

## REFRAME YOUR FAILURES



### MAIN FEATURES

Strengthened skills	CONSTRUCT, SUPPORT
Suitable for	Teachers, students
Difficulty level	Medium
Setting	Group
Minimum number of participants	2
Average duration	60 - 75 minutes
Special equipment/materials	Yes
Online version	Yes

## 1. DESCRIPTION

In this activity, participants can learn the concept of "reframing" (White, 2002), or consider personal failures as a way to explore their values. In a school context, teachers could support their students in reworking experiences that have failed them.

The participants are divided into pairs and assume, alternating, the role of "facilitator" and that of "client".

The "client" is invited to talk about an episode of failure in the past. In contrast, the "facilitator" is invited to ask specific questions according to a practice map here called "TASC Conversation Map on Failure", inspired by White's "Conversation Map on Failure" (2002).

## 2. PURPOSE/ BENEFITS

The exercise trains participants to deconstruct the concept of "failure", understood as a sense of inadequacy, incompetence, insufficiency, deficit, and backwardness that looms in people's lives.

This activity aims to help participants (e.g., teachers) to find an alternative way of thinking about failure to reconsider experiences of failure as opportunities to explore their personal values and those of the people with whom they relate (e.g., students).

In addition, the activity aims to teach how to use specific questions to reformulate the idea of failure. Such questions are constructed in such a way as to avoid judgment and, therefore guilt towards oneself and towards others; Consequently, their use can help for example teachers to deal with some topics by placing themselves with a less judgmental attitude towards themselves and students.

When taking on the role of "client", teachers may have the opportunity to explore their values, reflect on how to express those values and how to express those of the students, and improve the quality of the classroom climate.

## 3. RELATED SKILLS CLUSTERS

- BUILD (cluster n.1)
- SUPPORT (cluster n.4)

### *Why*

1. Dimension of CONSTRUCTING, which in this case refers to the idea that teachers can become aware of their value systems. This consequently make their actions and behaviors more and more consistent with these values. The skill stimulated in this dimension is **personal action**, because the participant (e.g. teacher) in the role of "client" becomes aware of his own power to act in a way more aligned with his values; moreover, with the support of the "TASC Failure Conversational Map", he can also support others (e.g. students) in becoming more aware of their personal actions.

2. SUPPORT dimension, which in this case refers to the idea that the practice of reformulating the concept of failure helps participants (e.g., teachers) to approach this topic without judgment, seeing it as a useful opportunity to start a conversation about values. The skills associated with this dimension and stimulated in this practice are:
  - **Avoid blaming:** Using the "TASC Failure Conversation Map" helps teachers avoid pointing fingers at themselves (and/or students) and using derogatory language that describes themselves (and/or students) as problematic or unable to achieve goals.
  - **Suspend judgment:** Reframing personal failure helps teachers avoid negative judgments about themselves (and/or students) as people. By reframing an episode of failure experienced in the past (or that students have experienced), teachers can learn that there is always another way of narrating things and that each person's life is richer and more complex than one might imagine.

#### 4. HOW TO DO THE PRACTICE

##### *Step 1 - Preparation:*

The practitioner divides the group of participants (e.g., teachers) into pairs and explains that this activity works on dealing with personal failure, whether it is related to their profession or the students' lives.

A text that you can use to explain the purpose of the activity is as follows:

*"The phenomenon of personal failure seems to be deeply linked to a "modern" standard according to which a "healthy" person can be autonomous and independent in his actions and failure to do so classifies the person as "failure" in his own eyes and those of others.*

*The ghost of failure also haunts people in their daily lives and hovers in school, haunting teachers and students with the fear of being seen as inadequate and incompetent in achieving a given standard.*

*But what if we considered a failure, instead of the result of a person's inadequacy to meet certain standards, as an act of resistance to those standards? As a way of expressing his rejection of social values that he does not feel aligned with his vision of the world?*

*If we see failure in this new way, a question we might ask ourselves is:*

*If the person, through failure, is resisting standards and values that he does not recognise, what are his values? How can we help the person act in a way that is more aligned with their values without feeling that sense of inadequacy?*

*That's the purpose of this exercise: to help you find failure in this alternative way."*

Each coupling member will take turn the role of "facilitator" and "client".

When assuming the role of "client", the participant can talk about an episode in his school, professional and or personal life in which he has experienced a sense of failure; in assuming the role of "facilitator", instead, he is invited to use the "TASC Conversation Map on Failure", which is a set of questions to be asked to the "client" to help him talk about the experience of failure differently.

The above map is described in the table below (each pair will receive a copy).

FAILURE CONVERSATION TASC MAP	
Phase	EXAMPLES
1. Ask the "customer" to tell an episode that he experienced as a failure	<p><i>Can you tell me about an episode in your school, professional (or personal, if you will) life that you think has been a failure for you and has resulted in inadequacy, incompetence, insufficiency, deficit or backwardness?</i></p> <p><i>Can you tell me about an episode in your school, professional (or personal) life in which you felt that you could not meet certain expectations regarding how you should behave, speak, act or be?</i></p>
2. Failure in relation to what?	<p><i>What is this sense of inadequacy/incompetence related to? Let's see it from different angles:</i></p> <p><i>For example, if the "client" is a student:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>About your role as a student?</i></li> <li>- <i>About your gender?</i></li> <li>- <i>About your role as a classmate?</i></li> <li>- <i>About your role as class/school representative?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>For example, if the "client" is a teacher:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>About your professional role?</i></li> <li>- <i>About your gender?</i></li> <li>- <i>About your role as a class coordinator?</i></li> <li>- <i>About your role as a contact person?</i></li> <li>- <i>About your role as a parent?</i></li> <li>- <i>About your role as a partner?</i></li> <li>- <i>About your role as a brother?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>And so on...</i></p>
3. Failure response	<p><i>What have you done to manage this sense of inadequacy that you have?</i></p> <p><i>What have you done in your quest to feel adequate?</i></p> <p><i>What have you done to compensate for this sense of deficit?</i></p> <p><i>Why do you think meeting those norms/expectations was so important?</i></p>
4. Personal values	<p><i>What led you to say, "Ok, enough of these efforts to be adequate to these standards or expectations, let's keep things as they are"?</i></p> <p><i>Why did you decide to let go of the quest to meet all those expectations and meet just a few of them?</i></p>

	<p><i>Why did you think it was necessary, at some point, to stop pursuing absolute alignment with those norms/expectations?</i></p> <p><i>What values led you to say, "Stop this search for alignment at all costs"?</i></p>
<b>5. Giving voice to personal values</b>	<p><i>How do you feel? How is it for you when you experience these values, which have led you to "say enough" with respect to the demands or expectations? Are you giving yourself a hard time? Or is it different?</i></p> <p><i>What would happen if you decided to apply these values more clearly in your professional/school life?</i></p>

Who conducts the activity:

- points out to participants that the types of questions represented in the table are in a specific order: it starts by talking about the sense of failure understood as inadequacy and ends with the sharing of the values underlying the experience lived as failure;
- clarifies that the questions described in the table are examples only, so participants in the role of "facilitator" may feel free to modify them according to the type of "clients" (e.g. teachers, students) and conversations with them;
- Explain that the exercise in pairs lasts 40 minutes in total. After 20 minutes from the activity's start, the couple members exchange roles.

### Step 2 - Talk about failure

Each couple starts the conversation in which one assumes the role of "facilitator" and the other assumes the role of "client". The two members of the couple exchange roles after about 20 minutes from the start of the activity.

The trainer who facilitates the activity pays attention to the fact that each "facilitator" merely asks the type of questions described in the table, following the order. The trainer may suggest some questions if a "facilitator" has difficulty using the map.

### Step 3 - Conclusion

At the end of the stipulated period, each pair takes 10 minutes to discuss the exercise. Some questions that could be used at this stage to help participants reflect on the experience are:

- *How was it for you, in the role of "customer", to develop an alternative vision of your failure?*
- *How was it for you to discover some of your essential values?*
- *How was it for you, in the role of "facilitator", to use the "TASC Conversation Map on Failure"? What was it like for you to ask these questions?*

## 5. FINAL REFLECTION

This stage is a group discussion about the activity.

For example, if participants are teachers, this phase allows them to reflect on how they might apply this methodology while working with individual students (or a class) to manage their sense of failure at school.

Here are some examples of questions that the activity facilitator could use to conduct the conversation:

- *Imagine that this experience changed how you see the concept of failure: how could these changes help you support students in improving the classroom climate?*
- *What are this methodology's critical issues and limitations if applied to your daily work? What are the situations/contexts that you think will benefit from applying this method?*

Participants may be invited to share their answers to the questions with the group or to write the answers and reflect for themselves after the end of the group session.

## 6. SPECIAL MATERIALS

- A copy of the "TASC Failure Conversation Map " for each pair;
- Pens and sheets of paper.

## 7. TIPS

If the participants do not understand the rules well, you can propose a short warm-up session, to show them how the exercise works.

## 8. ONLINE VERSION



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The activity can also be carried out online. For example, a platform like MIRO ([www.miro.com](http://www.miro.com)) allows you to create conversation rooms where participants can work in pairs and access them to monitor the process.

## 9. BIBLIOGRAPHY - SITOGRAPHY

- White. M. (2002). *Addressing Personal Failure*. The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work, 3: 33-76.
- White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. WW Norton & Company, New York.