"IF FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION, THEN NEITHER IS SUCCESS." - SETH GODIN

FAILURE IS AN OPTION:
HELPING YOUR STUDENTS MAKE THEIR MISTAKES WORK FOR THEM
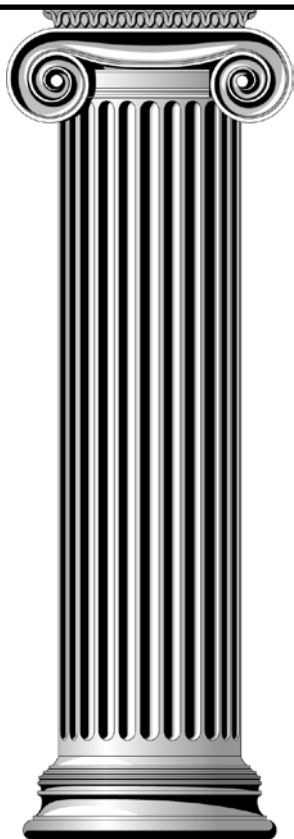
TIERA S. COSTON, J.D., PH.D.

Goals for this Session

1. Define **failure** and its role in student learning.

2. Present the case for students' use of failure as a **tool** for success.

3. Present some effective **strategies** for shifting student's mindset about failure.

4. Introduce some **resources** to help promote students' use of failure as a tool for success.
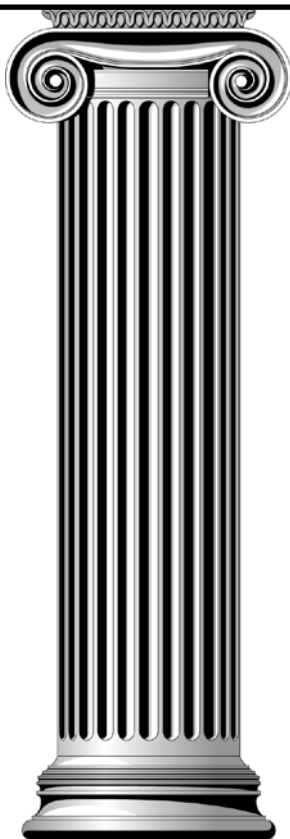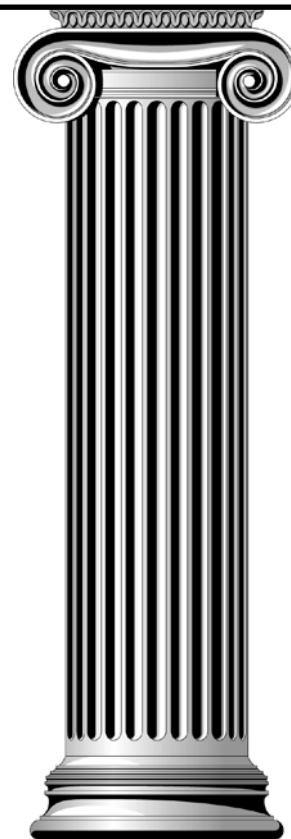
Laying the Foundation

| Accept mistakes and failure as a part of the learning process. | The ultimate goal is the students' mastery of the subject matter. | Students will require ample and frequent feedback. |

Teach Thought Staff (2012, November 9). Re: 10 Ways to Honor Mistakes in the Learning Process. Retrieved from http://www.teachthought.com/learning/10-ways-to-honor-mistakes-in-the-learning-process/ (te@chthought).

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Laying the Foundation

No guarantee in outcomes due to diversity in students and their motivations.

Any changes made will take time to both carry out and take effect.

Teach Thought Staff (2012, November 9). Re: 10 Ways to Honor Mistakes in the Learning Process. Retrieved from http://www.teachthought.com/learning/10-ways-to-honor-mistakes-in-the-learning-process/ (te@chthought).
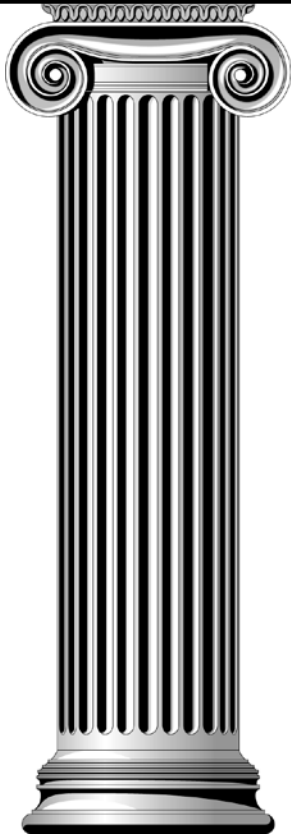
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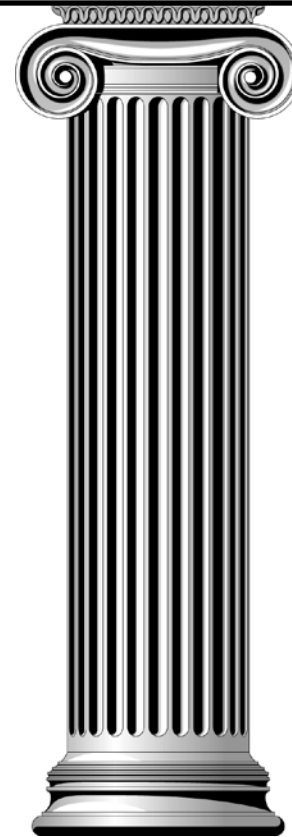For 'the development of faculty across all career stages and areas of professional responsibility'

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Student Motivation

Intrinsic motivation for learning involves on or more of the following:

- curiosity

- the drive to achieve competence

- desire to emulate a model

- Reciprocity (the need to work together with others to accomplish an objective)

Brookhart, S.M. (2010, July 20). Influence of Grading Practices on Motivation to Learn. Retrieved from http://www.education.com/reference/article/influence-grading-practices-motivation/.

Student Motivation

Four General Categories of Students

- Overstrivers
    - Motivated to learn, but also motivated to avoid failure
    - Success is used as a strategy to avoid failure
    - Grades tell them how well they have succeeded
    - Always looking to out-do their previous success
- Failure-accepting
    - Unmotivated to learn or to avoid failure
    - Bad grades are not a motivator to try
    - Presence in school is unrelated to success or failure

Brookhart, S.M. (2010, July 20). Influence of Grading Practices on Motivation to Learn. Retrieved from http://www.education.com/reference/article/influence-grading-practices-motivation/.

Student Motivation

Four General Categories of Students

- Failure-avoiding
  - Unmotivated to learn, but motivated to avoid failure
  - Set impossible, high goals and justify being unable to meet them
  - Grades are most important and a measure of self-worth
- Success-oriented
  - Motivated to learn, but not necessarily to avoid failure
  - Risk failure in an effort to learn
  - View failure as feedback that a goal is not yet mastered
  - View grades as information to be used in their learning

Brookhart, S.M. (2010, July 20). Influence of Grading Practices on Motivation to Learn. Retrieved from http://www.education.com/reference/article/influence-grading-practices-motivation/.

Student Motivation

Attribution Theory

- How and why ordinary people (students) explain events as they do

- Students search for an understanding of what brings about an outcome or event in the classroom (e.g., why they failed an test)

Students identify causes of various classroom events along three dimensions

- Stability – whether the cause was changeable over time

- Locus – whether the cause was internal or external to the student

- Control – whether the student had control over the cause

Brookhart, S.M. (2010, July 20). Influence of Grading Practices on Motivation to Learn. Retrieved from http://www.education.com/reference/article/influence-grading-practices-motivation/.

Student Motivation

- Students want to understand why things happen, e.g. why they failed the test.

- They identify the causes of different classroom events along three different facets – stability, locus and control.

- A student receives an "F" on a test and thinks:
  - I knew the material, but the teacher was unclear in writing the test questions.

- The causal attribution would be defined as:
  - *stable* – I can't tell my teacher how to write her test questions
  - *external* – It's not that I didn't know the material, the questions were not clear
  - *uncontrollable* – My teacher wrote the unclear questions, not me.

Brookhart, S.M. (2010, July 20). Influence of Grading Practices on Motivation to Learn. Retrieved from http://www.education.com/reference/article/influence-grading-practices-motivation/.

Student Motivation

- To facilitate a change in thinking, we want students to view causal events as *unstable*, *internal* and *controllable*.

- A student receives an "F" on a test and thinks:
  - I knew the material, so why did I fail the test?

- The causal attribution would be defined as:
  - *unstable* – I could talk to my teacher about writing clearer test questions in the future
  - *internal* – If I get a better understanding of what my teacher is looking for when she asks a question, I can give the right answer.
  - *controllable* – If I get a better understanding of what my teacher is looking for when she asks a question, I can give the right answer.

Brookhart, S.M. (2010, July 20). Influence of Grading Practices on Motivation to Learn. Retrieved from
http://www.education.com/reference/article/influence-grading-practices-motivation/.

Defining Mistake and Failure

Mistake

- *noun* – something that is not correct; a wrong action, statement, or judgment

- *verb* – to understand or identify incorrectly; to make a wrong judgment about

Failure

- a state of inability to perform a duty or expected action; lack of success

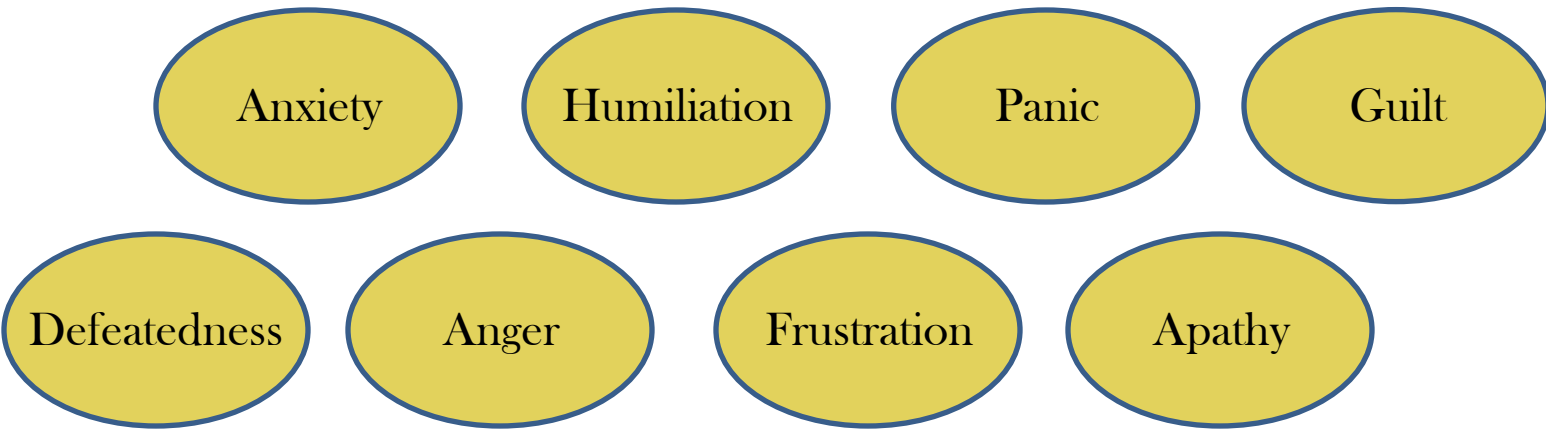mistake. 2014. In *Merriam-Webster.com* . Retrieved September 5, 2014 from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mistake?show=0&t=1410286909

failure. 2014. In *Merriam-Webster.com* . Retrieved September 5, 2014 from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/failure

Student Responses to Mistakes/Failure

What we typically see . . .

Anxiety

Humiliation

Panic

Guilt

Defeatedness

Anger

Frustration

Apathy

What we want to see . . .

Opportunity

Motivation
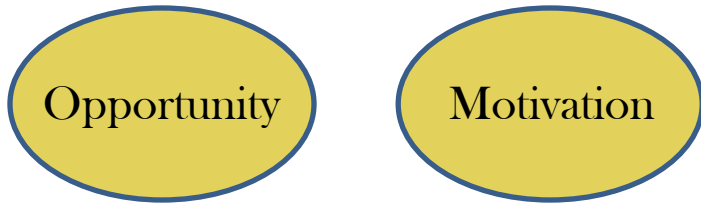
Agrell, Jeffrey (2012). Re: The Value of Mistakes. Retrieved from
http://www.uiowa.edu/~somhorn/resources/resources/resouces/articlesvalue.html (Horn Studio of the University of Iowa).

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Redefining Mistake and Failure

We must change students' attitudes and perceptions about their mistakes and failures.

This requires a shift in the culture in which most students have been educated.

Teachers have the power to redefine the culture in their classrooms.

Maats, H. and O'Brien K. (2014, March 20). Re: Teaching Students to Embrace Mistakes. Retrieved from http://www.edutopia.org/blog/teaching-students-to-embrace-mistakes-hunter-maats-katie-obrien (Edutopia).

Embracing Mistakes/Failure

Does not mean accepting. . .

Laziness

Mediocrity

Lack of Effort

Failure as an end result

It does mean using mistakes as a part of a discovery process that engages students and ultimately leads to achieving mastery.

Clifford, Miriam (2012, November 6). Re: The Value of Mistakes: Should It Matter How Long A Student Takes to Learn? Retrieved from http://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/the-value-of-mistakes-should-it-matter-how-long-a-student-take-to-learn/ (informEd).

Practical Approaches

- Metacognition

  - Talk About It

  - Assess It

  - Review and Reflection

Talk About It

Metacognition – understanding one's own process of learning and using that understanding to plan, monitor and assess learning (understanding and performance)

Communicate to your students that:

1) they are going to make mistakes; and

2) understanding the nature of those mistakes can be the key to mastering concepts.

Learn from your mistakes. Take the time to go over your prior tests. Figure out what problems you had. Were certain types of questions more problematic for you than others? Were you "missing the forest for the trees"? Talk to your classmates and me to help clarify issues and to work for improvement. I am here to work with you, so please help me help you.

Excerpt from Dr. Jeremy D. Cohen's syllabus, PSYC 1010, Fall 2014

Bransford, J.D., Brown, A.L. and Cocking, R.R. (eds.) 2000. How People Learn Brain, Mind, Experience, and School. National Academy Press, Washington, D.C.

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Assess It

- Generally, students are programmed to avoid failure.
- Attaching a grade to the process of learning to fail effectively and efficiently can encourage the paradigm shift.

- Make mistakes/failure a natural part of the learning process in your classroom by . . .
  - Encouraging students to share errors on exams and graded assignments
  - Prompt students who provide wrong answers during class discussions to analyze why their answers were wrong

Burger, Edward (2012, August 12). Re: Teaching to Fail. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2012/08/21/essay-importance-teaching-failure (Inside Higher Ed).

Review and Reflection

Rigorously Analyzing Mistakes (RAM) Strategy

Name: _____   Date: _____

Exam/Quiz/Homework Assignment/Class Discussion: _____

Question/Concept to be Analyzed: _____
_____
_____

Prior Knowledge (what I thought I knew)	Learning (information from text, notes, tutoring)	Misconceptions (what I thought I knew vs. what I learned)	Approaches (steps to minimize misconceptions)	Mastery (what I still need to know/do)

Ogle, D.M. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *Reading Teacher*, 39, 564-570.

Review and Reflection

K-W-L strategy sheet

K—What we know	W—What we want to find out	L—What we learned and still need to learn
1.		

2. Categories of information we expect to use
   A.
   B.
   C.
   D.

   E.
   F.
   G.

Ogle, D.M. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *Reading Teacher*, 39, 564-570.

Review and Reflection

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Ogle, D.M. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *Reading Teacher*, 39, 564-570.

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