic failures distributed? How are individuals asked to participate or be complicit in failures inside of systems that benefit some while harming others?

Meeting Descriptions

April 8: Chapters 1-4

This interdisciplinary group included some folks who had never met before, so we spent some time getting acquainted and sharing our reasons for being in the group. Folks set personal goals to work on throughout the term, and we each shared which chapter stood out most from the week's readings and why.

Quotes that Stuck:

- Chapter 3—After the Accusation: The Lasting Impacts of Plagiarism Trauma on Student Writing Behaviors: "... to *be* a failure is something different entirely" (40).
- Chapter 4—Failure Potential: Using Failure as Feedback -- "The ability to recover from failure is a privilege" (53).

April 22: Chapters 5-7

Our conversation this week circulated around the concept of rhetorical velocity, which Jim Rodolfo and Danielle Nicole DeVoss describe as "situations in which composers anticipate and *strategize future third-party remixing* (sic) of their compositions as part of a larger complex rhetorical strategy that plays out across physical and digital spaces" (qtd. 64). This rich concept would circulate through many upcoming conversations, both explicitly and implicitly, as we

grappled with complex issues raised by the text and the ways in which happenings in the real world evinced systemic failures that called for our acknowledgement and address. By the close of our second meeting, it had become clear to the group that we would need to create more breathing space for these challenging conversations, so we arranged for longer sessions and planned a 6th meeting during final's week.

Quotes that Stuck:

- Interchapter 1—Redefining Failure: Controlling a Sense of Self: “we fail within a system because of our experiences as social, cultural, political, religious, and gendered human beings” (83).
- Chapter 6—Failure as Exigence: Accusation and Apology as Opportunities for (Re)invention: “... participation in new media and social networking has come to both generate and shape responses to traumatic events” (72).

May 9: Chapters 7-8

This week's chapters invited the group to consider two sites of awkward juxtaposition in a chapter that put prisons up against schools to grapple with their mutual dependance and another that examined the failures of Title IX through the lens of witchcraft. These stark examples of “palpable failure” highlighted the ways that privilege and failure are co-constructed so that certain kinds of bodies are inherently sacrificed so that others may experience non-failure (aka success).

Quotes that Stuck:

- Chapter 7—A Force of Disruption: Refusing the Success /Failure Complex: “The university produces incarceration as the product of its negligence” (102).
- Chapter 8—Who Survives the Witch Hunt? Supporting our Students in a Process we Know will Fail Them: “Even as the witches we may be, our sorcery will not permeate the wall around the Title IX office” (122-123).

May 16: Chapters 9-11

These chapters invited the participants to consider the redemptive potential of failure even as they acknowledged the pervasiveness of narratives of success and the real world costs of systemic and pedagogical failures. Chapter 9 invited an interrogation of the “pedagogical mandate of happiness” that has an incredibly powerful yet unacknowledged role in shaping what kind of success is possible in academics and for whom. Chapters 10 and 11 shared narrative experiences with failure and the resonance of those failures in the lives of the writers and their students.

Quotes that Stuck

- Chapter 9—The Uses of Queer Failure: Navigating the Pedagogical Mandate of Happiness: “we can only define failure by subscribing to a model of success and then critiquing the ways the institution has failed us and limited our knowledge” (133).
- Chapter 10—Committing to Failure: Critical Pedagogy and Failure in Classroom Teaching: “Being part of a bad system doesn't let me off the hook for failing” (147).

June 3: Chapters 12-13 and Interchapter 2

Our conversation this week circulated around personal experiences of failure and the ways folks have passed on our learning from this text in our personal and professional networks. The group held space for a sharing session that centered the range of emotions members of the group have experienced in recent weeks as we bear witness to a variety of systemic failures and their impacts on children, people with uteruses, students, and educators.

Quotes that Stuck

- Interchapter Two—Failure to Wake? What #WPAListservFeministRevolution Tells Us About a “Feminist” Writing Studies: “as intervention, as disruption, feminist action must risk creating *uncomfortable spaces*. It is only through this discomfort that we can rise to the bigger questions of our time” (166).
- Chapter 12—Persevering Even When “We Are All Full of Mad”: A Lesson in the Value of Incremental Progress: “in every failed effort lies the potential to learn about ourselves and what we are capable of accomplishing. ... Acknowledging our failure, in many ways, is what keeps us moving forward” (188).

June 10: Chapters 14-15, Interchapter 3, and Conclusion

We reflected on the text as a whole today, and wondered about the lack of a cohesive definition of failure for the text. We also interrogated a number of systems in our workplace and lives through the various lenses provided in the book. We are all eager to continue reading and learning together (and maybe keeping bullet journals over the summer).

Quotes that Stuck

- Chapter 14—Embracing the Ugly: “The gaps represent a type of failure, because we are asking students to expose and sit with their misunderstandings” (216).
 - Our question: Is this failure?
- Chapter 15—Narrativizing Dis/Ability: Deconstructing Institutional Uses of Disability Narratives: “acts of narratively constructed charity are meant to create docile, disabled subjects who are grateful for charity” (231).

Helpful Resources

- Composition and Writing Studies Resources
 - “The Responsibility of Privilege: A Critical Race Counterstory Conversation” by Aja Martinez for a lens on how notions of “success” are unequally distributed and the importance of counterstory as an epistemology.
 - *Composition in the Age of Austerity* for context related to the politics related to FYC, institutional systems of oppression, and complicity of writing studies/WPAs.
- Prison Teaching Resources
 - The Inside Out Prison Exchange Program: <https://www.insideoutcenter.org/>
 - **Davis, S. W. & Roswell, B. S. (Eds.). (2013).** *Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
 - **Allred, Sarah L., Charles Boyd, Thomas Cotton, and Paul Perry (2019).** Participatory Evaluation in a Prison Education Program: Meaning & Community Building within Inside-Out Think Tanks, *Corrections*. DOI: 10.1080/23774657.2019.1604193
 - **Belcher, D. C. (2018).** Fresh starts behind bars: Teaching with the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program. *Northwest Journal of Teacher Education*, 13(1).

- **Maclaren, K. (2015).** The magic happens inside out: a reflection on the transformative power of self-expression and dialogical inquiry in inside-out prison exchange courses. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 22(4), 371–385. doi 10.1080/10749039.2015.1075045
- **Pompa, L. (2013).** One brick at a time: the power and possibility of dialogue across the prison Wall. *The Prison Journal*, 93(2), 127–134. doi 10.1177/0032885512472479
- Additional Theory and Research Connected to Chapters and Discussion Topics
 - [Sounds Like Hate](#) podcast from the Southern Poverty Law Center
 - [The Queer Art of Failure](#) by Jack Halberstam
 - [Atmospheres of Violence](#) by Eric Stanley

Outcomes

Time and again members enumerated ways that concepts, frameworks, and ideas they encountered in *Failure Pedagogies* were organically shared via their personal and professional networks. In one discussion session, a group member shared an instance where they found courage to speak up, fortified by considerations about how fear of failure can keep us from doing what we know is right. Another reflected deeply on the question “who has the privilege to fail” and, in the complexity that question evokes, is finding inspiration to complete a project that has been “stuck” for several months. Another member shared a recommendation for a chapter of the text on a professional listserv and has received dozens of requests to borrow the book from colleagues across the region, as they found it sold out from local retailers and on a long waiting list on Summit. We shared our learning with colleagues when they expressed fear of failure as a source of avoidance, and we brought conceptual approaches to failure into reading group discussions, inviting friends to join us in considering the specter of failure as a component of modern life. Each of us have grappled with the complexity of failure’s janus faced nature: at once a site of innovation and learning and a source of fear and avoidance. From chapters being shared with students as part of coursework, to concepts being presented in advocating to the Lane Board of Education, to discussions over dinner with family and friends, *Failure Pedagogies* has shaped our conversations and our thinking as individuals and as a group. Perhaps the strongest indication of the book’s influence on our lives was the desire of FIG members to have more, longer meetings, and the unhesitating interest in gathering together again in 2022-2023 to review the book and our reflections on it in order to propose a panel for the CTL Symposium. My hope for this continued sharing is that a less fearful and more contemplative approach to failure can emerge at Lane Community College as it has seeped into the lives of members of this FIG.

Report prepared and submitted by Gina Szabady