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Constructive Failure: Bringing failure back to classrooms for better student success (a pilot study)

What did you set out to do?

The research investigates how constructive failure (CF) (learning for and from failure) as a skill could be embedded in the higher education (HE) curriculum. The project is in three phases. Phase one is ongoing and involves the conduct a systematic literature review (SLR) on the subject of failure in HE. A systematic literature review allows for an evidence-based approach to support the pedagogic intervention.

How have you achieved it?

- Phase one of the project is ongoing. A total of six databases have been searched for relevant journals. So far, 70 relevant journal articles have been identified and will be further examined after the final database search. A seventh database is now being interrogated.
- In addition, the research project was presented at the second annual BAL Festival of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (TaLEnt) on the 10th of June 2022. A developmental paper on the research was also submitted to the British Academy of Management conference 2022.

What next?

To complete phase one of the project i.e., the systematic literature review and subsequently develop interventions such as explicitly teaching students about the concept of CF at workshops (preferably, within modules) and implicitly through the design of assessment (subject to ethical approval).

Then phase three, which involves an evaluation of the outcome of the interventions, for instance, the attainment and attrition of students who participate in the research at the end of the academic year. A sample of these students would also be interviewed to assess other implications of the intervention.

Benefits for the University

The current curriculum in HE does little in developing the knowledge and skills of students on failure and how to respond to failure constructively. The findings from this study will serve as a basis for a more robust justification for the initiative. Also, the outcome of this research will provide research-informed recommendations for implicitly and explicitly embedding constructive failure in the curriculum delivered at DMU and HE – with DMU possibly considered a thought leader in the initiative. The research initiative is also in line with DMU's Education 2030 considerations, i.e., rethinking the learning experiences we deliver to students to allow for high-quality student experience and high-quality students outcomes

Benefits for Subject Community

The findings from this research could serve as an impact case study on how universities might develop students who can better navigate instances of failure constructively in during and in a post-Covid-era.

Benefits for Students

A further potential impact from this research on CF is developing/equipping students with the relevant knowledge, framework and skillset to facilitate an agile response to circumstances of failure or possible failure. Tolerating its potential uncertainties to better equip them for the world of work and other future endeavours for which failing, or the possibilities of failure is not uncommon.

Benefits for Staff

The findings from this research project would enable my colleagues and me to better understand how to embed CF in the HE curriculum (through an agile framework - as clear processes will be developed from this research). Likewise, understanding its potential impact on the ability of students to cope with instances whereby the outcome of their performance is less than the set goal.



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