

Oh, glorious failures! Lightning talks on how to succeed through failure

By Danielle LaFrance.

"Discomfort" and "failure" were two conceptual bookends to my BC Library Conference experience, and the link between them is nuanced below. The second day of the BCLC included a revealing research contribution by Dr. Lisa Nathan, iSchool at UBC, where she focused on discomfort as a negative affective state to consider in the library profession. Dr. Nathan's research context is particular to the new developments of the Indian Residential School Research Centre at UBC and the rigorous questions settlers have to ask themselves around complicity and reproduction of systemic, colonial power. I introduce this concept of discomfort as an important inter-conference relationship to consider with another session on failure. "Oh, glorious failures! Lightning talks on how to succeed through failure" was comprised of 13 speakers each with five minutes to talk about their experiences with failure, trials and tribulations.

The introduction to the session critiques the performance inherent to participating in a conference whereby "sessions are about putting our best foot forward, about sharing what went well, and about glossing over what didn't work out." There is discomfort with disclosing failure in professional environments, especially in the library world where we're often expected to provide information first over our own perspective on the resource. Sometimes our work involves engaging with communities we have no personal affiliation with other than through our work place. Sometimes our programs, our redesigned space, our good intentions fail miserably. During this session, if the podium was a confessional booth and the participants acted as 150 priests, no one was innocent of committing failure.

On the chopping block included Shane Plante, Simon Fraser University Library, Shailoo Bedi, University

of Victoria Libraries, Kim Davison, Fraser Valley Regional Library, Susan Downs, Innisfil Public Library, Dethe Elza, Mozilla, Sarah Felkar, West Vancouver Memorial Library, Erin Fields, University of British Columbia Library, Tamarack Hockin, Surrey Public Library, Barbara Jo May, Okanagan Regional Library, Shannon Ozirny, West Vancouver Memorial Library, John Pateman, Thunder Bay Public Library, Tami Setala, BC Libraries Cooperative, and Beth Davies, Vancouver Public Library. And the failures were endless from experimental spaces in open education to pressure from local government to missing a building budget by 2M, to collection merchandising gone awry to deleting all the systems MARC records to accidentally patronizing teenage interest in art to building a beautiful law library that no one actually used.

Library professionals choose not to disclose their failures for a reason: if disclosing the failure in some way suggests the library as a space isn't worth investing in than we're not only without one of the last free and open spaces but also out of a job. Discomfort is what sits and needles us into inactivity if kept in hiding. Failures are when expectations fall flat without reprieve. Although the speakers tended to focus on how their failures were overcome and how this led to a nuanced sense of success, I found the major takeaway for participants had more to do with breaking from the traditional form of the conference as well as from the game of role playing the professional angel. This session was about acting out and it was refreshing.

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