



How Failure Can Be Good For Your Students

By Michael Linsin on February 25, 2017

I've failed a lot in my life.

And I'm thankful for it every day. Because hidden within every failure is a blessing.

Failure teaches us more than our successes.

It reveals our mistakes and areas needing improvement. It uncovers our carelessness and unpreparedness.

It exposes our hubris and causes us to take a long look in the mirror.

It humbles. It motivates. It offers undeniable proof that we didn't work hard enough.

Yet, in this day and age, many of our students are denied this wonderful lesson.

Sure, they may be told they need to do better. They may be asked to redo the assignment or go back and finish this or that. But rarely is there finality to their failure.

Rarely are they required to face the plain, hard truth that [they fell short](#).

Your students need to know when their project didn't meet the minimum standard. They need to know that the deadline passed and it's too late to fix it.

They need to know their effort – listening, preparation, concentration, attention to detail, etc – wasn't good enough.

Many teachers, however, gloss over failure, or deny it altogether.

They allow do-overs and extend deadlines. They lower standards and grade on the curve. They accept less than what is required for success in school and beyond.

All for fear of being seen – by themselves or their colleagues – as harsh or uncaring.

But in reality, the opposite is true. You do a disservice to your students by accepting their shoddy work or pretending that everything is A-okay.

When a student thinks they're doing well but they're really not, you crush their will to improve. You give unreliable [feedback](#). You hide one thing students absolutely deserve from you: The truth.

When you give chance after chance after chance, happily accepting just about anything and everything, no matter how below par, you remove the intrinsic motivation to do better next time.

You lower the bar. You reinforce a more sloppy and careless work and encourage laziness. You cause your students to tune you out and misbehave behind your back. You remove academic urgency and keep your students wallowed in mediocrity.

Now, it's important to point out that success may look different to different students, particularly in the elementary grades when they're progressing at different rates.

I'm not suggesting that you assign work that *any* student isn't capable of completing successfully. This underscores the critical importance of setting your students up for success before assigning graded work.

Provide one clear objective per lesson. Simplify. Inspire. Storytell. Model. Review. Challenge. Shift responsibility. Then practice, practice, practice. ([Click here](#) to learn how to teach great lessons.)

Prove to your students that if they listen and apply themselves, they *will* excel. Every single one of them.

Do your part well and expect your students to do theirs.

And if they don't, if they choose to give a poor effort, if they turn in sub-par work or complete a test without care, if they don't meet the standard you've set for them, then give them exactly what they've earned.

And make it final. No going back. No second chances (on any one particular assignment). No excuses.

Stick to your guns. Be a teacher of integrity. Allow your students to learn the hard but life-changing lessons now, when they still have time.

One day, they'll thank you for it.

PS - As long as you provide every student the opportunity to succeed, the prospect of failure is one of the keys to creating a tenaciously motivated class..