

“I cannot see my way clear. I cannot see the blackboard”

Deconstructing Personal Failure Stories

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Abstract

In this article, a failure identity story of a student counsellor is deconstructed. Self-data on the experiences of her six-year-old self in a school were generated through an outsider witness ceremony, as suggested by White (2007) in *Maps of Narrative Practice*. The data take the form of a rescued speech poem, as proposed by Speedy (2005). The article reflects on the process of data generation and of using a failure conversation map, as discussed by White (2002) in his paper “Addressing personal failure,” to analyse and deconstruct the failure identity/ies available to the student counsellor. The process of the research, the writing, and the analyses of the failure story contributed to the development of an ethical counselling practice by the student counsellor.

Keywords: autoethnography, self-data, identity stories, failure conversation map, outsider witnessing practice

The story of the six-year-old¹

I am six.

I am at school in Rarotonga.

I'm new here. I don't know anybody.

I do not like my teacher. She is mean.

I do not understand what she says.

She writes mysterious squiggles on the blackboard with chalk. Up and down and around.

For the life of me I cannot make out what they are. Perhaps they are numbers?

Bored, I gaze out the window, willing myself out of the classroom. I see the outline of large flamboyant trees against the brown grass of the field. Are those red splotches I can only just make out in the trees flowers? I hear a buzzing sound of a motorised bike zipping along the straight one-lane road that lies just past the field. I'd like a bike like that. I could ride it across that road, down the lane, past the fluffy kapok plants, to home. Would they notice if I just went home? Could I just jump out the window?

I realise that the others are writing in their books with the pale blue and little faint squares on the pages. I don't want to be left out, left behind.

I am dumb. Really stupid.

I don't want to be dumb. I don't think I'm stupid. I have to do something. I glance surreptitiously out of the corners of my eyes at their work. Slowly my eyes shift left, then right. I look up, as if I am thinking, but I am checking that the teacher is not looking at me. She isn't.

This is working.

Relief.

Without moving my head I again swivel my eyes to the right as far as I can. I can feel the muscles of my eyes straining. Slowly I shift my gaze left. With confidence I copy what I imagine they are doing and write random, indecipherable "numbers" and squiggles on my page too. I try to be as neat on the page as possible. The effort it takes to painstakingly try to fit the squiggles neatly inside the little faint pale blue squares forces the tip of my tongue to follow the movement of my hand. Up...and...down and...around.

Up...and...down...and...around....I clutch the new red pencil tightly. The shape of the pencil presses almost painfully into the fingers of my right hand. Later, I would see the marks of the squiggles I carefully inscribe have indented deeply into the next few pages of my book.

There. I stare at my handiwork and nod. That should do it.

Satisfied, I close my book.

The teacher collects our books.

After break, the class lines up to go into the classroom. I walk past my teacher as she talks to another teacher. I line up. In spite of the jostling, I manage to get myself into fourth place in the line. We all wait. I smile at the other children. I am trying to be friendly. I don't know anybody here and I'd like to have at least one

friend to play with during the breaks. The class becomes more and more boisterous as they jostle each other for position in the line. What's taking the teacher so long? I glance over towards the staffroom. I can just make out the shape of two women standing talking to each other. I recognise the colours of the dress my teacher is wearing. The shape walks towards us. It's my teacher all right. She passes right by me, and looks directly down at me. I see that she has a funny look on her face. Why? Is something wrong? Suddenly, right in front of my nose, tucked under her arm I see a book. Is that mine? A shock of recognition zaps through my body. My teacher has my book with the little faint pale blue squares with the squiggles on the pages, under her arm. My head retracts on my neck.

Terror.

Run! Can't! Why are my feet glued to the ground? My toes grip inside my sandals. As I try to grip onto the ground, I feel the earth tip sideways.

Time slows down. The trees overhanging the veranda loom threateningly over me. The noise of the children squabbling around me fades.

Dizziness.

I feel sick to my stomach.

My heart pounds loudly.

I hold my breath. I have been caught out. I want to ask her for my book back, but my mouth is dry and my tongue is stuck to the roof of my mouth. I am struck dumb.

What will she do with my book? Am I in trouble? Are they going to throw me out? Am I not good enough for this place? Will I be punished? Will they hit me? Will they shout at me for not doing it properly? Will they tell my father? Please no.

Please. No.

I cannot see.

I cannot see my way clear. I cannot see the blackboard.

I cannot see the [cup]board.

The cupboard is bare.

Poststructural autoethnography

In Paula's autoethnographic research (Money Penny, 2013) she explored both self as event (Jackson, 2010) and the fluid nature of self-identities. She reported that one experience of failure in an educational setting emerged for her from an outsider

witness ceremony (White, 2007) during a Master of Counselling class that Elmarie taught. At the time of the ceremony, Paula was a second-year student, and Elmarie interviewed her about the difficulty she experienced in grasping and putting narrative therapy into practice. During the interview, Paula explained how the difficulty elicited a reconnection to earlier experiences of failure in educational settings. One particular experience from when she was six years old came to mind. The story (from which an extract is given above) formed the start of an autoethnography and opened up the possibility of creating self as a work of art (Foucault, 1985, 1994a, 1994c) for Paula; indeed, it evolved into one of the data chapters in her research project of self-as-event (Money Penny, 2013). Paula and Elmarie revisited the journey of the research and selected and rewrote sections in order to use it in a collaborative format in the current article to make visible the possible presence of “failure” identity stories in learning and counselling journeys.

Regarding the act of thinking and rethinking “self,” Tom Andersen (1993) explained an act of expressing self as

simultaneously forming One’s Self. The act of expressing oneself is the act of constituting One’s Self. Maybe *performing* is a better word than *expressing*. That is, when a person is performing, this *performing* is *informing* oneself and others and simultaneously forming One’s Self. (p. 309, Andersen’s italics)

In performing and informing the self, Paula called on the following practices: outsider witnessing (White, 2007), Andersen’s (1997) “four ways of knowing” (p. 171), compassionate witnessing (Weingarten, 2003), and rescued speech poems (Speedy, 2005) to generate self-data. These practices are briefly discussed below.

Outsider witness ceremony

In the learning exercise described above, Elmarie asked Paula to present a snippet from her life story that in Paula’s opinion spoke of failure. Through the telling and questioning, a relationship with failure emerged. After the conversation, Elmarie asked Paula’s classmates to reflect on and relate to how her story resonated with and transported them. As they took turns, Paula listened and took notes on what they said. In the final phase, Elmarie asked Paula whether she wanted to take up the story and retell the meanings she had made of their telling (White, 2007). Paula was able to perform and story an identity in front of her classmates as witnesses.²

The purpose of outsider witnessing is threefold (White, 2007). In this specific situation, it created an audience to witness Paula’s experiences of failure and helped

to counteract the way that isolation supported the problem of failure. Secondly, this ritual opened up opportunities for Paula to develop richer practices as a reflexive and responsive practitioner. Thirdly, being witnessed helped to bring to the fore Paula's preferred identity/ies as a committed student who yearns to develop ethical counselling practices.

For Paula, the experience of resonance with her classmates opened up an opportunity to summon the confidence to write up the research (Money Penny, 2013) that generated this article. She generated self-data from this outsider witnessing by refining a listening to self.

Listening to self: Andersen's "four ways of knowing"

After the outsider witnessing ritual, Paula listened to the audiotape again, and engaged in a mode of listening informed by Andersen's (1997) "four ways of knowing" (p. 171), namely, the rational, the practical, the relational, and the bodily ways of knowing. Paula chose to shape her listening within the landscape of relational and bodily knowing. Relational knowing invites a person "to find a position in relation to one or more others" (Andersen, 1997, p. 171) and bodily knowing refers to being able to recognise affect, or visceral bodily reactions, for the listener, when "something significant is being expressed, without necessarily knowing what the significance entails" (p. 171). By engaging in and with these forms of listening, listeners enhance their attunement to the inner conversation that they have with themselves, a conversation between the "I" and the virtual other. This listening practice assists people in developing self-reflexivity. Andersen (1993) contended that "[b]eing in conversation with oneself and/or others can be seen as a constant movement toward an understanding of oneself, one's surroundings, and one's relationships. A self is a moving and changing being" (p. 310). Paula used these ways of knowing to explore and reconstitute a "self" by listening to her inner dialogue.

Compassionate witnessing

As Paula listened and relistened to the audiotape, she also noted the inner conversation and bodily reactions she experienced while listening to the tape, and took up a "compassionate witnessing" position (Weingarten, 2003, p. 192) in relation to the self that was telling, and that had lived through, the events she experienced as a six-year-old on her first day at school in Rarotonga. Paula focused on the language that she used in the telling of the story in her Master of Counselling class, identified the utterances that seemed significant, then paused the tape and made notes. Speedy

(2005) suggests capturing the words and phrases that resonate most, and sitting very closely to the experience at the time, as these captured moments lift the ordinary into the realm of the sacred. This dwelling on the utterance and bodily re-experiences helped Paula to reconnect and remember the experience. Paula then used the notes to write the story as a rescued speech poem, as Speedy (2005) recommends.

Rescued speech poems

Speedy's (2005) work is informed by two key psychoanalytic feminists, Kristeva and Irigaray, who contend that poetic writing can be a way of resisting taken-for-granted discursive practices and constraints. Speedy (2005) argues that poetic writing can be seen as a political and ethical act, claiming that "poetic language speaks to that which is not fixed or known and that which 'moves or escapes' and appears to defy the confines of conventional language" (p. 285). Writing in a poetic way thus illuminates that which has not been said, and highlights the (im)possibility of writing the self (Gannon, 2006). It helps to make visible the shaping of a discursively produced self that questions "the authority of the self who writes and knows himself or herself as a discrete and autonomous subject" (Gannon, 2006, p. 477). Therefore, Gannon (2006) suggests that a writer attempt to write not in a coherent or linear fashion, but rather use "discontinuous fragments informed by memory, body, photographs, other texts, other people" (p. 491) in writing a poststructuralist "self." In a similar vein, Barthes (1977) wrote his autobiography in a fragmentary and imaginative way that challenges conventional ways of re-presenting oneself autobiographically. These suggestions support an argument for conceiving of the self as fluid, multiple, and changing.

Out of Paula's process of synthesising and translating the notes, a piece of free verse emerged—a form of poetic writing with no structure. This form is designed to be read aloud, resplendent with pauses for dramatic effect. Whitworth (2006) argues that writers of free verse "must raise language from the everyday—it really does have to be 'the best words in the best order'" (p. 99). Paula shaped the writing by harnessing poetic writing techniques such as variable line length, ellipses, and space around the writing, and she used repeated key phrases to add emphasis and drama for the reader/listener.

Having generated the self-data as explained above, the story of the six-year-old emerged and was then deconstructed by using White's (2002) failure conversation map.

Deconstructing the story using the failure conversation map

The following analysis was performed with the intention of increasing understanding of how various positions within the discourses operating in the classroom—

in particular, educational discourses—were taken up and resisted by the teller as listener. Foucault's (1994a) ideas about the Stoics' practice of silent listening to the teacher, and also to their own *logos* or reason, inform this practice of self-listening to the self-as-teacher.

White's (2002) eight steps of a failure conversation map were shaped to create a lens to make alternative meaning of failure, because Paula was curious as to why this old story of failure kept returning for her. She used White's (2002) map to try to unpack, listen to, and reposition the self in relation to the multiple discourses operating at the time.

Step 1. Failure in relation to...

This category is concerned with unpacking the expectations, norms, and standards of the educational discourse that Paula failed to reproduce in her acts of learning at the time when she experienced the events in the story. Drawing on White (2002), she posed the following question to her story: *What were the classroom expectations that you think you failed to meet?*

She remembered the following: On my first day of school in Rarotonga, I wished to step into compliance and obedience. Evidence of this is the careful listening to the teacher and the fact that I do not talk out of turn. I can see by the other children's behaviour around me that the only option is one of quiet obedience and silence. Raising my hand is not an option. My looking in the direction of the board as instructed is further evidence that I wished to be obedient. However, the physical seating arrangements, combined with the inability to understand the teacher, contributed to this failure to measure up; I am seated towards the rear of the classroom so I cannot make out what the teacher is writing on the blackboard. This is because, unbeknownst to me, I am short-sighted and cannot see what the others are seeing. I also cannot understand the teacher's accent and so cannot interpret what she is instructing the class to do.

I had attended school for a year in New Zealand before my family and I moved to Rarotonga. During that initial year I had come to learn the expectations of my teacher and the school environment and had experienced the benefits of compliance with the teacher's wishes/instructions, as well as the consequences of failure to follow the rules of the classroom. This learning I did in my first year of school can be described as a submitting in order to master the educational discourse (see Butler, 1995). For a subject to achieve mastery within a discourse, and to function in the social world, he or she has to first become subjected by the discourse. Foucault (1972) argued that a sense of self is created as discourses are mastered.

Step 2. Response to failure

White (2002) invites reflection on the actions that a person initiates in his or her efforts to address these failures and inadequacies. This step is concerned with the actions Paula took to discipline herself in order to measure up and meet the expectations, norms, and standards of this context. Drawing on White (2002), Paula posed the following question of her text: *What did you do in response to being positioned as a failure in this context?*

Paula reflected on this as follows: Because I cannot see the blackboard nor understand the teacher's accent, I am unable to comply with her instructions. Faced with this dilemma, my initial response is to experience frustration, which causes me to resist being positioned as a failure. The first action of resistance I take is to blame the teacher by positioning her as "mean." My thoughts are:

I do not like my teacher. She is mean.

I do not understand what she says.

According to the normalising practices (Foucault, 1977, 1980, 1985, 1994b) of traditional Western educational discourses, every student in the class must be engaged in the same task at the same time and all must reach the same developmental educational milestones at the same time as their peers. This positions each student as responsible for his or her own learning outcomes. The pressure of this position call means that I wish to be obedient with every fibre of my being, yet I cannot comply. However, as I see the other students quietly complying with the teacher's instructions, I am faced with what seems like irrefutable evidence that I am the only one obviously struggling. This means that the problem does not lie with the teacher, but rather with myself. This shift from teacher-blame to self-blame results in feelings of embarrassment, frustration, discomfort, and isolation at what I perceive as my inability to do the set task made up of indecipherable writings on the blackboard. Desperate to escape from these painful feelings, I shift to the next action, which is to escape the confines of the classroom and the educational discourse by daydreaming, looking out of the window:

Bored, I gaze out the window, willing myself out of the classroom.

Imagining the feeling of freedom from the strictures of the classroom brings me a moment of relief. However, I cannot sustain this act of resistance in the face of the expectations of the teacher and the educational discourse, and I know that jumping

out of the classroom window will not be tolerated. I have sufficiently mastered the educational discourse to know that such an act will result in punishment, so I am forced to concede that escape is simply not an option. As the hope of escape fades, the invitation to blame my self grows. Taking up a position of self-blame highlights my difference from the other students:

I realise that the others are writing in their books with the pale blue and little faint squares on the pages. I don't want to be left out, left behind.

This fear of failure to measure up in relation to my peers strengthens and makes irresistible the invitation to accept the position of self-blame:

I am dumb. Really stupid.

Step 3. Unique outcomes: Small steps towards resistance

For White (2002), unique outcomes or exceptions to the problem-saturated personal story of failure are evidenced by any responses or actions (small or otherwise) that do not fit with, or refuse, the expectations, norms, and standards. These actions or responses can then be teased out into an alternative story line that does not fit with the locating of personal failure with/in the individual. White (2005) suggested that as "an outcome, the alternative story lines of people's lives are thickened and more deeply rooted in history, the gaps are filled, and these story lines are clearly named" (p. 10). The following question emerged: *What did you do in response to resist the invitation of the failure identity claim?*

Paula's answer to this question was the following: Realising that the others are getting on with their work brings about a surge of fear and a desire to conform. I hear the words "dumb" and "stupid" in my inner dialogue and am faced with the fear that accompanies the painful realisation that I am failing in this context.

In my mind I hear ideas of how to behave in this setting... thoughts such as "don't put your hand up; that will only attract attention to the fact that you're dumb," and "don't ask the others for help, as this will identify you as being weak and vulnerable." The threat of a failure definition as a student is so compelling that I feel I have no option but to draw on courage, and resort to a "cheating look." According to the educational discourse, the performance of a "cheating look" is also an unacceptable move, which brings with it the threat of punishment. Therefore, to make this move, I must first discipline my body and plan my next step, as I desperately do not want to take up the invitation to, and the identity claim of, "dumbness."

I don't want to be dumb. I don't think I'm stupid. I have to do something.

Underpinning this move is the hope that I am intelligent and can take the necessary steps to get out of this predicament. So, I discipline the muscles that control my facial expressions and eye movement to perform a cheating look.

Without moving my head I again swivel my eyes to the right as far as I can. I can feel the muscles of my eyes straining. Slowly I shift my gaze left.

Once this is done I am then able to copy confidently what I imagine the other children are doing.

Step 4. Foundations of action: Antidote to failure—small but significant steps

The kinds of question that White (2002) poses in this category are intended to identify the actions taken in order to refuse the expectations, norms, and standards of the educational discourse in this context. These achievements provide a platform for a refusal of other aspects of socially constructed norms, such as methods or procedures associated with these norms. Inspired by White (2002), the following question was constructed: *What did you do that supported you in refusing this position call of failure?*

Paula revisited the story as follows: Even though I can neither follow the teacher's instructions, nor see the exercise written in chalk on the blackboard, I resist the position call of failure. Drawing on specific knowledges I hold, I call on courage and implement a "cheating" strategy of checking out what the others are doing, in the process inventing a new form of "mathematics." Mimicking what I imagine I can see the others are doing, I begin to

write random, indecipherable "numbers" and squiggles on my page too. I try to be as neat on the page as possible.

This is working.

Relief...I try to be as neat on the page as possible....There. I stare at my handiwork and nod. That should do it.

Satisfied, I close my book.

This strategy seems to work at first and I feel relief in my body as I take pride in creating the numbers and squiggles. This action of confidently copying what I think I see the others doing, as well as taking artistic licence to concoct that which I cannot see, can be described as resisting a failure identity position. At this moment, I claim creativity as artistic licence in the movement of my identity. This calling on courage

and the creative steps I take bring a moment of relief from the fear that accompanies the spectre of personal failure.

Step 5. Ethical substance: Bottom line consideration

This category of inquiry identifies what motivates or shapes the steps of refusal that people take. Paula addressed the following questions: *What names would you give to what lies at the heart of the steps you took? What were your hopes for your identity as a student?*

Paula's response was this: The efforts I make represent a serious engagement with the task. This implies that the six-year-old is conforming to a work ethic. This work ethic inspires a stepping into courage and a deviation from the structures of the educational discourse, which in its turn makes possible the performance of the cheating look. The adherence to this work ethic is also illustrated by the following memory:

The effort it takes to painstakingly try to fit the squiggles neatly inside the little faint pale blue squares forces the tip of my tongue to follow the movement of my hand. Up...and...down and...around. Up...and...down...and...around...

The firm and forceful pressing with the pencil leaves an indentation on my right ring finger that also reflects the degree of commitment to this work ethic.

This calling on deviousness and courage, as well as the serious engagement with the task, can be construed as a small but significant step of resistance to the invitation of failure and is a testament to the degree to which I had already mastered a work ethic at the age of six. The creative additions and the embroidering of the "numbers" and squiggles that I inscribe in my book also illustrate the depth of my commitment to the work ethic I held at that time. I heeded the call of the work ethic to produce work in spite of the limitations I face. I do not give myself a hard time for not knowing what to do, as I know that I am being asked to fulfil a task too big for me. This knowing that I hold on to makes it possible for me to continue and to strategise, even under pressure. I draw on a spirit of hope and courage, and call on courage to help me meet the expectations of the work ethic.

Step 6. Mode of subjectification: System of rules/body of values and principles

At this point in the maps of inquiry, questions are designed to uncover key values and principles that underpin these refusals and might be accorded the status of "rules" or "laws of living" that are "shaped by culture and class specific narratives about the 'good life'" (White, 2002, p. 59). Drawing on White (2002), Paula posed the following

question of her text: *What key values and principles guided you in this expression of self-preservation?*

These are the answers she found: In the face of an invitation to personal failure, I took up the challenge and drew on the resources I had at my disposal. This I would name the “resourcefulness” of the six-year-old. Standing up to personal failure and resisting the position call of dumbness and stupidity signals hope for a positive student identity—one that is creative, hard-working, valued, engaged, intelligent, courageous, and competent. Key values that underpin this resourcefulness of the six-year-old are:

“*Fairness and justice*” This set of principles reflects a valuing of and appreciation for self—a sense that I deserved to be treated fairly and justly. By the age of six I had already been instilled with a sense of my own worth by my parents, in particular my mother, who supported me unflinchingly, so that I held the belief that I could do anything if I set my mind to it.

“*Adherence to the work ethic*” By endeavouring to comply with the expectations of success and productivity of the educational discourse, I took up a position that was informed by a valuing of working hard, as well as an obligation or responsibility to be seen to be doing what I am requested to do. A person who is hard-working and virtuous is valued and rewarded in society.

“*Resourcefulness*” This is also the ability to think for and help oneself, despite an absence of support. Resourcefulness lies in my resistance, even then, to responding to the position call of failure and speaks of a desire to want the best for myself.

“*Courageousness*” Stepping into a courageous position is an antidote to anxiety and despair, and a sign of hope.

Step 7. Asceticism: Self- and relationship-forming activities

In this category of inquiry, White’s questions concern identity formation through self- and relationship-forming activities. They are intended to unpack efforts to become an ethical person (“subject”). Drawing on White (2002), Paula constructed bridges from experiences, captured in the story of the six-year-old, to her current counselling practices as a student counsellor. She reflected on and remembered the key values and principles that guided her in the expression of self-preservation as a six-year-old and then brought them forward to employ them in an ethical practice in the counselling room. She asked herself: *When you step into experiencing this fairness and justice, resourcefulness, courageousness, and commitment to a work ethic, what is it like for you? How do these practices of fairness, resourcefulness, courageousness, and commitment to a strong work ethic shape your counselling practice?*

To respond, Paula called on a recent experience in the counselling room (Money Penny, 2013, pp. 98–99) that provided an insight into how these values underpin her preferred way of working, inviting her self into self-reflexivity and self-reflections:

On the couch sits a thirteen-year-old boy and his mother.

They talk about

Listening to self to know that things aren't right

And when things are right...

To speak up.

Slowly... the counsellor scaffolds with them

desiring to do the right thing.

Inner dialogue: Is standing up for others what he wants? Is his speaking injustice a calling to the fore of the self-as-political? Where does this knowledge he holds come from?

He talks

About the support from his mum

If things get bad.

At the end of the session they leave, all three transported.

Where are they transported to?

Is this moving toward an ethical self?

Is this self as art in process? Is this becoming other?

Has the counsellor been transformed? Have the others?

Have they reconnected to their hopes and dreams?

Has she supported them in this?

Step 8. Telos: The goal or desire of becoming an ethical practitioner

In White's (2002) final category of inquiry, questions are asked to establish aspirations for behaving as a moral being: what hopes and dreams a person has for his or her life, and the efforts made to act as an ethical being. Paula asked herself: *What do the efforts you made as a six-year-old to better position yourself under difficult circumstances say about what hopes you hold for learning journeys and your counselling practice?*

Paula's response to this question was the following: This exercise uncovers the importance of taking up a courageous and hard-working position that values resourcefulness and confidence during my learning journeys, at school, as a mature

student in counselling studies, and in my counselling practice. Bridging between the story of the six-year-old and the failure identity of the student counsellor available to me resulted in my retrieval of important values and principles that sustain me and that can be called upon in my current practice. At the heart of my resistance to being positioned as a failure by educational discourses lies an expression of self-preservation and survival. I think this resistance is evidence of agency being available to me as I took this up. I may be able to take this up, again and again, when embarking on learning journeys and in my counselling practice. I hold on to hope that an ethical counselling practice will make similar agentic positions available for clients. I can slow down and create space for a more sustainable practice by positioning myself as a co-searcher with clients, especially when invitations to “successfully solve the problem” and “do it all on one’s own” present themselves. The position of collaboration also creates the space to take risks in the light of the new ideas of “failure” I hold.

Coda

For Foucault (1994c), the preconditions for the formation of an ethical self are freedom and reflexivity. Reflexivity is important because it means that a subject can deconstruct ideas and practices, and in doing so, consciously reflect on the positions on offer by power/knowledge, and make considered decisions from the critical position of this reflexivity. In the example, we touched on the positions that Paula had woven: the value associated with the notion that hard work will produce rewards, and the trust that they will do so, regardless of when they will come, resulting in a feeling of virtuousness, of success, and of being beyond reproach. Simultaneously, she also took up a position that resisted individualistic notions of rewards and reconnected to alternative values and dreams of being in relation to, and of service to, others. This opened a position of holding on to the individual drive of success and competition with others, while simultaneously releasing this drive to acquire a new skill of relationality, co-constructing knowledge with others, and of understanding that identities are formed in relationship with others.

In analysing this story of the six-year-old’s experience through the lens of White’s (2002) failure map, it was possible to deconstruct the notions of failure, success, and the power of educational discourses. The process made visible how the six-year-old Paula dealt with adversity by calling on courageous strategies. Undertaking this exercise highlighted the feat of strength, intellect, and spirit performed by the six-year-old in pursuit of her goal. When Paula connects to these practices and ideas today, doing so may

contribute to a more collaborative engagement with her clients. This opens up space to focus on the do-able within the practice of doing reasonable hope (Weingarten, 2010).

Endnotes

- 1 The material in this article draws on Paula's Master of Counselling thesis.
- 2 See Crocket and Kotzé (2011) for storying identities in counsellor education.

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