A Phenomenological Case Study: Independent High School Teachers' Perceptions of Student Fears of Failure

by

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Abstract

Student fears of failure are prevalent in K-12 schooling and post-secondary education. However, examining a teacher perspective on what the failure is that high school students are afraid of and how students' fears of failure are addressed by independent school teachers in their teaching practice is unclear in current research. This study used semi-structured phenomenological interviews and vignette responses with independent high school teachers to gain insight into how teachers perceived student fears of failure and how these perceptions influenced the decisions they made to address students' fears. Teacher participants viewed student fears of failure as interwoven with many fears and expectations that students face. To address these fears, teachers strove to facilitate student well-being through ensuring that each student knew that they would be supported in moments of fear, including their fears of failure, while also helping students shift their perspective on failure and the need to fear it in the longer-term.

Keywords: teacher; student; perception; fear of failure; case study; phenomenology

Dedication

This thesis is written for all educators who tirelessly support the needs of students and who strive to build communities of learning where everyone can feel safe and supported. Thank you for your work. I hope in some small way that this research will acknowledge your efforts through the stories of these teachers. This thesis is also dedicated to all students who have been, or still are afraid of failure. Those fears are real experiences that can come with great weight. May this study bring hope to you that fear does not need to win.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Acronyms

PFAI	Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory
PI	Phenomenological Interviews
SFU	Simon Fraser University

Chapter 1.

Introduction

According to the Collins Dictionary, perception is both the “way that you think about…or the impression you have of” and a “recognition of” a reality (Collins, 2024b, para. 2). Held together, perception then is not only the thought process and beliefs a person has surrounding a concept, but is also how someone identifies that a concept is present (Collins, 2024b). In this study, which sought to explore teachers’ perceptions of student fears of failure, perception then was not only what teachers thought about student fears of failure, but also how teachers identified if these student fears were present. In Henderson’s (2002) study of teacher’s perceptions, he sought to “document teachers’ understandings, assumptions and beliefs” of failure in the context of literacy (p. 53). In the same way, I sought to make the internal beliefs of high school teachers visible in the process of gathering vignette responses and conducting qualitative interviews with teachers about their perception of student fears of failure.

By focusing on teachers’ perceptions of student fears of failure rather than the students’ perspectives on their own fears, I strove to gain insight into the ways that teachers’ beliefs about their students’ educational experiences impacted their decision making in the classroom. The importance of perception is particularly true for teachers, as teacher perceptions “have been found to affect a number of processes related to teachers’ practices, such as teachers’ planning, decision making, and how and what students learn” (Lutovac & Flores, 2022, p. 57). As further affirmed by Stahnke et al.’s (2016) review of teacher beliefs in mathematics education, “teachers’ in-the-moment decision making is influenced by their knowledge, beliefs, and goals” especially when choosing which instructional strategy to apply in what situation (p.1). As another example, in Caleon et al.’s (2022) study that focused on high school teachers’ perceptions of underperforming students, when teachers believed that exams were the main indicator of students’ success or failure, teachers implemented instructional strategies that emphasized correcting mistakes and making sure students remained on-task. It is the relationship between the internal beliefs of teachers regarding student fears of failure and the pedagogical choices they make, including assessment practices and classroom routines, that was at the core of this study.

In looking at the literature on students' experience of fearing failure, a generalized fear of failure is well documented for elementary (Hargreaves, 2015; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017), high school (Borgonovi & Han, 2021; Choi, 2021; Conroy, 2003; Caraway et al., 2003; De Castella et al., 2013; Dinc & Eski, 2019; Myers, 2019) and post-secondary students (Benson et al., 2022; Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Conroy, 2004; Cox, 2009b; Elliot & Thrash, 2004; Inoue, 2014; Lou & Noels, 2016; Nunes et al., 2022; Podlog, 2002; Shepherd et al., 2020). The prevalence of students' fear of failure across age groups speaks to its pervasiveness in the educational lives of students and the need for teachers to not only be aware of, but also address student fears of failure.

Researchers largely conceive a fear of failure within an academic context as negatively impacting students' academic and personal lives (Caraway et al., 2003; Conroy 2003; De Castella et al., 2013; Martin & Marsh, 2003). A fear of failure can increase procrastination behaviours especially for students who feel that they have low levels of competence (De Castella et al., 2013; Haghbin et al., 2012; Caraway et al., 2003; Karim et al., 2022; Rahimi & Hall, 2021) and can decrease high school students' motivation to participate in academic tasks (Caraway et al., 2003; Dickhauser et al., 2016; Dinger et al, 2013; Life, 2015; Reiss, 2009). These fears can also decrease the ability for students to regulate their behaviours in learning tasks (Minnaert, 1999) and can decrease the ability for students to see themselves as capable of fulfilling their personal goals (De Castella et al., 2013; Langens & Schmalt, 2002). A fear of failure can also prompt students to take avoidance measures when completing academic tasks or courses (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Choi, 2021). Additionally, students who fear failure may even experience emotional consequences including feeling ashamed, powerless (Choi, 2021; Conroy et al., 2002; McGregor & Elliot, 2005; Niederkofler et al., 2015) and sad (Huang, 2021). Fears of failure can be particularly debilitating for students, as their fears of failure are seen by researchers as interconnected with their self-efficacy (Caraway et al., 2003; Ma, 2021), motivation (Choi, 2021; Conroy, 2001; Conroy, 2004; De Castella et al., 2013), and goal orientation (Elliot & Thrash, 2004; Caraway et al., 2003; Lou & Noels, 2016; Lutovac & Flores, 2022; Putwain & Symes, 2011).

Much of the research on student fears of failure has been quantitative and has focused on measuring fears of failure using pre-determined metrics (Borgonovi & Han, 2021; Caraway et al., 2003; Choi, 2021; De Castella et al., 2013; Dinc & Eski, 2019; Dinger et al., 2013, Huescar Hernandez et al., 2020; Wach et al., 2015). However, the

consequences of students fearing failure are also substantiated in qualitative research, though on a more limited scale than the amount of quantitative research available in this area. These qualitative studies primarily speak to the experience of fearing of failure from student participants' own perspectives (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Cox, 2009b; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Nunes et al., 2002; Pope, 2001). In Cox's (2009a) interviews of students at a community college, students experienced a "fear of failure" that sometimes translated into an "actual failure" in their coursework (p. 67); the experience of failure had tangible consequences not only for their mental state, but also their academic outcomes in not completing a course that served as a gateway to further studies. As one of the few qualitative researchers that has explored specifically high school students' experience with fearing failure, Pope's (2001) findings with high school students present similar themes to Cox's (2009b) interviews with college students. In Pope's (2001) study, the students who were interviewed at times felt significant anxiety and frustration surrounding failing to meet the varied expectations of others. This fear of failure meant that they were willing to cheat or manipulate relationships with teachers despite these strategies going against their own value system (Pope, 2001). In short, a fear of failure is a student reality that not only shapes their experience of the education system, but also their decisions within it that can have lasting consequences.

A fear of failure may feel particularly debilitating for female students (Alkhazaleh & Mahasneh, 2016; Jerrim, 2022; Niederkofler et al., 2015), especially for female students in traditionally male-dominated fields of study (Borgonovi & Han, 2021; Wach et al., 2015). Students' lower socioeconomic status may also amply the negative impact of their fears of failure (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021). With the diversity of experiences of student fears of failure in mind, to what extent high school teachers actively seek to cultivate mindsets that recognize and respond to students' fears of failure or use other strategies to decrease student fears of failure warrants further research.

Despite the prevalence of the fear of failure for students across a variety of classroom settings (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Borgonovi & Han, 2021) and teachers' explanations for student academic failure in relation to student academic performance (Frelin, 2015; Henderson, 2002; Matteucci & Gosling, 2004), I could find no literature that speaks specifically to the perspective of high school teachers on students' experiences of fearing failure. While examining the causes for student academic failure alone can provide valuable information for teachers (Matteucci & Gosling, 2004), these explanations do not fully recognize the emotional aspect of student fears of failure or the

students who may fear failure but perform well academically (Dai, 2000; De Castella et al., 2013). Additionally, while limited research has examined post-secondary professors' responses to student fears of failure (Cox, 2009b; Whittle et al., 2020), I could find no study that discusses to what extent high school teachers consciously work to address student fears of failure or what they view as their role in student fears within the broader institution of education.

The lack of teacher perspectives in this area of research is surprising, as from a student perspective, the way teachers design their lessons can increase or decrease student fears of failure (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Coudevylle et al., 2021; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Huescar Hernandez et al., 2020; Inoue, 2014; Meijer, 2007; Nunes et al., 2022). Additionally, as hypothesized by Meyers et al. (2019) and studied by Frelin (2015), teachers who empathize with students' fears of failure and recognize its potential effects on learning, may actually lessen students' avoidance of learning opportunities while also strengthening the student-teacher relationship. In contrast, from a student perspective, the level of competition and comparison encouraged by teachers in a classroom setting could reinforce student fears of failure (Hodis & Hodis, 2020; Pantziara & Phillippou, 2015; Weissman et al., 2022;). Doing research to gain insight into high school teachers' perspectives sought to help identify what teachers saw as their role in shaping students' experiences with fearing failure in classroom contexts.

The need for this research is also affirmed by previous conversations that I had with high school teachers. As advocated by Maxwell (2009), piloting conversations about a phenomenon previous to a study situates research "not [in] theoretical abstractions" but instead in the "real[ness]" of people's lives (p. 58). This research not only addresses a gap in current literature, but also the practical needs of teachers and students; conversations with teachers previous to this study commented on the scarcity of dialogue about student fears of failure within their professional experience. With this context in mind, the purpose of this study was to invite teachers into this dialogue through exploring their perceptions regarding students' fears of failure and how these perceptions shaped the pedagogical choices that these high school teachers made.

Chapter 2.

Theoretical Perspective

The theory that guided this research was social constructionism as defined by Berger and Luckmann's (1966) work *The Social Construction of Reality*. Social constructionism acknowledges that no singular person's perspective fully encapsulates all knowledge and that, instead, it is through the interaction with others that knowledge is built and reinforced (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 35). Because knowledge is viewed as constructed by people within a society rather than being an in-born and self-evident truth of humanity, failure and the fear of failure in this research were both considered as socially-constructed realities; people have conceived the idea of failure and have the power to reconstruct the concept of failure for others in their day-to-day interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 69, p.169). Through these interactions, individuals engage in a broader process of internalization, institutionalization, and legitimization of social norms, where constructed knowledge and beliefs become "embodied in routines" and entrenched in "human activity" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 169, p.70). Student failure, and the need to fear it, then exists within the education system because people have built it into the very fabric of the current education system and fears of failure are perpetuated because those in positions of authority maintain its reality even if unintentionally.

When taking on the role of an employee of a school and the broader education system, teachers not only participate in the construction of norms like failure and success criteria that are upheld by educational institutions, but may also implicitly or explicitly transmit these beliefs to students through the choices they make about how they teach. Social constructionism views individuals as holding knowledge because of the repeated experiences that they encounter with those around them and those who are present in face-to-face encounters are particularly powerful in shaping a person's experience (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 43). Therefore, teachers from a social constructionist perspective hold a powerful role in society because they interact with students face-to-face for extended periods of time. Teachers, when viewed as closely involved in the socialization of students, inhabit the role of potential legitimizer of the existence of failure and, in doing so, can act as a voice of affirmation of failure's power within the educational system and students' lives (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 165).

However, teachers can also become potential voices of transformation of what the reality of failure means for students and can facilitate students' deconstruction of the need to fear failure or the existence of failure at all. With this role of the teacher in mind, the way a teacher views the realities of students' fears of failure and responds to them is not just an accidental by-product of an ambiguous system, but rather the result of conscious or unconscious choices made by each person in the school system (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.77). While the environment of the specific school may undoubtedly contribute implicitly or explicitly to these choices, it is teachers' decision-making processes regarding how to address student fears of failure, if at all, that was the crux of this study.

Viewed through the lens of social constructionism, language usage and pedagogical choice in the hands of adults, like teachers, hold particular influence for children and adolescents (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.163) in confirming or challenging students' preconceived ideas about themselves and the consequences of failure. While not always explicitly referencing the word failure, what teachers say while interacting with students or explaining assessments may "maintain subjective realit[ies] of students particularly when done repeatedly and consistently" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 172). In a social constructionist perspective, language is able to communicate the constructed realities not only of individuals, but also of an institution like education. It is through this language that participants build a "common world" and negotiate the meaning of social norms (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.37). The language teachers use to describe what it means to fail and whether teachers consciously consider how language can be used to lessen students' fears of failure, may point to what teachers perceive as their role in creating shared understandings between teachers and students. The language usage of teachers in explaining failure and student fears of failure necessitates further study because this language is connected to not only teacher beliefs about their role, but also the beliefs they transmit to students while inhabiting this role.

In social constructionist theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), when the symbolic meaning that a term represents conflicts or fails to be passed down between generations within a common space like a classroom this "unsuccessful socialization" can come with consequences for individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.187). Namely, conflicting definitions of terms like failure may create strong, negative emotional responses like fear in students when they try to reconcile these different perceptions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.191). By interviewing teachers about how they perceive the failure that students are afraid of, analysis within and across teachers looked for consistency of their

definitions of failure as one factor that could perpetuate or augment student fears of failure. The ability for language to speak to both individual and social realities also necessitates that this study use a qualitative rather than quantitative methodology.

Before teachers alone are held responsible for students' experience of education and their fears of failure, social constructionism recognizes that individuals may not only participate in the performance of a given role, but also that all roles stem from the broader social reality that has been cultivated by institutions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 91, 93). Social constructionism does not just consider these individual interactions and instead emphasizes the broader ecology that each individual exists within, especially when they are a part of an institution (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 72). The decisions and thought process of the teachers interviewed as part of this study pointed then not only to their own perspectives on the topic studied, but also their perspective on broader social realities within their educational institution.

Furthermore, the language used by teachers to convey their beliefs about student fears of failure and what teachers did as a result of these beliefs was not just the voice of the teacher alone. While it may be easy to see the teacher as the holder of the definitions of failure and the sole cause for why students may be afraid of failing, teachers and the students that they teach are "located within much more comprehensive history" that "decisively shapes [their] situation" and understanding of the world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.41). The concept of failure and its everyday consequences like being feared precede any teacher who is currently teaching.

Therefore, teachers too have inherited a social understanding of failure and fear from the educators before them. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), those initially involved in constructing a social reality shared an inside knowledge of why the reality was built as it was and what the language used within this reality meant (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.77). However, those removed from this initial decision making inherit the realities of previous generations without these same rationales (Berger & Luckmann, 1696, p.77). The distance between the origins of a construct and present times makes the inherited ideologies appear "unalterable, and self-evident" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.77). Considering failure, both current teachers and students operate outside of the initial decision to introduce the potential for failure into the school system. Furthermore, considering fear as a part of student's experience in school, this reality too is viewed as long pre-dating current teachers and students. Therefore, both the existence of failure and its potential to be feared may be viewed as part of an

unquestioned reality of the education system that perpetuates decisions of the past (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.77; 84); fears of failure may persist within schools at least in part because its existence appears normal for teachers and students alike and, as such, may be engrained into the very fabric of the schools themselves. The research in this study sought to examine not only teacher beliefs about student fears of failure in the classroom, but also to understand if teachers viewed failure and fear as a part of a constructed, social reality that they had some control in changing. Furthermore, this research examined to what extent teachers made classroom-level decisions that allowed students to acknowledge this same socialized reality of fearing failure.

In exploring teachers' perspectives on student fears of failure, the question becomes, what is a fear of failure and who determines if it is something to fear? Especially if parts of "everyday life [are] taken for granted as reality…the routines of everyday life continue without interruption" and may continue simply because they are viewed as "unproblematic" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 37-38). From this perspective, a teacher's level of awareness of student fears of failure, how they perceive student fears of failure, and the ways they attempted to address student fears of failure may all point to a need to question the systematic norms of the education system rather than the capabilities of any individual teacher.

Instead of being a quick process, where teachers can help students lessen their fears of failure by means of brief interventions or conversations, Berger and Luckman (1966) emphasize that due to the entrenchment of institutional norms and the methods that institutions use to legitimize them, "if [we] want to challenge the proclamation [of everyday realities]...[we] must engage in deliberate and by no means easy effort" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 37). From a social constructionist perspective, because this "effort" is required if social realities like fear of failure are to be questioned, this study asked teachers not only about their general perceptions of student fears of failure, but also for concrete examples of what student fears of failure looked like in their classroom experience and the intentional strategies they used to address these fears in the classroom (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 37).

Chapter 3.

Literature Review

In conducting this literature review using the Simon Fraser University [SFU] library database, one of the first challenges I encountered was how to find articles that specifically examined not just students' academic failure in relation to their grades, but rather their experience of fearing failure. Adding to this complexity, as Cox (2022) identified in reviewing the presentation of emotions within the context of higher education, the language used by researchers to describe a wide array of emotions and the meanings behind these terms is not always consistent across fields in academia. As a result, I had to choose whether I would include studies that used words other than fear to describe students' experiences of failure. Despite the inconsistency of language use across educational research (Cox, 2022), Lazarus' (1991) summary of theories used to study emotions in educational research advocates that "each…emotion—that is anger, fear, guild, shame, and so on-is also a separate and distinct reaction…each involves a different person-environment relationship and pattern of appraisal" (p.11). While a limitation of this literature review, literature searches focused on student fears alone rather than student anxiety or any other emotion, as comparing the use of emotional language across educational research was outside of the scope of this study.

To first focus on literature most closely related with the phenomenon of study, teachers' perceptions on student fears of failure, the search terms "fear of failure" AND "student" AND "teacher" AND "high school" were used. I then conducted a subsequent search replacing "high school" with "secondary" and another search that replaced these terms with "education," as not all educational systems use the same language to describe the last few years of K-12 schooling. Between these searches 229 English, peer-reviewed articles were found in the last 10 years. Of these studies 44 were included in the final review, as all others were excluded because they focused on a university-specific task (e.g. medical school examinations), focused on teacher or parent fears, or did not mention student fears of failure beyond the introduction to the study. To ensure no further studies were missed that did not use the precise phraseology "fear of failure," I conducted another search using the terms "fear" and "failure" separately. For this search the additional keyword "grades" was limited, as this study focused on failure in the context of student's emotional experience rather than purely an explanation of

quantifying student progress. Of the 75 peer reviewed articles from the last 10 years, two were included in the review, as the majority were duplicates from previous searches.

A final search was done without the term “fear” to find studies that may describe student experiences or teacher perspectives using similar terms in the abstract, but that examined a fear of failure in the findings or results section of the study. This search was limited to include only research from educational settings that did not to focus on specific interventions (e.g. e-learning or communication devices). This choice was made because assessing a specific intervention often did not discuss teacher or student experiences beyond the effectiveness of the intervention itself. Of the 322 peer-reviewed results, 89 focused on a specific intervention and 146 did not discuss student failure, but instead discussed teachers’ fears, the failure of a school or program, or the failure to adequately provide resources to teachers. Seven studies from this search were included in the review for a total of 57 studies across all searches. For a summary of all inclusions and exclusions throughout the literature review process, see Appendix A, Figure A1.

Additional articles and book chapters were identified through following citations from these core studies. Researchers like Atkinson (1957), Conroy et al. (2001), Covington (1992), Cox (2009a), and Elliot and Thrash (2004) were also included in this review as they appeared in several of the initially reviewed articles.

3.1. Examining the Context of Studying Student Fears of Failure

While I could find no history on student fears of failure within the Canadian school system, Straehler-Pohl and Pais’s (2014) interviews with teachers and students forefront the reality that both parties exist within a school system where the “conditions for failure” are taken as broader, school-wide norms (p.93). These norms are especially associated with reinforcing and justifying the idea of merit-earned acknowledgement (Straehler-Pohl & Pais, 2014). Looking at failure from a critical historical perspective, these institutionalized norms that perpetuate student fears of failure stem then in part from the historical decisions of educational leaders (Di Mascio, 2019). The decision to include the possibility of failure in schools and to view failure as fear-inducing can then be perpetuated in modern times through teachers’ and administrators’ pedagogical decisions (Strahler-Pohl & Pais, 2014). Pedagogical decisions that could perpetuate the existence of the fear of failure, could include the continued use of testing in schools, the continued use of competition and comparison between students, and the continued use of grades to motivate students to meet the expectations of parents, teachers, and

students themselves (Contenta, 1993; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). These origins of student fears of failure are further affirmed by Birney et al. (1969) who concluded that the "fear of failure arises only after standards of task excellence are established against which self-evaluation or social evaluation may be made" (p.232).

With this socialization in mind, the fear of failure in this study is viewed as developing through social processes rather than existing as an emotion automatically held by a student (Birney et al., 1969). This impact of socialized norms on students' experiences of fearing failure has since been affirmed by studies like Borgonovi and Han's (2021) analysis of 517,047 high school students' survey data where they concluded that students from countries who had less of a focus on cultivating "growth mindset reported higher fear of failure" (p.28). This socialization process reinforces the need to examine teachers' perceptions on student fears of failure as a potential avenue for perpetuating or reducing student fears.

However, tension between researchers' approaches to understanding fears of failure within education exists. Foundational to studying the fear of failure, achievement motivation researchers like Atkinson (1957) viewed a student's desire to avoid failure as stemming from a motivation to minimize interactions with negative emotions like shame or other forms of emotional pain. Although Atkinson's (1957) theory of achievement-motivation offers a potential explanation for why a student may desire to avoid tasks that they view as challenging because of a fear of failure, this theory explores the student's decision making as a function of their level of motivation to complete the task rather than examining the way external factors beyond the student shape these motivations. From an achievement perspective, building on Covington's (1992) work, Martin and Marsh (2003) also focused on the different profiles that students could have when encountering fears of failure and theorized that fears of failure could be reflected in four groups of students: "self-protectors, failure acceptors, over-strivers, and optimists" (Martin & Marsh, 2003, p. 32). These researchers again situate student fears of failure as focused on the individual.

However, missing from these models (Atkinson, 1957; Covington, 1992) is an explanation of how factors outside of the student, like the teacher, view their impact on why a student may feel the need to avoid failure or accept it as a predetermined reality that they cannot overcome. Instead, this study seeks to acknowledge that fear can be a part of the student experience of education (Palmer, 2017) and that judgements of what student work constitutes a failure is also interwoven into the school system's evaluative

nature of student performance (Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Hargreaves, 2004; Straehler-Pohl & Pais, 2014; Simpson & Matlese, 2017, Inoue, 2014). In Kahram and Sunger's (2013) survey of Turkish middle school students and Ma's (2021) analysis of the 2018 PISA data from China, the United States of America, and Finland, both concluded that some of the countries focus of the education system, like the frequent experience of failure for Chinese students, and the comparison-based system of Turkey, had some level of impact on the variation in students fears of failure across these different nations. Additionally, the socialized systems of recognition within schools, like the Fijian academic-achievement award system noted by Singh and Chand (2022), and the elevation of some types of knowledge over others noted by Hargreaves (2004), can create "emotional economies of inclusion, distinction and disgust" (Hargreaves, 2004, p.37). As such, research on students' fears of failure needs to include examining not just the students' fears of failure in isolation, but rather how students' fears of failures may be impacted by those who are also a part of the education system, like teachers.

Birney et al. (1969) also introduced the possibility that "fear of failure would prove much more socially sensitive" than what Atkinson (1957) had theorized and that the type of tasks that students were asked to do, as well as the environment that students do the task in, were necessary to contextualize findings about student fears of failure (Birney et al., 1969, p.172). It is within these contexts that a students' "sense of self" is learned, which includes how failure is perceived (Birney et al., 1969, p. 230). Some researchers since have sought to understand the way students' fears of failure shift according to the type of assessment (Singh & Chand, 2022; Vanderhoven et al., 2012) and the way instructors present a task (Huescar Hernandez et a., 2020, Leptokaridou et al., 2016; Vanderhoven et al., 2012; Vehkakoski, 2020). However, exploring how high school teachers' beliefs surrounding student fears of failure impact their instructional choices and how they think these choices impact students' understandings of failure has not been explored to my knowledge.

More recently, researchers have also sought to study students' fears of failure without a teacher perspective (Borgonovi & Han, 2021; Caraway et al., 2003; De Castella et al., 2013; Hodis & Hodis, 2020; Jerrim, 2022; Life, 2015; Ladejo, 2021; Kahraman & Sungur, 2013, Regueiro et al., 2018; Weissman et al., 2022; Whittle et al., 2020) and to understand teacher's own fears of failure (Leighton et al., 2022; Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Woodcock et al., 2019) or teacher's attributions for student academic failure (Georgiou et al., 2002; Lutovac & Flores, 2022; Matteucci & Gosling, 2004;

Woodcock et al., 2019). However, to my knowledge no study examines Canadian, independent high school teachers' perspectives on their role in shaping student's experience of fearing failure where teachers and students are viewed as interconnected systems rather than separate entities.

3.2. Defining the Failure that Students are Afraid of

Examining further the idea of failure as something to be feared, which is a lived reality for some students (Borgonovi & Han, 2021; Choi, 2021; Conroy, 2003; Caraway et al., 2003; De Castella et al., 2013; Dinc & Eski, 2019; Myers, 2019), some may argue that success standards are a necessary part of this discussion because success is viewed as directly opposite to failure. However, as Conroy et al. (2001) and Bergold and Steinmayr (2016) concluded, fears of failure are unique from success-related motivations and should be considered as separate concepts rather than being dichotomous ends of the same scale. This difference between success and failure follows research by both Macdonald and Hyde (1980) in theorizing separate tests for fear of success in comparison to fear of failure, and Covington (1992) in theorizing that the pressure a student feels to pursue success may actually be a moderating factor in a student's fear of failure. De Castella et al.'s (2013) study of Japanese and Australian high school students support these theories, as researchers found that students could experience high or low levels of fear of failure depending on whether they felt the needed to protect themselves in educational settings or pursue success no matter the cost (De Castella et al., 2013). Due to success and failure being distinct constructs (Conroy et al., 2001; Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016; De Castella et al., 2013), this present study focuses only on teachers' perceptions of student fears of failure rather than students' experiences of both success and failure.

Within the context of failure alone, for each individual student or teacher, failure can take on innumerable definitions (Hargreaves, 2004; Lutovac & Flores, 2002). While some definitions of student failure, like those summarized by Lutovac and Flores' (2022) in their interviews of 42 pre-service teachers, focus on the gap between student's demonstration of their learning and the curricular goals set for students, there is also an emotional (Benson et al., 2022; Conroy et al; Hargreaves, 2004, Nunes et al., 2022; Simpson & Maltese, 2017; Wong, 2015), and experiential component of student failure (Shepherd et al., 2020, Whittle et al., 2020). Rather than exploring the failure that students may encounter based on academic outcomes alone, in not receiving a passing

grade, the failure explored in this study is the ever-shifting (Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Podlog, 2002), personal feeling of failure (Hargreaves, 2004; Lutovac & Flores, 2022) that can be experienced within but is not limited to the school environment (Myers, 2019). As such, failure in this study is not viewed as a stable construct with a universal definition but rather, as Simpson and Maltese (2017) concluded in their survey of 574 students, is defined individually based on a person's expectations, interpretation of outcomes, mindset, mental health state, and goals. Failure then is a "complex concept" that is "inherently subjective" (Fremantle & Kearney, 2015, p.316; Whittle et al., 2020, p.4) and requires interrogation within the experiences of people within the education system.

In the context of student's experience of failing then, the ways they experience this failure is not uniform or easily understood (Nunes et al., 2022; Podlog, 2002; Shepherd et al., 2020). As Whittle et al. (2020) summarized from their experience with action research with students, what may seem to others as signs of student's fulfillment of school-based expectations, like "getting good grades" or "handing in work regularly" did not dismiss the potential for students to still feel that they have failed (p.4). Not only can each individual teacher and student's perception failure very then, but Podlog (2002), in their interviews with athletes, also identified that failures may be perceived circumstantially and may be present in some environments but not others. Researchers have explored more all-encompassing definitions of what it means to fail for medical students (Shepherd et al., 2020), undergraduate biology students (Nunes et al., 2022), student athletes (Podlog, 2002), athletes and artistic performers (Conroy et al., 2001), and Finnish pre-service teachers (Lutovac & Flores, 2022). However, definitions of what student failure means specifically within a high school context for working teachers remains largely unexplored (see Appendix A, Table 6).

Despite the variation in definitions of what constitutes student failure and what this experience entails for students, in the literature reviewed failure carried a predominantly negative connotation (Conroy et al., 2001; Martin & Marsh, 2003, Nunes et al., 2022; Simpson & Maltese, 2017). In Hargreaves' (2004) review of school failure, he concluded that the "stigma that attaches to failure is not trivial" (p.33). Instead, the way that students encounter an emotional experience of feeling like they have failed can have consequences for interpersonal relationships and a student's participation in academic spheres (Conroy et al., 2003; Hargreaves, 2004). Furthermore, students' fears of failing an assessment or a test can even extend into their view of themselves (Cox,

2009a) to the point that grade outcomes become a part of their identity as a “failing student” (Fremantle & Kearney, 2015, p.315).The failures that students experience can also build over time in their negative impact, as students who begin avoiding failure, with continued failures, may shift to adopting coping strategies that include avoiding learning opportunities altogether and relying on other people’s help to avoid all risk of continued failure (Martin & Marsh, 2003). Across Conroy et al.’s (2001) study of athletes and performers, and Conroy’s (2003) study of college and high school students, failure was seen as having a wide array of negative effects including strong emotional discomfort, feelings of a lack of agency to change their situation, and thinking less of themselves because of their failures. Teaching staff may also hold a largely negative view of failure, as Simpson and Maltese (2017) concluded through their interviews with educators that only 19% viewed failure in a positive lens, and the remainder associated failure with terms like “inadaptability, setback” and “defeat” (p.228). While asking teachers about the failure that they saw students experience in this study was not assumed to always be a negative encounter, the potential for teachers to have identified a wide range of what failure meant to their students necessitated asking teachers about how they perceived students’ failures and how they reached these conclusions.

3.3. Defining the Fear that High School Students Experience

While the focus of this study was students’ fears of failure, fear in and of itself as one aspect of this study bears its own definition. While fear and anxiety can be used as synonymous terms in educational research (McNeil et al., 2017), fear is viewed by the dictionary of American Psychological Association (2018) as being more closely tied with the present moment. Fears of failing are then not just a distant possibility, but are instead a close, intense experience of emotions and physiological stressors that can be tied to a students’ present educational context (Whittle et al., 2020). This study also situates fear as a deeply personal and varied experience (Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017), as fear can include a variety of physiological responses like “sweaty palms and rapid heartrate” (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014, p.33) and socio-emotional responses like “worrying” and “panicking” (Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017, p.227). Despite the diversity in presentation of how fear can affect a person, at its core, fear is a protective reaction in response to an event that is seen as harmful to one’s physical, emotional, or social well-being (Davey, 2006). As such, fear is a common human emotion that can be protective in the short term (American Psychological Association, 2018). However, it is the

conditioning of a fear response over a longer term so that it is continuous, overwhelming, and at times emotionally paralyzing that is most closely associated with debilitating outcomes (Ledoux, 1998).

Fears, while sometimes motivating (Benson et al., 2022; Putwain & Symes, 2011; Wha Kim & Dembo, 2000), largely inhibit students' learning. Fear can create a classroom dynamic where students avoid interacting with others (Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017), avoid writing assessments (Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Putwain & Symes, 2011), or avoid verbally sharing their ideas (Hargreaves, 2015) because they are afraid of feeling embarrassed by their responses (Conroy, 2004; Downing et al., 2020; Palmer, 2017). Students may also fear that if they do not provide the expected response, they will not only face immediate, but also lasting social and academic consequences (Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, 2016). Although there are many different fears a student may have in a classroom, students' fears of failing to meet the expectations of themselves and their teachers are commonly affirmed by research (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Conroy, 2003; Dai, 2000; De Castella et al., 2013; Hargreaves, 2015; Nunes et al., 2022, Podlog, 2002; Simpson & Maltese, 2017). Due to fear's ability to instill deep anxiety and panic, to insight avoidance-behaviours, and to be a conditioned response based on context alone (Ledoux, 1998), students' fear of failure is of particular concern for educators. However, no research was found that examined the ways in which high school educators specifically sought to address students' fears of failure.

3.4. Defining Student Fears of Failure

Several researchers (Conroy et al., 2001; Choi, 2021; Macdonald and Hyde, 1980) have worked to quantify students' fear of failure and to more thoroughly define what a fear of failure means to students. Researchers like Conroy (2001; 2003; 2004) and Choi (2021) developed instruments like the "Fear of Failure in Learning" scale (Choi, 2021, p. 2114) and the "Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory [PFAI]" (Conroy, 2001, p. 433). However, student fears of failure is not a simple nor universally understood construct (Conroy, 2001). Following Atkinson's (1957) work, researchers like Conroy (2004) theorize that students may experience a general fear of failure or any of five sub-fears related to "experiencing shame and embarrassment, fears of devaluing one's self-estimate, fears of having an uncertain future, fears of important others losing interest, and fears of upsetting important others" (Conroy, 2004, p. 484).

Delving more deeply into these sub-fears, students' fears of failures that include the social implications of their actions, is affirmed by both older (Holt, 1964) and more recent research (Carled Ydhag et al., 2021; Downing et al., 2020). Fear of failure has deeply-rooted social consequences, as Bartels and Ryan (2013) concluded in their survey of 308 students that "interpersonal concerns appeared to be the primary concerns in response to failure" (p.47). The failure in this context that students can be afraid of goes beyond a specific mark, and instead focuses on the standards for approval according to the student's peers and the potential for this social approval to be removed (Downing et al., 2020; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Life, 2015). It was the potential for students to be mocked and thought less of by their peers that at times even caused students to withhold their effort and to remain silent in the midst of learning opportunities (Downing et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2021; Wonder, 2021, Yost et al., 2019). Fears of failure for students also included the perceived social implications of failure on their relationship with their teachers and parents (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Kahraman & Sungur; Nunes et al., 2022). Students' fears of failure included their worry that they would not fulfill their parents' goals, especially related to achieving high grades (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021, p.8; Life, 2015; Sing & Chand, 2022) or for some immigrant students, in continuing the family's pursuit of upward social mobility (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021). Within student fears of failure, some students may even fear that their failure will bring about negative emotional reactions from their parents and teachers (Kahraman & Sungur, 2013; Singh & Chand, 2022). Nunes et al. (2022) and Niederkofler et al. (2015) affirm that the fear of failing is often rooted for students in the fear of disappointing those whom students view as significant sources of affirmation in their lives.

Another component of students fears of failure includes their anticipation of the future (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Conroy, 2004; Hargreaves, 2015). Even as young as elementary school, the interviews and responses of the 60 students in Hargreaves' (2015) study, lead her to conclude that "much of the fear of the 60 children…seemed to be directed towards future negative consequences in the classroom" (p.626). These fears of failure related to future outcomes are not exclusive to elementary students though, as Carlhed Ydhag et al. (2021) similarly concluded that secondary school students were afraid of making a decision about their post-graduation plans that would lead to failure or that they would not have the grades needed to achieve their career

goals. Both Conroy (2004) and Ledejo (2021) affirm these findings, as both also found that college students also worried about the unpredictability of their future.

Students' fears of failure also encapsulated feelings of not being capable enough to fulfill expectations of themselves or others (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014, De Castella et al., 2013; Hargreaves, 2015; Ladejo, 2021; Wong, 2015). When students participate in class contexts, whether verbally sharing their ideas or completing learning tasks like assessments, students who are afraid of failure may view the results of these situations as "compelling evidence that one lacks ability" (De Castella et al., 2013, p.861). Or, students may be afraid that if they participated, they would be unable to know how to respond and would instead be completely "lost" (Hargreaves, 2015, p.630). Some students could even be so certain of their lack of ability that they reported both previous academic failures and that they felt that these failures discounted their ability to participate at all in an academic context (Cox, 2009a; Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, 2016).

While student fears of failure can pre-date student's entrance into high school (Hargreaves, 2015; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017), these fears of failure can continue to develop in high school (Dai, 2000; Niederkofler et al., 2015) and persist beyond high school into students' adult and post-secondary lives (Buchanan, 2014; Cox, 2009a; Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, 2016; Turner et al., 2021; Yost et al., 2019). As such, examining how aware teachers in a high school are to students' fears of failure may hold particular importance in trying to shift this cycle of fearing failure for students before they reach adulthood.

3.5. Consequences of Students' Fears of Failure

Student fears of failure is viewed in this study as having impacts on students' emotional well-being (Benson et al., 2022; Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Schwinger et al., 2022), interpersonal relationships (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Nunes et al., 2022), and academic outcomes (Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016; De Castella et al., 2013). The consequences of student fears of failure may be temporarily positive in moving students towards preparing for academic tasks like assessments or elevating students' level of concentration during their classes (Downing et al., 2020; Haghbin et al., 2012; Putwain & Symes, 2011). However, ultimately student fears of failure may only have temporary benefits in light of the often-longer-term consequences on students' learning and mental health (Martin & Marsh, 2003). These only transient benefits of student fears of failure led Martin and Marsh (2003) to conclude that while student fears of failure could be

perceived as a “friend” in sometimes providing some motivational benefits, it is ultimately a “foe” in bringing along with it overwhelming emotional weight, emotional volatility, and challenges for students trying to consistently perform in academic settings (p.31).

In terms of students’ learning, fears of failure can lead to students withholding themselves from learning opportunities in remaining silent due to their overwhelming fear (Downing et al., 2020; Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017). Fears of failure may also leave students in a position of cognitive challenge, where they struggle to learn new information in a way that can be retained (Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016; Konings et al., 2008; Yost et al., 2019) or to recall information that they already know (Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017). Student fear of failure may also lead students to the point where they avoid any potential moments of failure, which can mean removing themselves from significant learning opportunities (Bartholomew et al., 2018; De Castella et al., 2013; Dinger et al., 2013). As one type of avoidance behaviour, students who fear failure may procrastinate as another means to engage in less fear-inducing tasks or to avoid the possibility of their failures being verified by the results of doing the task at hand (Balkis & Duru, 2019; Haghbin et al., 2012; Karim et al., 2022). These avoidance behaviours related to students fears of failure may appear as a diminished motivation to learn (Dickhauser et al., 2016; Hodis & Hodis, 2020). Over time, students with fears of failure may also experience diminished self-efficacy (Niederkofler et al., 2015; Schwinger et al., 2022) and frequently strive to compare themselves to others to gain reassurance from others because of a lowered confidence in their own abilities (Bartels & Ryan, 2013; Michou et al., 2013; Weissman et al., 2022). Ultimately, some students’ fears of failure may translate not only into behavioural adjustments, as noted above, but also a decreased academic performance (Caraway & Tucker, 2003; De Castella et al., 2013; Dinger et al., 2013; Regueiro et al., 2018). In some situations, like in Cox’s (2009a) study of higher education students, fears of failure could even lead to a detrimental cycle of students failing a course entirely, further entrenching their fears.

Fears of failure are also defined in relation to the experience of deep emotional pain (Bartels & Ryan, 2013; Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016; Dinc & Eski, 2019; Elliot & Thrash, 2004; Huescar-Hernandez et al., 2020; Schwinger et al., 2022; Whittle et al., 2020). For some, fears of failure go beyond just a momentary experience and instead extend to be intertwined with profound feelings of not accepting who they are as a person (De Castella et al., 2013; Whittle et al., 2020). In Ahmadi et al.’s (2018) interviews with 160 undergraduate students, some students even reported their fears

were so debilitating and ever-present that the fears caused their sleep to be significantly disrupted. Student fears of failure have also been found to increase students' experience of depression (Benson et al., 2022) and increase students' anxiety in trying to complete tasks (Regueiro et al., 2018). Student fears of failure have also been connected with an increase in students' tendency to hold to a negative narrative about themselves (Balkis & Duru, 2019; Conroy, 2004), and to hold skewed evaluations of the weight of a task in terms of its impact on their emotional state (Haghbin et al., 2012).

For high school students in particular, students' fear of failure can increase students' negative self-concept and behaviours that limit their ability to engage in learning (Conroy, 2003; De Castella et al., 2013). Students' fears of failure can also decrease students' wholehearted engagement in academic tasks (Caraway et al., 2003; Reiss, 2009). Fears of failure may also increase student's deferral of important tasks amongst those who feel that they lack competence to complete what is being asked of them (Caraway et al., 2003; De Castella et al., 2013). The experience of students' fear of failure may be particularly common for female students (Alkhazaleh & Mahasneh, 2016; Michou et al., 2013; Wach et al., 2015) and female students may report more adverse consequences of fears of failure (Jerrim, 2022; Miloseva, 2012), even for female students who have high levels of academic standing (Borgonovi & Han, 2021). Students who face compounding economic stressors like coming from a lower socioeconomic status may also face more debilitating levels of fearing failure (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021). In contrast, students who have been able to develop resilience in challenging learning environments may not experience a fear of failure that is as harmful as students who seek continuous high achievement or students who seek to protect themselves and their reputation (De Castella et al., 2013; Covington, 1992; Jackson, 2003, Ma, 2021). However, to what extent high school teachers perceive the wide range of student experiences in terms of student fears of failure and address students' fears of failure in a way that is unique to individual students is unclear.

3.6. Fear of Failure as a Socialized Process

Exactly why students have come to view a situation as something that is to be feared and that poses a risk of failure is also not universally agreed upon. Some researchers situate students' own internal worlds as deeply connected to their experience of fearing failure (De Castella, et al., 2013; Lutovac & Flores, 2022; Ma, 2021). As one example of this perspective, Conroy (2004) has theorized that the fear of

failing may be triggered based on how intently students' "cognitive schemas or beliefs associated with the aversive consequences of failing" are present within themselves (p.484). Student fears of failure are also seen as interconnected with their self-efficacy (Caraway et al., 2003; Ma, 2021; Schwinger et al., 2022), motivation (Alkhazaleh & Mahasneh, 2016, Choi, 2021; Conroy et al., 2001; Conroy, 2004; De Castella et al., 2013), mental-health struggles like chronic perfectionism (Life, 2015), and goal-orientation (Caraway et al., 2003; Elliot & Thrash, 2004; Kahraman & Sungur, 2013; Lou & Noels, 2016; Lutovac & Flores, 2022; Putwain & Symes, 2011; Regueiro et al., 2018). Adding to this complexity, in trying to measure students' fear of failure both Choi (2021) and Conroy (2001; 2003; 2004) assert that a fear of failure incites a wide variety of behaviours depending on the individual, including negative self-talk and giving up on difficult tasks. However, while student fears of failure may be partially an internal, individualized process (Conroy, 2004), with some roots in a student's own perceptions of their experiences, examination is needed into the way these are also shaped by the environment around them (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Straehler-Pohl & Pais, 2014; Vaughn et al., 2021). In this study the fear of failure is viewed as something not automatically held by students. Instead, how students develop a fear of failure is heavily influenced by the "internalization" of their interactions with adult figures, particularly their parents (Conroy, 2003, p.779; Deneault et al., 2020) and teachers (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Inoue, 2014; Nunes et al., 2002; Vaughn et al., 2021).

Examining further the role of parents in the development of fears of failure, Conroy (2003) theorized a potential explanation for why these parent-child interactions could amplify student fears of failure. Namely, the child's fear of failure becomes a mechanism used to preemptively avoid the potential for their parents to remove their affirmation and support if the child fails (Conroy, 2003). This ability for fears of failure to be reinforced by parents is further affirmed by Elliot and Thrash (2004) who studied the transmission of fear of failure between parents and their children. As they concluded, the "fear of failure…is not simply a function of genes," but instead is a reality of "children carry[ing] the 'motivational baggage' of their parents with them" (Elliot & Thrash, 2004, p. 968). When either the father or mother feared failure, students studied were more likely to try to avoid failure themselves (Elliot and Thrash, 2004; Tao et al. 2021). When mothers feared failure, they also reported more negative behaviours in their children including persistent attention-seeking and heightened anxiety (Singh, 1992) and increased their child's fear of failure in their use of more harsh discipline techniques

(Teevan & McGhee, 1972). Furthermore, when a father figure was absent from a students' life, students' fear of failure scores were higher particularly for male college students (Greenfeld & Teevan, 1986). In short, developing a fear of failure is relational in nature for children and is influenced by their perception of adults in their life, including their parents (Conroy, 2003; Elliot & Thrash, 2004; Stipek, 2013). Yet, the level of teacher awareness of students' fears of failure and that fears of failure can be transmitted from adults to youth is not well understood.

While parents clearly play a role in students' experience of fearing failure, Nunes et al. (2022) noted that second to the family influence two participants cited teachers as also part of this process. Conroy (2003) further affirms that "instructors may be implicated in the development of fears of failure because…they typically provide immediate, valued, competence-related feedback in achievement settings" (p.765). In Stipek's (2013) review of motivational research, teachers were placed at the center of shaping students' understanding of failure in the number of external rewards that teachers relied upon and the teacher's level of focus on competition in comparison to focusing on skill development. In studying Dutch high school students amid a curriculum shift, when students perceived being faced with an overly taxing workload and receiving very little support from their teachers, their fears of failure were also elevated (Meijer, 2007). When teachers were perceived as overbearing rather than genuinely supportive of students' autonomy (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Huescar Hernandez et al., 2020) or accusatory in their response to students (Conroy, 2003), students' fear of failure was also reinforced. When students thought that their teachers viewed failure as something that was insurmountable, students also felt a decreased sense of knowing their place within their classroom community, a decreased desire to care about their performance in academic tasks, and a decrease in their feelings of overall competence (Muenks et al., 2021). The experience of this distanced relationship between teacher-student was one trait identified by Conroy (2003) and Hodis and Hodis (2020) as also present in students with high levels of fear of failure. Together, these studies situate teachers as able to reinforce student fears of failure, at least from a student's perspective.

While several studies affirm the potential for teachers to increase or decrease students fears of failure from the perspective of students (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Downing et al., 2020; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Huescar-Hernandez et al., 2020; Nunes et al., 2022), only a few examine the way

teachers view their role in lessening student fears of failure (Cox, 2009b; Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Lutovac & Flores, 2022). Furthermore, while a few studies have examined high school teachers' attempts to address student's academic failure more generally (Frelin, 2015; Matteucci & Gosling, 2004; Straehler-Pohl & Pais, 2014), these studies have not focused on students' fears of failure specifically. As such, beyond Matteucci and Gosling's (2004) conclusion that teachers often minimized their role in student failures comparison to the perspectives of the high school students studied, I could find no study that examines if high school teachers consciously built classroom routines and lessons that take student fears of failure into consideration and, if so, their rationale for doing so. Researchers in this area have instead primarily conducted studies that focus on post-secondary professors (Cox, 2009b; Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Yost et al., 2019) or pre-service teachers (Lutovac & Flores, 2022).

Of these studies that discussed educators outside of high school, in Lutovac & Flores' (2022) discussions with pre-service teachers, the teachers interviewed saw themselves as holding a "shared responsibility" for students' feelings of failure because of the way they had a primary role in building assessments and structuring the classroom environment (p. 63). Lutovac and Flores's (2022) study positioned pre-service teachers as not only aware of student fears of failure, but also as holding the power to make decisions that could change students' experience of failure. In Yost et al. (2019)'s study, agriculture professors also recognized the fear of failure as a hindrance to students' development of problem-solving skills and identified the scope and sequence of course curriculum as one area that instructors could change to address these fears. In contrast, Cox (2009a) commented on American college professor's response to students' fears of failure. Of the six professors in the study, only two were mentioned that planned their courses taking into account that students could fear failure and that these fears could interfere with learning (Cox, 2009a). As a result, examining the specific beliefs and decision making of high school teachers and the extent that they choose to directly communicate their perspective on failure and fear to students is in need of further research.

3.7. Teaching Practices and Students Fears

Looking at the practices that teachers use, the role of teacher interactions with students is repeatedly identified as a potential amplifier of or protector against students' fears of failure (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Downing et al., 2020; Florescu & Pop-Pacurar,

2016; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Vehkakoski, 2020). When looking at the way teachers navigate classroom discussions as one teaching practice, teachers who put students on the spot in discussion settings could increase students' fears of failure because the students may be are uncertain about their own ability in a social context that expects a response of them (Downing et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2021).Furthermore, teachers' affirmations of academically strong students' responses (Adamson, 2022) or a focus on teacher lecturing with minimal student interaction (Del Carmen Gomez, 2016) may also increase other students' fears of making a mistake or disappointing a teacher (Adamson, 2022; Del Carmen Gomez, 2016). In contrast, teachers' use of reassurance to help students see the benefit of making mistakes in discussions for themselves and others, could have the opposite effect in reducing student fears associated with student responses (Downing et al., 2020). A teacher's responsiveness to a student's task-specific questions, especially when the student is already afraid of failure, could also shift the student's view of their own capability and help them to engage in the learning task (Vehkakoski, 2020). When teachers took the time to listen to French high school students voicing factors that they felt impacted their performance level in PE, students' fears of failure also lessened (Coudevylle et al., 2021).

Examining another teaching practice, the way learning tasks are constructed can also augment or reduce students fears of failure (Downing et al., 2020; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Martin & Marsh, 2003). In studying university students, if a teacher's creation of assessments countered what students were expecting, students' fears of failure were amplified (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Inoue, 2014). Davila-Acedo et al. (2021) also found that teachers' instructional decisions, like the amount of group work students had to engage in and the number of textbook-based activities in the classroom without much peer interaction, could also implicitly change the gravity of negative emotions, including fear, that students experienced while learning. However, students working collaboratively with familiar peers (Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016; Downing et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2021) or the use of peer-feedback given anonymously between students rather than where students could see each other's facial reactions (Vanderhoven et al., 2012), could minimize the potential social impact of any failures. Giving students the opportunity to learn information in feasible, compact sections could also diminish student fears because they do not have as much need to brace for colossal consequences of failure (Martin & Marsh, 2003).

In terms of the way feedback is given to students by teachers, in Fremantle and Kearney's (2015) study, professors interviewed also voiced concerns about the potential for grading to reinforce student feelings of incapability. The use of positive feedback by teachers can instead help to lessen the strength of students' beliefs that they could fail, and their fears associated with these failures (Caraway & Tucker, 2003; Hargreaves, 2015; Huang, 2021; Vehkakoski, 2020). When teachers were viewed supportive and providing feedback on a student's work that acknowledged the significant efforts of their students, university students who feared failure continued to try to overcome any failures or gaps in their learning despite this challenge (Vaughn et al., 2021) and high school students' general fear of failure decreased (Huescar Hernandez et al., 2020). The use of encouragement that focuses on teachers seeing the work that students are trying to do may be best suited for those especially who have high levels of fear of failure, as the use of encouragement for this group of students was also found to result in a higher level of academic achievement (Vaughn et al., 2021).

Rather than diminishing the role of emotions in classroom settings as is sometimes the case in high school classrooms (Hargreaves, 2004), teachers' use of humour and reassurance (Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017) and giving students an opportunity to share their fears (Coudevylle, 2021) could help students perceive the classroom as a safe-space (Huescar Hernandez, 2020; Simpson & Maltese, 2017). In a similar vein, students who saw their teacher as someone who respected their uniqueness as a person and their need for independence also reported lessened fears of failure (Huescar Hernandez, 2020; Kahramn & Sunger, 2013; Leptokaridou et al., 2016). This strategy of seeing students as individuals, in surveying students to gain insight into their past educational experiences and affirming individual student capabilities, was also used by two of the professors included in Cox's (2009a) study on students fears of failure.

Another practice used by teachers or advocated by the students surveyed to reduce student fears of failure included shifting the shame surrounding failure to recontextualize failure as an expected part of learning (Bartels & Ryan, 2013; Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016; Dweck, 2006; Kaharman & Sungur, 2013; Nunes et al., 2022; Vaughn et al., 2021). Fremantle & Kearney (2015) studied British university professors' concerns regarding the fear of failure that assessments could produce, and the professors studied identified that students' fears of failure needed to be reframed by the professor to help students view failure as both inevitable and necessary for learning. Strategies used by

the professors included sharing personal stories about their own failures and talking with students directly about assessment criteria (Fremantle & Kearney, 2015). This hearing of teachers sharing of their own experiences of failure and fears of failing was affirmed as helpful by university students (Nunes et al., 2022; Shepherd et al., 2020) and teachers alike (Whittle et al., 2020). The conversations may be especially powerful when considering that discussions of fears of failure can otherwise sometimes be absent in a classroom context (Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Palmer, 2017).

While professors and pre-service teachers' perspectives on student fears of failure have been explored, to my knowledge exactly what high school teachers view as their role in contributing to or lessening students' fears of failure, their use of teaching practices to diminish fears of failure for students, and their rationales for doing so, has not been examined in current research.

3.8 Teaching Perception of Student Failure and its influence on Teaching Practices

As defined by Moreau (2014) in her study of middle school teachers, teacher perception "include[d] ideas about the students, but also [how teachers] view[ed]… themselves as practitioners and teachers" (p.4). In this study, I built upon this definition of teacher perceptions, as I sought to understand not only how high school teachers thought about and their beliefs associated with students fears of failure, but also how high school teachers situated themselves in relation to students' fears.

Teacher perceptions, while not always directly translating to teacher actions or decisions (Buehl & Beck, 2015), have been studied in relation to the approach teachers took with their class (André et al., 2023; Sprouls et al. 2015; Moreau, 2014), the explanations they have for students' failures (Henderson, 2002; Matteucci & Gosling, 2004) and their responses to student behaviours (Skilling et al., 2016; Woodcock et al., 2019). As such, teacher perceptions can be one part of how teachers decide on how to respond to students and how they decide to set-up the classroom activities that their students engage with (Lutovac & Flores, 2022).

Teachers' perceptions and the way these perceptions shape their practice may also strongly influence students' perceptions of whether failure is something to be feared (Boostrom, 2010; Shepherd et al., 2020; Woodcock et al., 2019). In the context of perceptions surrounding student failure, in Lutovac & Flores' (2022) analysis of journal

entries of 79 Finnish pre-service teachers, they concluded that these soon-to-be teachers held a more deficit-view of failure, as failure was associated with not fulfilling expectations. Similarly, in Jiang's (2016) open-ended survey of pre-survey teachers, teachers ranged in their beliefs surrounding the reasons for students' failures, including everything from student-specific factors like the students' intelligence level to broader contextual factors that the student was immersed in, like social norms in their family units. Moreau (2014) and Henderson's (2002) studies also concluded that the teachers surveyed situated failures as a result of the students' experiences rather than the teachers' own actions. In short, these studies (Henderson, 2002; Jiang, 2016; Lutovac & Flores, 2022; Moreau, 2014) situated failure as a gap in students' outcomes that stemmed from the student and the student's immediate environment.

While the teacher perceptions of students' failures may not on their own impact students, these perceptions may shape how the teacher interacts with their students (Matteucci & Gosling, 2004; Skilling et al., 2016). In Matteucci and Gosling's (2004) two-part survey of 223 high school teachers, teachers who perceived students' failures as due to students' choices, like students' inaction in studying, were more likely to respond with negative emotions like frustration and harsher consequences like not passing the student or "reprimanding" them (p.157). In contrast, in this same study, when teachers situated themselves as having some role in the student's failure, they tended to react to students with greater empathy (Matteucci & Gosling, 2004). Outside of students' failures, Skilling et al. (2016) also concluded in interviews with 31 high school math teachers, that teacher's explanations for students' attentiveness in the math classroom resulted in the teacher adapting their teaching approach. For example, Skilling et al. (2016) found that teachers used more review tactics if they believed the students struggled with memory and adjusted the structure of the questions they asked if the teacher saw their students as having a low level of capability in applying their understanding of mathematics. While not specific to students struggling academically, Sprouls et al. (2015) in their survey of 56 primary school teachers also concluded that teachers who perceived a group as particularly at-risk for an emotional and behavioural disorders, gave students more frequent negative verbal correction than those who were not as high risk. As such, teachers' beliefs about their students can impact the teaching practices they use to respond to students. While teachers' perceptions of students' failures have been studied in elementary (Henderson, 2002), middle (André et al., 2023; Moreau, 2014) and high school (Maluleke & Motlhabane, 2015; Matteucci & Gosling, 2004), I could find no study

that addresses teachers' perceptions of students' fears of failure specifically, or teachers' perceptions of these fears in the context of an independent school. Additionally, I could find no study that examined if independent high school teachers' perceptions of students' fears of failure guided the practices that they used to address these fears. As such, examining not only what teachers do to respond to address students' fears, but also the way teachers articulate the why behind these actions becomes a necessary avenue of further study.

Chapter 4.

Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative, phenomenological approach (Seidman, 2006) to a case-study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to gain insights into student fears of failure from the perspective of high school teachers who work within an independent school. Phenomenology recognizes that each individual's experience is unique, complex, and worthy of in-depth study (Seidman, 2006). However, because phenomenology prioritizes examining each person's individual experience (Seidman, 2006; van Manen, 2016), the aspect of social constructionism that highlights the role of institutions in creating a structured system that each person in their formal role operates within is less of a focus (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As such, the case study aspect of this research allows me to hold all findings within the context of a defined boundary of an organization with its own unique social ecology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Given that this study seeks to understand the experience of high school teachers within the social context of teaching at an independent school, the case study aspect of this research is essential to recognize that the social environment of each independent school is unique (Boerema, 2006; Frenette & Chan, 2015a; Frenette & Chan, 2015b).

Held together, a phenomenological case study then allows the exploration of participant experiences with the recognition that the experiences they have are part of a larger social system of a specific school (Eisenbach & Greathouse, 2020; Ross et al., 2022; Tadesse et al., 2021). Phenomenological interviews [PI] (Seidman, 2006) and a combination of written responses to vignettes and follow-up interviews (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020) were used to gain insight into teacher experiences. All interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using a six-step inductive approach to reflexive thematic analysis to explore the themes identified across participant experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Specifically, two research questions guided the study:

1. How do high school teachers from an independent school perceive students' fears of failure?
2. How do high school teachers from an independent school address students' fears of failure?

In this study perception was defined as the “assumptions” (Giles & Tunks, 2015, p.523) and “beliefs” (Novita et al., 2022, p.2) of a participant that allowed them to “recogn[ize]” (Collins, 2024b, para.3) students’ fears of failure. To “address” was defined as the teaching practices that teachers used to respond to a student, particularly when they recognized a student’s fears of failure (Cox, 2009b; Lutovac & Flores, 2022).

Qualitative Research Design

As summarized by Maxwell (2009), a qualitative research approach aligns with research that prioritizes participants’ experiences and seeks to gain insight into the ways participants come to an understanding about their experiences. In line with these goals, rather than focusing on just the outcome of how teachers respond to student fears of failure, this research prioritized the way their perceptions of student fears of failure shaped the ways that they addressed student fears of failure. In short, it was not just what teachers did, but also the decision-making process that they engaged in that was at the core of this study. Qualitative research is better equipped than quantitative research to help researchers understand processes like these, as qualitative interviews allow participants to explain in their own words the reasoning behind their actions and to explain the circumstances that they view as relevant surrounding their actions (Maxwell, 2009). Additionally, following a qualitative approach allows future educators and administrators who may read this study to see findings that are grounded in fellow educators’ experiences and words, which may strengthen its use by other educators because they are better able to identify with the findings (Maxwell, 2009).

4.1.1. Case Study

A case study is defined within qualitative research as a study of a specific system or site, as this form of research recognizes the unique social environment of each locale (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015); case-study research upholds that each specific social context comes with its interconnected and complex set of pre-existing interactions between the people operating within this environment (Cohen et al., 2007). Because of this interconnectedness between participants’ experiences of a social reality and the unique social norms of a site, the case-study approach to research relies on multiple data sources to explore not just the phenomenon studied, but also how the social environment may contribute to the way participants experience this phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). However, while the context-specific focus on a site is a strength of case-study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), it also affords limitations. Namely, a

case-study approach does not allow for findings to be applied to other settings that do not share the characteristics of the chosen sample case (Cohen et al., 2007).

I followed a case study approach as defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) for this research because I conducted research within the boundary of teachers working within an independent school. The focus on a single school was necessitated by the vast difference in educational context, approach to learning, and population across independent schools in Canada and ensured that the unique social ecology that teachers at any given independent school work within was acknowledged (Boerema, 2006; Frenette & Chan, 2015a; Frenette & Chan, 2015b). Furthermore, a case-study approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) aligned with the importance of the social context that was upheld in this study's theoretical framework of social constructionism, where individuals navigate their specific role within the context of social norms of an institution (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). By focusing on just one institution, case-study research allows researchers to examine the underlying social factors that shape participant experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Exploring the social factors of a given institution (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) also contextualized teachers' perceptions of students fears of failure and ways they address these fears as not purely the responsibility of the teachers alone, but rather partially the product of their social setting (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). To gain insight into these social factors, case-studies rely on multiple data sources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this study, both interviews with participants and written responses to hypothetical vignettes were used. However, like the limitation of case-study research to generalize findings beyond the single case (Cohen et al., 2007), the findings of this study reflected the experiences of a specific group of independent high school teachers working at one school rather than the experiences of independent high school teachers more generally.

4.1.2. A Phenomenological Approach to Interviewing

A phenomenological approach also informed this study in the form of phenomenological interviewing [PI] (Seidman, 2006). Phenomenology emphasizes the importance of exploring a central phenomenon from the perspective of people's experiences particularly through the data collection method of interviewing (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Seidman, 2006). Phenomenology prioritizes hearing participants accounts of their experience as the fundamental way to gain insight, as participants share their experiences as they see them in the past, present, and retrospectively (Seidman, 2006;

Schutz & Weber, 1967). PI (Seidman, 2006) is prioritized as the main method of data collection in the phenomenological tradition, as the way participants make sense of their experiences is an internal process that cannot be understood by an observer alone (Schutz & Weber 1967). Because a phenomenon, or socially constructed reality, may appear to participants as just a part of their everyday life (Schutz & Weber, 1967), a multi-interview approach has been adopted by researchers like Seidman (2006) to allow participants to reflect on not only their experiences, but also the meaning of these experiences (Cohen et al., 2007). While phenomenology's strength comes from allowing researchers to deeply understand the way participants come to understand their own experiences and the phenomenon of study (Seidman, 2006), it does not place as much emphasis on factors that take place outside of participants' accounts of their experiences (Cohen et al., 2007).

The use of PI and its emphasis on participant experiences (Seidman, 2006) aligned with the goal of this research to understand teachers' perceptions and the way that they addressed student fears of failure from their experience in working with high school students. Furthermore, answering the 'how' aspect of teachers addressing students fears of failure was only able to be understood in full when teachers shared both what the teaching practices that they used meant to them and their thought process behind using these practices to respond to students fears of failure. Looking at the teaching practice used to address student fears of failure without hearing what these actions meant from the teachers' own perspectives would have separated any action from their context and rationale, and would have only allowed the researcher to answer the question of 'what' teachers do. Similarly, 'how' teachers perceived students' fears of failure was also only able to be explored when the researcher was able to gain access through PI (Seidman, 2006) into the teacher's internal assumptions about what students' fears of failure looked like and meant; perceptions are not self-evident (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Giles & Tunks, 2015; Sotardi, 2018) and therefore had to be explained by the teachers themselves.

4.1.3. A Phenomenological Case Study

In combining these two approaches to form a phenomenological case study, I sought to minimize the limitations of both approaches while also drawing on their strengths. By choosing to conduct PI's (Seidman, 2006), I sought to understand the depth of independent high school teachers' professional experiences, as the high school

teachers themselves are central to both the research questions and to this methodology. However, the social constructionist (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) framework of this study and the methodology of case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), both recognize the ways that participants and the institutions participants are a part of uniquely constructing the social realities that they encounter. As a result, rather than examining participant experiences from multiple institutions, as is possible in a phenomenological study (Seidman, 2006), only a single independent high school was the focus of this research to respect the importance of the social context in shaping participant experiences (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Rather than just relying on participant interviews, as is common in phenomenological traditions (Seidman, 2006), I adopted the case-study approach where multiple data sources were used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Participant responses to hypothetical vignettes (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020) helped to provide another avenue to examine high school teachers' perceptions of student fears of failure and the practices they used to address these fears. Like other researchers who have used a phenomenological case study approach to explore teachers' pedagogical decisions (Tadesse et al., 2021) and teaching experiences (Demir & Qureshi, 2019; Shiver et al., 2020), this study combined these two approaches to understand independent high school teachers' experiences with students who feared failure, but within the confines of a single school.

4.2. The Role of Researcher's Positionality

With the tremendous responsibility of a researcher, as they are central to the study conceptualization, data collection, and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Seidman, 2006), conducting this research with sensitivity, transparency, and respect was all the more paramount. As such, it is a genuine, relational approach to interacting with participants and the desire to learn from participants that situated my role as the researcher in this study with the intent to be anti-oppressive (Potts & Brown, 2015). While I do not identify as Indigenous, I resonate with Wilson's (2008) call for all research to be situated with relationships at its core. One example where this relationship guided my approach to data collection was when a participant entered the room for the second interview. Previous to starting the recording, the participant shared that they had been thinking about the last interview and had a thought that they really wanted to share, but they were not sure if it fit in the context of that day's interview. Rather than having the participant try to remember the insight they wanted to share for another week, or

communicating implicitly that my focus for the interview overshadowed their insights, I welcomed their sharing. As soon as the recorder was started, I invited the participant to share what they had wanted to in saying, “I know you were saying you had a thought that you wanted to share… if you want to start off with that.” In this moment, I prioritized the relationship with the participant in viewing what they wanted to share as just as important as the questions I wanted to ask. In this way, I strove to conduct research in a way that maintained the relationships with those I was interviewing by listening to, learning from, and representing their perspective in a way that reflected the complexity of their lives.

Looking further at the role of the researcher, I have come to see the reciprocal impact research can have both on the participants alike. Through my conversations with participants, I have come to realize how much these interactions have shaped my own view of what student fears of failure are and how teachers make sense of these experiences of their students. Similarly, in engaging in a dialogue with me about failure, one participant commented that they also found the interview process itself “helped them think through” student fears of failure because it was not something “we talk about…a whole lot.” Two other participants also commented on the interviews helping them to “verbalize” their thoughts and to consider aspects of students’ fears of failures that they had not considered before because they had an opportunity to work through their ideas with someone else. These responses reminded me that the interactions I have as a researcher are reciprocally impactful. As a result of my increasing awareness of this reciprocity, these conversations confirmed my use a social constructionism paradigm to guide this study, as it most closely aligned with what I and some of the PI participants had observed, that meaning is built and shifts through social interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

In terms of my rationale as an educator for this research, as a high school teacher at an independent high school in Canada, I regularly heard students both in the hallways and in my classroom ask the question “what if I fail?” In my early teaching practice, I would frequently dismiss these comments as students either wanting attention or needing a way to voice the anxieties they were experiencing in navigating the necessary stressors of student life. However, after several years as a teacher, I noticed that my dismissal of these comments did not match the weight these comments carried for the students themselves. Students regularly sought advice on how to handle their deep fears of failure and how to navigate feeling like they were never able to meet the

plethora of expectations that were put on them. Often in meeting with students one-on-one, conversations with students about their fears of failing included them sharing stories of the ways these fears were deeply affecting their mental health, including not allowing them to sleep at night. However, they also shared how these fears of failure at times impacted their academics, in preventing them from participating even in opportunities that they were passionate about.

I sought out the informal experience of teaching colleagues and found that several also shared in these experiences of students facing the seemingly inescapable weights of feeling like they had failed and fearing these failings. These findings also parallel researchers like Cox (2009a) who found that some student's experience of fearing failure had tangible consequences not only for their mental state, but also their academic outcomes in not completing a course that served as a gateway to further studies. These conversations with students and colleagues, and my growing concern for the ways that fears of failure seemed to come with crushing socioemotional weight for so many students, are at the heart of why this study focused on addressing student fears of failure.

Through these interactions with students regularly seeking out support from myself and my colleagues as teachers, I have also come to believe that teachers may be able to be a profound source of encouragement for students and that teachers may be able to influence if students feel the need to fear failure. These assumptions, however, are not just my own, and mirror the research of those like Bartholomew et al. (2018), Coudevylle et al. (2021), Hargreaves and Affouneh (2007), Huescar-Hernandez et al. (2020), and Meijer (2007) who found that teachers' classroom practices and their responses to students could reinforce or lessen students' fears of failure. It is this combination of research and my own experiences as a teacher that led me to focus the research questions in this study on the role of teachers rather than any other individual in the school. Examining how teachers' addressed students' fears of failure within the context of an independent school also came from my own experiences in working at an independent school. However, this interest was also paired with the findings that the competition experienced by students in especially high-performance independent schools may decrease their emotional health despite encouraging high academic outcomes (Heller-Sahlgren, 2018; Leonard et al., 2015). As such, the focus of this research on independent high school teachers was of particular interest to me as a researcher.

On a more personal level, because I am someone who has been privileged enough to participate in many spheres of academia, from my time as a student in the K-12 education system, to my time as an undergraduate, and now graduate student, my own fear of failure has not been an unfamiliar experience. Therefore, I was invested in this study not only as a researcher and educator, but also as someone who hoped to lessen the potential for others in the future to experience the paralyzing effects of fearing failure that I have faced in moments of my educational journey.

4.3. Research Site and Participants

The research site of this study was a high school, as high school teachers assign grades, comments, and write recommendation letters that are often required for student entrance into further studies. Because student fears of failure are not just tied to their present emotional reality, but also their consideration of their future (Conroy, 2001), the role high school teachers fulfill is closely intertwined with student fears of failure. High school teachers have also been viewed by the high school students studied as playing a role in either decreasing or increasing student fears of failure (Coudevylle et al., 2021; Meijer, 2007; Huescar Hernandez et al., 2020).

An independent high school was chosen in particular not only due to access, as I worked in the context of the independent school community, but also due to the heightened emphasis in independent schools on academic achievement and post-secondary admission that has been associated with decreased emotional well-being for independent school students (Heller-Sahlgren, 2018; Leonard et al., 2015). While the research of Heller-Sahlgren (2018) and Leonard et al. (2015) did not explore students' fears of failure specifically in the independent school context, student fears of failure are well-documented to negatively affect students' emotional health in being associated with shame, helplessness (Conroy et al., 2022; Choi, 2021; McGregor & Elliot, 2005; Niederkofler et al., 2015) and sadness (Huang, 2021). Fears of failure have also been connected to learners feeling the pressure to fulfill other's expectations (Bartels & Ryan, 2013; Birney et al., 1969; Conroy, 2004; Nunes et al., 2022). Higher parental expectations associated with academic performance and enrollment in post-secondary institutions (Dockery et al., 2022; Coleman et al., 1981; West et al., 1998) are also reported in independent schools when compared to public systems. These increased expectations also extend to high educator expectations of student academic achievement that is identified in some independent schools (Frenette & Chan, 2015a;

Jeynes & Beuttler, 2012). Held together, teachers in independent schools may see heightened fears of failure in students despite their high academic performance due to these pressures to perform well (Dockery et al., 2022; Frenette & Chan, 2015a). This study not only contributes to research on fears of failure in exploring teachers' perceptions and practices relating to student fears, but also the gap in literature on what these fears of failure look like in the independent school context.

The specific independent school that was recruited for this study, was the only school that granted me access. Beyond the issue of access though, the independent school chosen was also one of the top 20 schools in Western Canada according to the Fraser Institute's rankings by Cowley and Emes (2020a; 2020b), which are primarily based on student academic outcomes. Because of the student population's high academic performance in this school (Cowley & Emes, 2020a; 2020b), I anticipated that student fears of failure could be situated in the emotional reality of fearing failure that was not always connected to academics. Instead, these fears of failure could be connected to others' expectations and the potential self-consciousness or loss of self-worth that may come from feeling unable to meet these expectations (Conroy, 2003). These heightened expectations to perform well, and the fears of failure that could accompany these expectations, could also be augmented by the often-higher level of education of tuition-paying parent communities, as seen in other independent institutions (Lundstrom & Parding, 2011). The teachers at this independent high school then would not only interact with this specific demographic of students, but I anticipated that they may have also had to navigate the complex set of expectations placed on both themselves and their students from the broader school community.

Many of these features of independent schools were reinforced by the participants at the study site, as five participants spoke to the frequent assumption of students or families at the school that students would go on to post-secondary studies. A "culture" of high academic achievement was also noted by some participants and one participant in particular commented on the shift of the school towards having a "reputation… of being very, very, very academic." One of the themes that I saw in the data from participants' experiences was also the plethora of expectations that teachers saw students navigating. These expectations especially surrounded students' academic performance, despite this not being a stated goal of the school. However, amidst the teacher participants recognizing that these expectations were interconnected with the fears of the students they worked with, the teacher participants themselves had a largely

favourable view of the specific study site. In particular, repeated across multiple teacher participants was their perspective on the school as a "caring," committed community. These attributes were further evidenced by participants speaking about the caring teachers who worked at the school, the school's philosophy of service and looking at the whole person rather than just academics, and the incredible support that the learning support coordinator offered to teachers and students alike. Tension between highly academic pursuits and a holistic view of education seemed to exist in the school that created a unique landscape for exploring fears of failure.

In terms of sampling decisions, according to Merriam (1998), case studies typically follow purposeful sampling. The same is said of phenomenological studies as purposeful sampling is relied upon to recruit participants (Seidman, 2006). Although this study used a single case study approach where only participants within one school were recruited (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), even within this boundary teachers had to be recruited using a specific sampling approach (Maxwell, 2009, p.235). Within the case of a single independent school, maximum variation sampling was followed to seek out the widest diversity of perspectives (Seidman, 2006) of high school teachers in this one school as possible. In an independent high school, there are teachers with a wide variety of years of teaching and subjects taught. With this in mind, all teachers in the independent school were invited to participate in the hopes of recruiting teachers of different subjects and amount of teaching experience.

Rather than this study focusing on any subject-specific group of high school teachers, this study viewed student failure as extending beyond the boundary of any one discipline (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Conroy, 2003; Martin & Marsh, 2003) and recognized that many teachers in independent high schools teach multiple subject areas because of their smaller scale. Average enrollment in independent schools in Statistics Canada's (2015) report was on average 367 students less than a public school, resulting in less teachers required in any given high school. As such, to ensure more than one subject was represented in the participants, I aimed to recruit at least one participant from each of the main disciplines within a high school (e.g. Humanities, Art & Applied Skills, Science & Mathematics, Physical Health & Career Life Education) for each part of the study. I also aimed to have at least two teachers who had been teaching for over five years and two who had been teaching less than five years in both the vignette response group of participants and those being interviewed following Seidman's (2006) PI approach. Participant years of teaching experience was viewed as a relevant aspect of

participant variation, as the amount of teaching experience has been connected to both shifts in their beliefs about teaching and the teaching practices they use (Caleon et al., 2018; Dogan Dolapcioglu & Koşar, 2021; Giles & Tunks, 2015; Killough & Stuessy, 2019; Salvador et al. 2020). In the end, of the nine teacher participants, the areas of humanities, arts and applied skills, and science and mathematics were all represented, as well as having multiple teachers with less than five years of teaching experience and several with more than five years of teaching experience (see Table 1).

While sample size in phenomenological case studies in the 63 phenomenological case studies found on SFU's database involving teachers in the last ten years varied from one to 34, in total, I aimed to recruit 12 participants (see Table 1). This decision was made in order to ensure enough resources were allocated to the in-depth nature of PI (Seidman, 2006), the limitations of resources in thesis research (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021), and to allow for more researcher-participant dialogue (LaCroix, 2023). Thus, in the end I had 20 units of data (e.g. eight units for written response participants including the five written responses and three follow-up interviews, and 12 interviews across the four PI participants).

Table 1. Participant Recruitment

	Years of Experience	Subject Taught	Target Number of Participants	Number of Participants Recruited
Written Response to Vignettes & Follow-Up Interview	> 5 years 2- 5 years	Humanities Arts & Applied Skills Science & Mathematics Physical Health & Career Life	8	5
Phenomenological Interviews (Seidman, 2006)	> 5 years 2-5 years	Humanities Arts & Applied Skills Science & Mathematics Physical Health & Career Life	4	4

This study sought to uphold the SFU's (2022b) policy on *Equity and Diversity in Research*, which aligns with the Government of Canada's (2021) *Best Practices in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Research*. Supporting equity in this study was ensured by first offering the opportunity to participate in the study to the entire staff population at

the study site rather than any one particular group of independent school teachers. All nine participants who indicated their interest in participating in the study were invited to participate.

To ensure that inclusion was considered in the study design, procedural barriers were also directly addressed (Simon Fraser University, 2022b). Recruitment material was provided both verbally and in a visual presentation to accommodate variation in language levels and auditory or visual needs (see Appendix B for recruitment material). Additionally, through offering multiple avenues of participation in the study, written vignette response and interviewing, those who felt more comfortable writing their responses rather than sharing them verbally or vice versa due to writing or reading difficulties were also be able to participate.

To recruit participants for the study, the following inclusion criteria was used: (a) teachers recruited must have been teaching at the independent high school study site for at least two years and (b) have their provincial teaching license or independent teaching certification (Ministry of Education, 2021). The independent teaching certification in this study was viewed as a certification recognized by the Ministry of Education for professionals to teach in an independent school setting although they have not gone through a teacher training program (Ministry of Education, 2021). The two-year requirement for participation was due to seeking the in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions of student failure within the ecology of this one institution, which required having spent time working at that institution (Ross, 2022). The requirement of a provincial teaching license or independent teaching certificate ensured that only those who were teachers in the independent school system were able to participate in this study that focused on independent high school teachers, rather than support staff like educational assistants.

After receiving the approval of the independent school and the approval of the SFU Research Ethics Board, I presented the purpose of the study and requirements of participation in the study to the teaching staff in a staff meeting (see Appendix B for Recruitment Presentation). Participants who were interested in participating were invited to email me directly using my SFU email address or to have a conversation with me to let me know that they were interested in participating. I also sent a follow-up email (see Appendix B for Recruitment Email) with a link to a SurveyMonkey for the vignette response for interested in participants (see survey in Appendix E). For those who decided to complete the vignette response through SurveyMonkey, all information about

the study and the consent form were on the landing page of this vignette response survey (see Appendix C for Consent form). For participants interested in the phenomenological interviews, I confirmed their preliminary consent through an informal conversation and gave participants the opportunity to ask questions in this conversation before agreeing to participate. I then offered participants who still wanted to be a part of the study to fill out a written consent form (See Appendix C for Consent form) and to schedule an initial interview time with me.

4.4. Ethics Considerations

As per SFU's research ethics protocol (2022a), "any research involving human participants…by any student of Simon Fraser University…must be reviewed and approved by SFU Research Ethics Board" (para.1). As such, this study sought the approval of the SFU Research Ethics Board. Ethics approval also recognizes the need to ensure that researchers are carefully considering and upholding their responsibility to learn from participants in a way that is filled with integrity, respect, and care (Government of Canada, 2019). Therefore, because this study involved interviewing participants and learning from their written responses to vignettes, ethics approval was required. To gain approval to conduct this study as an SFU graduate student, I submitted excerpts of this proposal as well as accompanying documents (e.g. interview protocols, vignettes, and recruitment emails to participants, recruitment presentations, and consent forms) to both the SFU Research Ethics Board, as well as to my pro-tem supervisor and committee member. After receiving approval from the SFU Research Ethics Board to conduct the study, I sought approval for conducting the phenomenological case study from the head of the independent school site first in an informal conversation and then in written form. This process followed not only SFU's ethics board and the independent school's requirements, but also followed Seidman's (2006) acknowledgment of the importance for researchers to receive approval for research from site gatekeepers (e.g. heads of school) where the study was conducted. After receiving the written approval from the head of the independent school, I began to recruit teacher participants as outlined above.

4.4.1. Confidentiality

To address internal confidentiality because all participants worked at the same institution, I chose not to share participant responses with other participants, and not to identify the subject area of participant responses in the data reporting process or to

report participant responses using pseudonyms (Tolich, 2004). Instead, I focused on reporting themes using quotations taken directly from participant interview responses (Toy-Cronin, 2018) to address Tolich's (2004) insistence on internal confidentiality. To ensure the confidentiality of participant data, I kept all audio-recordings in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility until transcripts were confirmed for analysis. After this point, this information was permanently deleted. Only a de-identified interview transcription, written responses, and memos, will be stored at this same password-protected, SFU supported, secure storage location following the conclusion of this study. These documents will be kept for a period of 5 years to inform future graduate work.

4.5. Data Collection Methods and Procedures

The primary methods to collect data were phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2006) and vignettes (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020).

4.5.1. Phenomenological Interviews

The phenomenological interviews (PI) were the main source of the insight into participants' perceptions as interviews allowed the researcher to hear participants' experiences as articulated by the participants' themselves (Carl & Ravitch, 2021; Seidman, 2006). First and foremost, PI's focus on people's experiences (Seidman, 2006) and aligned with the focus of this study on independent high school teachers sharing stories of their teaching experiences with students who fear failure. To understand the first research question on teachers' perceptions of student fears of failure, I needed to gain insight into the participant's internal dialogue and past experiences rather than just observing the participant (Seidman, 2006). Interviewing fulfilled both of these needs (Carl & Ravitch, 2021) because PI not only asks participants to describe specific details about their experiences, but also how they interpreted these experiences for themselves (Seidman, 2006).

Additionally, PI's allowed the researcher to learn from both participant's language and explanations how they rationalized (Seidman, 2006) the methods they used to address student fears of failure and what language they used to describe students' fears of failure that made up their perception. The language participants used matters because, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) identify in their conception of social constructionism, the language a person uses is the way they make sense of the world around them (p.51). As such, these interviews were essential to the researcher

understanding how participants articulated their perceptions and what the specific teaching practices that they used to address fears of failure meant to them. Furthermore, because a teacher's use of a specific practice, including to address student fears of failure, is a subjective process (Kikas et al., 2014; Lutovac & Flores, 2022; Sprouls et al., 2015), the rationale for why a teacher addressed student fears of failure in a specific way was not be able to be understood apart from asking the teacher themselves. As expressed through their own voice in interviews, it was the way teachers perceived students fears of failure, addressed student fears of failure, and their rationales for doing so, that was the core of the research questions at hand.

Following the phenomenological approach to data collection, for those who consented to be a part of the phenomenological interviews, I conducted three, 60-minute, audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with each teacher individually (Seidman, 2006). I approached each interview with an interview protocol as seen below and in Appendix D, which was structured according to Seidman's (2006) three-interview approach to PI. While I used open-ended questions in each of these interviews, I adopted a customized replication approach (Carl & Ravitch, 2021) where follow-up questions were tailored to the direction the participants led the conversation within the framework of each interview focus (Seidman, 2006). This approach acknowledged that there could have been experiences that were relevant to teachers' perceptions of student fears of failure that I might not have considered and sought to contribute to the study's validity (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). Because qualitative research seeks out "understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researchers" during interviews with participants I chose not to share my own experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 16; Toy-Cronin, 2018) or to "reinforce" participant responses with evaluative language (Seidman, 2006, p.89). For this same reason, I remained quiet other than posing questions, to ensure that what participants shared was as reflective of their experiences as possible (Seidman, 2006). This focus on the participant's experience over my own in some moments was challenging, as some participants wanted to have dialogue about what I thought. However, in moments like this, where one participant stated, "I want to hear your answers now," I redirected back to their experience by saying "shifting a little bit…" and asked them further questions about their role as a teacher. As recommended by Seidman (2006), because each of the three interviews built on the previous, interviews were scheduled no more than a week apart to make-up approximately a three-week interview cycle for each participant (p.21).

Following a reflexive thematic approach to the formalized part of data analysis, coding of these interviews occurred after all interviews were conducted and transcribed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

First Interview. Following Seidman's (2006) PI structure, the first interview focused on each participant's past experiences in order to hold future interviews in "context" (p.21). More specifically, the first interview focused on how participants came to recognize students' fears of failure in order to allow for participants to depict any events in their past professional experience (Seidman, 2006) that they felt contributed to the way they saw student fears of failure. Participants' responses to this interview primarily explored the first research question of this study of how high school teachers from an independent school perceive students' fears of failure. For the initial questions used to guide this interview as well as the rationale for these questions, see Appendix D.

Second Interview. The second interview focused on the "concrete details of the participants' present lived experience" by asking teachers to recount specific interactions with students who feared failure and what they did in response to these moments (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). The responses participants gave in this interview primarily explored the second research question of this study, how high school teachers from an independent school addressed students' fears of failure. However, participant's explanations for why they responded in a particular way to students also provided insight into how teachers perceived students' fears of failure. For the initial questions used to guide this interview as well as the rationale for these questions, see Appendix D.

Third Interview. For the third interview, participants were asked to "reflect on the meaning of their experience," by focusing on what they saw as the relationship between student fears of failure and their teaching practice, and potential implications of their experiences (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). Following the theoretical framework of social constructionism, knowledge is continually constructed rather than a stable, self-evident reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). While the research questions of how teachers perceive and address student fears of failure were grounded in participant past and on-going experiences (Seidman, 2006), they were also situated in the ever-evolving ways the teacher participant viewed themselves, their students, and the independent school institution that they were a part of. In PI, it is by voicing these past experiences and present realities that the "clarify[ies]" how participants make sense of their world in relation to the phenomenon studied (Seidman, 2006, p.19). For the initial questions used to guide this interview as well as the rationale for these questions, see Appendix D.

4.5.2. Vignettes

Vignettes in this study were defined as written descriptions of a fictive scenario that acted as a tool for participants to dialogue about their own experiences (Poulou, 2001; Skilling & Styliandies, 2020). As summarized by Schoenberg and Ravdal (2000), responding to questions after reading vignettes is one way to allow participant to share their own experiences and capture the way that participants make meaning of their actions and beliefs. The strength of vignettes allows participants to explore their responses to and their internal thought process regarding a situation (Schoenberg & Ravdal, 2000; Skilling & Styliandies, 2020). This strength aligned with the research questions of this study that focused on participant actions in terms of how they addressed students fears of failure, and how they perceived student fears of failure, which included their beliefs (Novita et al., 2022*)*. Because teachers may or may not have been conscious of their reactions to student fears of failure (Cox, 2009b) previous to this study, and to provide a way of comparing teacher responses across participants (Poulou, 2001), written vignettes were offered to participants as a way to share their experiences (See Appendix E).

Vignettes have also been used in place of participant observation, which is typically used in case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), when situations relating to the phenomena studied were inaccessible or when the presence of the researcher may have altered participant behaviours to the point of compromising the results of the study (Gould, 1996; Wilson & While, 1998). In the case of this study, because teachers were aware of my research topic in studying teacher perceptions of student fears of failure and how teachers address students fears of failure, being present in the classroom while doing an observation of the teacher could have introduced the challenge of “reactivity” into the data (Carl & Ravitch, 2021, p.142). For example, my presence in the classroom could have resulted in the teacher directly bringing up a discussion about fearing failure or being hyper-vigilant about their actions in this regard. Therefore, vignettes allowed me to gain insight into teachers’ decision-making process while not having to be in the room in the moment these decisions occurred (Skilling & Styliandies, 2020).

Vignettes have been used to study elementary school teachers’ emotional responses to student failure (Prawat et al., 1983; Woodcock & Moore, 2021), teachers’ rationales for student failure (Vlachou et al., 2014) and the use of teacher feedback as a response to student failure (Skipper & Douglas, 2019). However, these vignettes

(Prawat et al., 1983; Vlachou et al., 2014; Woodcock & Moore, 2021) focused on how teachers' responses changed based on student perceived effort and ability. Instead, I developed the vignettes for this study following the framework put forward by Skilling and Stylianides (2020) where the vignettes were based on both a study's theoretical framework and were informed by the literature reviewed. More specifically, the words of the students in each vignette were based on Conroy's (2001) findings that there are multiple sub-fears that make up a students' fears of failure. A student writing an assessment was chosen to not only give each vignette more of a realistic classroom context, but also because research has most closely associated student fears of failure with assessment practices (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Coudevylle et al., 2021; Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Inoue, 2014; Lutovac & Flores, 2022; Singh & Chand, 2022; Vanderhoven et al., 2012) and the teacher-interactions that surround assessments (Huescar-Hernandez et al., 2020; Vaughn et al., 2021). Teacher reactions were also based on literature reviewed (See Appendix E). All teacher-student interactions in the vignettes followed a verbal exchange in order to remain in alignment with social constructionism's emphasis on the use of language to construct a shared social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

To eliminate the potential for bias in the presentation of the vignettes, all vignettes were read by participants (Skilling & Styliandes, 2020). By also not including evaluative language in the vignette and inviting the participant to explain their own response to the hypothetical student, teacher participants were able to build their own understanding of the hypothetical situation (Poulou, 2001). In order to ensure that teacher responses were not skewed by the hypothetical student's demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, academic history), no further information about the student was provided (Poulou, 2001). At the beginning of the vignette response, participants were also invited, "if the vignette in no way correspond[ed]" with their experience to "comment on how [their] experience differ[ed] from the vignette or move on to the next vignette." By inviting participants to respond even if they had not experienced what the vignette depicted, the credibility of the vignette data was increased, as teachers who did not have an experience that they felt was similar to the situation in the vignette could still share an experience, or they could move on to the next vignette (Thompson et al., 2020; Wilson & While, 1998). This process also aligned with the research questions being centered around participant experiences, as if teachers did not think that the situation

aligned with their experience, they were invited to share a different experience that came to mind for them rather than shaping their experiences to fit the vignette.

All vignettes were reviewed by my thesis supervisor and committee in advance of presenting them to participants, as a way to invite critique of how biases may have impacted the construction of the vignettes in ways that I may not have considered (Poulou, 2001). Previous to finalizing the vignettes, I also had two teachers not at the study site review the vignettes that I wanted to present to participants to get their insight on parts of the vignettes that were unclear. Additionally, because the vignettes were written about hypothetical students, I also asked these teachers to give me feedback on whether they found what the students were saying believable and realistic according to their experiences. These insights from those who did not know all of the nuances of the study provided me with an opportunity to again reflect on the decisions I was making in writing these vignettes (Poulou, 2001). Additionally, as summarized by Skilling and Stylianides (2020) in their framework for constructing vignettes for educational research, when vignettes are combined with interviews, there are also further opportunities for researchers to gather information about participant perspectives. Vignettes can also reinforce the reliability of findings through this process (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). The opportunity for vignette response participants to indicate interest in doing a follow-up interview further allowed me as the researcher to deepen my understanding of the participant written responses; I was able to ask participants for more information about their experiences, for further explanations of how they responded to students' fears of failure, and for more insights into why they chose these responses.

Once a participant indicated interest in participating in the vignette response portion of the study by clicking on the link to the SurveyMonkey in the email that was sent to all staff following the recruitment presentation, they could then see the vignette response consent form (see Appendix C). If a teacher consented to the electronic consent form posted on the landing page of the study, they then gained access to the vignettes and corresponding questions (see Appendix E). The SurveyMonkey link was left open to responses for the duration of three months to ensure that participants who wanted to participate had enough time to think about and complete their written responses. After completing their response to the written vignettes, participants who indicated that they were interested in a follow-up interview were contacted using the email they provided to confirm their desire to do a follow-up interview and to schedule a 60-minute follow-up interview with me. These follow-up interviews allowed me to ask for

clarification of their responses and to increase the reliability of findings (Skilling & Styliandies, 2020). These interviews also served as a way of member-checking and exploring more in-depth details of their experiences (Skilling & Styliandies, 2020). While I followed a customized replication approach for these interviews (Carl & Ravtich, 2021), for the initial questions used to guide this interview as well as the rationale for these questions, see Appendix E.

4.5.3. Active Listening

Active listening also helped build trustworthiness, in ensuring that the researcher took the posture "student of the interviewee" in trying to learn from the participant's perspective as much as possible rather than inserting the researcher's own opinions (Roulston, 2010, p.17). Active listening not only affirms the value of what participants are saying, and in doing so strengthens the interviewer-interviewee rapport, but also ensures that the data collected is not simply a reflection of the researcher's own ideas (Seidman, 2006). As such, I remained quiet as much as possible to hear the participant's own voice and I tried to consciously make sure that follow-up questions used the foundation of what the participant had already articulated as a starting point (Seidman, 2006). This conscious focus on each participant's words was done by jotting down notes as needed during participant interviews so that follow-up questions could come back to what the participant had already shared (Seidman, 2006).

To help ensure that I was interacting with participants in a way that limited my own pre-conceived ideas, I also asked questions like "what does that mean to you?" that allowed participants to explain the meaning they gave to their experiences (Seidman, 2006). As one example of this posture of prioritizing participants understanding of their experiences, one participant frequently referenced books on other stories other than their own during the interview. Rather than assuming these were just moments where the participant was drifting off topic, even though it at times felt this way to me, I instead asked "I notice you use like a lot of outside, like books or videos and all of those things. Is that part of that...evidence that you were talking about?" Through this question I came to learn that the participant viewed referencing others stories or books as a means to show not only the validity of their perspective, but that the participant was also modelling their approach to teaching students when talking with me. The participant saw telling these stories as a tool to build students' evidence for their own capability because it was through stories that the teacher participant had developed their own perspective.

Through asking a question rather than assuming I knew the reason behind this storytelling, I was able to understand the central role of these stories for this participant.

I was made even more aware of the need for active listening when I continually prioritized asking not only what teacher participants did to address student failure, but also directly asking why. One participant was discussing their observation of students struggling to look at the negative feedback on assessments. Rather than assuming the relationship between negative feedback and students fears of failure, I asked the teacher participant, “why do you think that feedback is such the hard thing?” This question then led to a discussion that revealed the repeated negative feedback that these students had received throughout their educational journey and that they had built what the participant viewed as an almost habituated response to resist this feedback because of the discomfort it created. The teacher participant then discussed their desire to create more assessments that focused on pointing out the positive aspects of a student’s work as a way to counter this habituated response that had cultivated students’ fears of failure. Later, this same participant also articulated a tension they felt with having to attach marks to students’ work, but that this was unfortunately part of their job. Through asking “why,” I came to learn not only how the teacher was trying to address students’ fears, but also the systemic pressure that they felt and observed in their students.

To help further with actively listening to the participants, I also refrained from using evaluative language when responding to participant experiences (e.g. I avoided using phrases like ‘that’s great!’ or ‘that’s really hard’) as much as possible, to allow participants to share their experiences without being guided by my own emotional reactions (Seidman, 2006). Instead, to indicate that I was listening to participants, I chose to respond with thinking sounds like “hmm” or to thank them for their response.

4.5.4. Research Journal

Keeping a research journal is recommended to encourage self-reflection in the researcher (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). A research journal differs from memoing, as a research journal is more about the experience of the research process for the researcher themselves rather than analyzing any specific part of the study data (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). Research journals were informal places to gather my own thoughts and to help build within me a capacity to reflect on my own understanding of research, the research process that I was involved in, and track questions that I wanted to dialogue about with my committee member, supervisor or peer (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). As such, researcher

journal entries were recorded on at least a bi-weekly basis starting when the study was approved by the SFU Research Ethics Board and the study site.

4.6. Data Analysis

Because this study used a blend of methodologies, as it followed a phenomenological case study approach and used multiple methods of data collection, the data analysis approach used had to be able to bridge multiple methodologies and data sources. As such, to frame all analysis, I used an inductive, reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021) because of its adaptability across methodologies and because thematic coding is central to phenomenological studies due to its power in noticing patterns in data gathered from participants (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Saldana, 2013). These patterns give organization to the data through labelling smaller pieces of data with codes and grouping these codes according to commonalities to create clusters, and then grouping these clusters together to form themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This reflexive thematic analysis was carried out according to the six-step process developed by Braun & Clarke (2021). While thematic analysis can be used within the context of several conceptual frameworks, including grounded theory, reflexive thematic analysis is also differentiated from a grounded theory approach to analysis (Sigurvinsdottir & Riger, 2016). In comparison to other analysis tools like inductive phenomenological analysis (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021), reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) allows researchers to not only explore participant experiences, but also to examine the social factors surrounding participants and their experience (Sigurvinsdottir & Riger, 2016).

The reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) was inductive. This emphasis on inductive data analysis more closely fit the phenomenological approach to this study in focusing primarily on the participant's experiences to drive my understanding of the data (Seidman, 2006) rather than relying on pre-built codes. Additionally, because the research questions of this study centered on how independent high school teachers perceived and addressed student fears of failure, it was the perspective of these teachers that had to be considered over any particular theory. The rationale of prioritizing participant language in phenomenological studies also guided my decision to rely on mostly semantic coding over latent level coding (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Reflexive thematic analysis, as stated by Braun and Clarke (2006) can allow researchers to both "reflect reality and unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality" by providing the flexibility needed to bring together the insights of a variety of data collection methodologies (p.81). Reflexive thematic analysis can also allow for the researcher's in-depth analysis that is needed in seeking themes that represent multiple participants' data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In asking "how do independent high school teachers perceive student fears of failure" and "how do independent high school teachers address students fears of failure," these research questions sought to examine not just what held true for one independent high school teacher, but across multiple teachers. Another strength of reflexive thematic analysis, and specifically inductive thematic analysis, was that it is based in participant experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These benefits of thematic analysis supported the purpose of this study in providing understanding about independent high school teachers' experiences with students who fear failure to other educators and administrators.

While reflexive thematic analysis afforded many strengths to this study, namely in identifying and reporting themes that spanned across all of the data gathered, its focus on portraying each individual's experience was lessened (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In short, as summarized by Braun and Clarke (2020), reflexive thematic analysis "produce[s] breadth" (p.41). However, this does not mean that the themes developed using this analysis method were superficial, but rather they reflected patterns in experience for all participants rather than just one participant. As recognized by both Braun and Clarke (2006) and Sigurvinsdottir and Riger (2016), another potential limitation of thematic analysis is that themes may not be as in-depth if themes are reported as just general overviews of data rather than the researcher analyzing the meaning behind or implications of what participants are saying. To lessen the potential for this as a drawback of using a thematic analysis approach, themes were reviewed by my pro-tem supervisor and committee member to help ensure that they had analytical depth.

Following Braun & Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis in this study included using the six-step framework of "familiarizing yourself with the dataset, coding, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, refining, defining and naming things, [and] writing up" (p.35). All of these processes were viewed as influencing one another (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as each aspect of this study, including

the analysis, was continually refined and “recursive” (Carl & Ravitch, 2021, p. 234; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Merriam, 1998).

4.6.1. Data Familiarization

Data familiarization, as defined by Braun & Clarke (2021), includes not only coming to know the data thoroughly through hearing and reading the data in the process of transcription, but also through the writing down of a researcher’s initial thoughts about the data in this process of going through the data set several times. In this study, all interviews were first transcribed using Adobe Premiere Pro’s auto-transcription software, which was stored locally on the password-protected device being used. Using this transcription as a base, I then reviewed transcripts by listening to the interview and following along in the written transcript to ensure their accuracy as well as adding additional notes including participant’s use of sarcasm and pauses. In this process, I kept detailed memos about what I was noticing in each interview and either repeated ideas a participant had mentioned or questions that I had about how this one piece of data related to their other interviews. Once I had verified that the transcripts aligned with the participant’s words, I printed off these transcripts and read these transcripts twice, both annotating them with my own thoughts, and colour coding initial repeated ideas that I was starting to see in the data. As part of this process, I read the entire data set multiple times, first according to participant, and then according to the method of data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This careful reading of the data followed both the phenomenological approach to this study, where I recognize that each participant was situated in their own experiential context (Carl & Ravitch, 2021; Seidman, 2006), and Braun & Clarke’s (2021) reflexive analysis that advocates for a researcher to deeply contemplate both each piece of data individually and the data set as a whole before codes are chosen.

4.6.2. Coding

A code is a “word or short phrase” that is used by researchers to identify a section of an interview, written response, or other form of data, that represents just one aspect of a participant experience (Saldana, 2013, p.3; Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 52). In this study, coding was done inductively, as the foundation of the analysis was the data itself rather than a series of codes that were been pre-developed according to a specific theory (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Instead, as Braun & Clarke (2021) emphasize, these codes were the result of me, as the researcher, identifying units of meaning in the data;

codes were chosen by me according to what I noticed in participant responses as I read. This coding occurred after reading through the interview transcripts multiple times so that I, as the researcher, was thoroughly familiarized with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saldana, 2013). All coding was done in NVivo. Using a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021), codes were ultimately gathered together to form clusters and then themes that were representative of how these smaller pieces of data related to form patterns across multiple interviews and responses (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The following process was followed for each participant and then across participants. However, only themes across participants were reported.

Following a reflexive thematic analysis approach to coding (Braun & Clarke, 2021), coding was the second phase of formal analysis. However, while Braun & Clarke (2021) emphasize that coding should be "systematic," (p.53), they do not specify the precise methods of coding used in this approach including how the "initial codes" are generated (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87). As such, open coding (Saldana, 2013) was used in this step of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Open coding was chosen as it both allowed for the prioritization of participant's own language in moments when I chose to employ the participant's words as part of a code, or in other moments what I saw as the meaning behind the participant's words (Saldana, 2013).

To ensure that the analysis I conducted on the data was rigorous, I reviewed the codes that I had generated after each transcript to look for codes that had "multiple meanings" or for codes that conveyed the same meaning to decide if they were to be combined or if they were to remain separate (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.53). I also paused after every participant to re-read all of the excerpts for each code to ensure that all excerpts from participant responses were still reflected in the chosen code.

These initial codes that I generated from this process were then further refined by having a peer also code excerpts of the data to invite the questioning of my own assumptions. As emphasized by Braun & Clarke (2021), the role of having an additional coder of the data is to allow the primary researcher to "develop richer and more complex insights into the data" through the process of dialoguing with someone else, rather than to come to a consensus on the data with the other coder (p.55). In order to document this process, I also wrote memos that recorded my decision-making process in order to ensure that I was "critical" of my coding process (Saldana, 2013, p. 104). One example of engaging in this dialogue process, was my discussion with my peer around using the code "performance standard" on a section of the dataset. In dialoguing with my peer,

they did not know what this code was referring to as it seemed to be more common language to teachers rather than other professions. While I ended up choosing keeping this code the same, I was given the opportunity in this conversation with my peer to question my rationale behind the words I had chosen and whether or not these words reflected just my own professional experience, or the experience of the participants. As another example of this reflexivity, in my research journal on January 26, 2024 after coding a section of data with a peer, I commented:

> After meeting with my peer yesterday and going through the codes, they started coding "student fear of …." And switched back and forth between labelling it "fear of ____" and "student fear." In talking through [my peer's] codes on my study's data and in trying to work through grouping the codes into categories/clusters, I realized that I needed to go back and differentiate the moments the participants were talking about student fears vs. general fears, and student fears of failure vs. fears of failure in general… so I went back and readjusted so that there were codes that were specific to teachers talking about student fears vs. their own fears, vs. fear in general. My hope is that this will help me to better see if there are commonalities between the fears that the participants were talking about.

It is this reflexivity that a peer-coder encouraged in helping me see my own assumptions more clearly. The remaining codes were recorded (see Appendix F) to act as a record of analysis decision making (Saldana, 2013).

4.6.3. Generating Initial Themes

Moving into the third phase of Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis, I began to organize codes into clusters with the end goal of ultimately coming to themes that would encapsulate the core meanings of what participants had shared across all data. In this study, a theme was viewed as an "extended phrase or sentence" (Saldana, 2013, p.173), that conveyed a "central…concept" that I had noticed repeatedly through the process of familiarizing myself with the data, coding the data, mapping the codes from the data, memoing about the data, clustering the codes, and bringing together these clusters into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 76).

In total, 247 of the 535 codes that I had generated were included in the code mapping process (see Appendix F). These 247 codes were all used in the initial clustering process, as Braun and Clarke (2021) recommend reflecting on the repeated ideas that can be seen across all of the codes rather than just a small number of codes. In order to make the developing a "central…concept" based on the data, also known as the theme, (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.76) more transparent, codes were first mapped to

help illustrate the connection between codes and to begin grouping codes together into clusters. This code mapping contributed to the trustworthiness of the data analysis, in recording the way clusters, and subsequently the themes, were developed (Saldana, 2013). This code map also provided the foundation for the “generating initial themes” but in a more specific way than Braun and Clarke (2021) outline (p.78).

In code mapping the codes that were used in at least three different participant’s responses, I labelled each grouping of codes that I saw as having a shared idea as a cluster. A cluster in this study was defined as a group of codes that were held in relation to one another around a “shared meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 79). These “shared meanings,” or clusters of codes, were viewed as the building blocks for the “patterns of shared meaning across the data set,” also known as themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.79). These themes were the primary way the findings of the study were reported (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In order to make this process as transparent as possible, I wrote down the inclusion criteria of what codes were included in each cluster, the definition of the cluster, and also did a code map to illustrate the cluster headings (see Appendix F for the complete code map). Of the 247 codes initially included in the code mapping, six codes were not included in a cluster as I could not see its shared meaning between them and the rest of the codes. A total of 51 clusters were developed in this process.

I then grouped these clusters into themes (Saldana, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2021). To increase the rigor of data analysis, I wrote down the inclusion criteria of what clusters were included in each theme and the definitions of each theme. Of the 51 clusters that had been built, all but six were used to form themes. The remaining six clusters did not form part of the themes as I could not come to the point of seeing their shared meaning with the other clusters.

4.6.4. Reviewing Themes

Following phase four of thematic analysis that focused on “reviewing themes,” themes were re-examined to determine if similar themes need to be combined and to ensure that the remaining themes captured the breadth of codes in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). This process was done by getting the feedback of my committee and supervisor on the themes generated to advance the rigor of data analysis and findings. Any adjustments made at this stage were adjusted on a revised copy of the code map to help track the changes made throughout analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006; see Appendix F for theme adjustments).

Once these final revisions were made, in phase five of thematic analysis, these themes were defined with a written definition and with example excerpts from participant data that acted as examples of a given theme (Braun & Clarke, 2021). These excerpts allowed me to check whether the themes I had built on the codes that I had generated from the data were still reflective of the teacher participants responses. As Braun & Clarke (2021) emphasize, this process acts as a type of "validity check on the quality and scope of [the] candidate themes" (p. 97).

To help engage with this process and allow me to look at all of the data for each theme, I used NVivo to sort all of the codes into clusters and these clusters into themes. When reading the quotations from each theme I looked for excerpts from participant data that did not seem to fit with the theme I had created, and asked myself at what level the meaning had been lost – did I need to adjust a code, a cluster, or a theme to ensure this data was reflected in what I was reporting? Once I saw the theme and cluster headings as aligning with the data, I then went back and read the data for each theme again. However, this time I asked two questions from Braun & Clarke (2021) that are meant to encourage a re-engagement with the data in relation to the themes: firstly, "does [the theme] [not] tell a compelling story to address your research question?" and secondly, do the themes "take you too far away from the data?" (p.97). If the answer I arrived at for either of these questions was yes, I went back again to the codes, clusters, and theme names to determine where I had begun to unintentionally stray from the data.

As one example of this process, initially I had named the first part of a theme "although teachers can observe and recognize student behaviours and needs." However, when re-reading this theme in light of quotations from participants, I thought the theme was not only too wordy, and took away some of the power of the theme, but also that it did not capture the individuality that participants saw in students enough in comparison to the data. As such, I instead revised this theme heading after re-reading the quotations from participants again to "although teachers distinguish students' unique profiles as learners." To me, this revision better reflected the way teacher participants viewed students as individuals in every aspect of their learning- their behaviours, their needs, their experiences, and their perceptions. After going through this process, I refined the definitions of each theme and the inclusion criteria for the clusters that formed this theme.

4.6.5. Producing the Report

Finally, in phase six, the themes with excerpts from the interviews and written responses were written up (Braun & Clarke, 2021) into a findings section of this thesis. Because not all seven themes could be reported due to limited time constraints of a master's thesis, six themes were selected that I felt best conveyed an overarching "story" of findings (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.129). To select which themes I would report, I looked for the themes that directly discussed students' fears, as this was at the core of both of my research questions.

4.6.6. Analytical Memoing

Analytical memos are specifically tied to all thinking related to the data gathered in a study, including but not limited to "future directions, unanswered questions, frustrations with analysis, [and] insightful connections" particularly relating to coding (Saldana, 2013, p.42). In short, it is the internal thoughts of the researcher while engaging with or thinking about the study that are made visible to others when written down (Strauss & Corbin, 2015).

Analytic memos are intended to provide glimpses into the researcher thought process specifically related to the data gathering and analysis that can be referred to at a future date, either to help the researcher with analysis or to invite transparency in the critiquing of data analysis (Saldana, 2013). In addition to making my thinking visible for others, as every decision made in the research process contributed to the way the meaning of the data was shaped (Merriam, 1998), these memos were used to help me "clarify [my] thinking" by exploring questions, barriers, or insights that I discovered along the way (Carl & Ravitch, 2021, p.108). These insights are important, as social constructionism recognizes that the researcher is influenced by their engagement with participants and that their knowledge will shift with these interactions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Carl & Ravitch, 2021).

While I followed Saldana's (2013) advice to write "whenever anything related to and significant about the coding or analysis of the data comes to mind," I also structured these moments to memo into the study to ensure that this memoing was engrained in my research process (p.42). Before conducting any interviews, I first wrote a researcher positionality memo that discussed my interest in researching students' fears of failure form the perspective of a teacher and how I situated myself in relation to those in the study (Carl & Ravitch, 2021; Saldana, 2013). After each interview, I also wrote a data

collection memo that made note of why I asked the follow-up questions that I did and that documented other decisions I made during the interview process (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). Then, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis, the first phase included the "jotting down of ideas and potential coding schemes" (p.86). This guideline formed the core of a pre-coding memo after reading each interview transcript (Carl & Ravitch, 2021; Saldana, 2013). Writing these analytic memos ensured that my thinking during the formal data collection and analysis phase of the study was well-documented and referenceable for myself and others (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). This documentation is particularly integral to qualitative research, as coding and data analysis is a process that is not static and is instead ever-changing, as ideas are continually refined by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.7. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in this study relied on structuring the study so that it tried to capture the experiences of participants in a way that was methodical, nuanced, and participant-centered (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). More specifically, trustworthiness was defined using Lincoln and Guba's (2007) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In this study, credibility was addressed by triangulating the data (Lincoln & Guba, 2007), through using two data collection methods, vignette responses and interviews (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). Data triangulation was also done by conducting PI's on different days (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). Credibility was established through the collection of "rich data" (Maxwell, 2009, p.244). Rather than interviewing participants a single time or just reading their written responses to vignettes, the three-interview framework from Seidman (2006) and the follow-up interviews to written responses sought to increase the depth of insight gathered from any one participant (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). Additionally, because participant responses occurred across several weeks, it is less likely for themes to be a result of the context of a teacher's or researcher's single day, which increased "internal consistency" (Seidman, 2006, p.25). Furthermore, member checking was done both during the interview, in the form of asking for clarification (Miles et al., 2014; Seidman, 2006), and initial themes were also sent to participants in phase four of the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This sending of initial themes to participants was done to gain insight into how reflective they thought these themes were of their experiences (Maxwell, 2009). To address transferability, information about the study site's characteristics (e.g. school

demographics highlighted by teacher participants, and teacher participant context highlighted by the participant) were provided to contextualize the data. To address dependability, I sought out the feedback of my supervisor and committee member to ensure that my research design was thoroughly critiqued (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). To address both dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2007), a detailed audit trail (Saldana, 2013) was developed through the process of regularly and systematically writing memos after reading each interview transcript and written response, through the process of developing code maps (see Appendix F), and through both cluster and theme definitions (Carl & Ravitch, 2021).

4.7.1. Reliability

The rigor and validity of findings were secured through thoroughly documenting my decision-making process, through peer-review, and through having a peer code several portions of the data to encourage deep reflection on my own assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Carl & Ravitch, 2021; Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Saldana, 2013). Every aspect of the study required that I, as the researcher, made judgements about what data was gathered, how the data was gathered, how data was coded, and what themes were made from these codes (Seidman, 2006). Therefore, reliability means that those reading the study not only know what decisions the researcher made, but also that the data collection tools (e.g. interview protocols and vignettes), and formalized analysis (e.g. coding and identification of themes) have been invited to be critiqued by someone other than the researcher themselves (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This invitation of critique helped me to ensure that I was maintaining a posture of “curiosity and making sense of meanings” rather than becoming too rigid in my own thinking about the data or my assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.265). In this study, all interview protocols, vignettes, and the design of this study were reviewed by my committee member and supervisor in order to ensure that all of these tools were thoroughly vetted and that my own biases had the opportunity to be questioned. These biases are not viewed in a negative light, as both the social constructionist theoretical framework (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and the reflexive thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2021) used in this study position each person as having their own lens through with they see the world. However, to do rigorous research I had to engage in a process of trying to make my assumptions visible to those reading this thesis.

4.7.2. Addressing Being a Teacher and Researcher

Because I am a teacher within the independent school system, I also inhabit the role of an insider researcher (Unluer, 2012). As such, some of the participants were not just fellow teachers in the profession, but were also colleagues in the world of independent school teaching. In recruiting participants, Toy-Cronin (2018) advocates that researchers conducting a study within their own field must guard against using the personal rapport between researcher and potential participants to encourage participation in the study. To create distance between my role as a colleague and as a researcher, and minimize role duality (Unluer, 2012), I used my Simon Fraser University [SFU] email as much as possible to communicate with participants regarding the research. I also minimized the use of words like “us” and “we” whenever possible so as to not draw on my shared experiences with potential participants (Toy-Cronin, 2018). I also sought to “provide clear signals of separation” between my role as researcher and colleague in also not initiating conversations in interviews about shared experiences within the school system or within my role as a teacher (Toy-Cronin, 2018, p. 6). I also offered to schedule participant interviews before or after working hours and to schedule interviews at an off-site location that was not a school if participants preferred these options (Toy-Cronin, 2018). By creating these distinctions between myself as a researcher and teacher, I sought to diminish the possibility for teachers to participate in the study purely due to a relationship with me or because of our shared profession.

Although my role as insider teacher-researcher can have positive effects on the research by allowing participants to share their perspectives with added depth because of shared professional language and understanding (Ulnuer, 2012), I also had to consciously minimize the possibility for my own assumptions to take the place of participants’ experiences. To address participants’ “tend[ancy] to assume you know what they know” when you as the researcher share the same profession as participants, I made sure to ask participants to recount specific examples of students they encountered who feared failure and what the teaching practices they used to address these fears meant to the participants (Unluer, 2012, p.8). As one concrete example of this, a participant had begun to share a few stories about their interactions with students generally who were afraid of failure, but they had not referenced many of the specifics of these situations. As such, I asked them “can you describe what was happening at the time when they came to you with that and then how you responded in that moment specifically?” This question was meant to encourage the participant to share aspects of

the experience that they might have just assumed that I knew because I also worked in a high school.

Due to my interest and personal experience with the topic of study and my insider status as a researcher, I also recognized the need to actively invite critique of every part of this study from its planning to its conclusion (Toy-Cronin, 2018; Unluer, 2012). In the planning process, interview protocols, vignettes, and the study proposal were reviewed by my thesis advisors (Unluer, 2012) to invite critique of any biases I may not have been aware of in developing this study.

Additionally, throughout the interview and analysis processes, I kept a researcher journal (Carl & Ravitch, 2021; Etherington, 2004; Unluer, 2012) and wrote analytic memos (Saldana, 2013) that captured my own thoughts regarding students fears of failure so that others could examine my own biases with a high level of transparency. This process also aligned with the phenomenological tradition that views reflection as central to gaining understanding (Schutz, 1967, p.12). These memos were used to not only document my thinking at the time so that I could look back on these memos to remind myself of the decisions I had made, but these memos also helped me to make my own thought process more visible to myself and others.

One other tool I used to help me to clarify my own view of my role as a researcher and my impact on the understanding of the data was a peer coder, where a peer coded multiple sections of transcripts and we discussed their codes and my codes after each coding session. This process mirrored Braun and Clarke's (2021) recommendations to form a "peer data analysis group" as a way to dialogue about the analysis process and to clarify both your perspective as a researcher and your findings (p.271). As someone within my own context, as recognized in social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and having my own lens as a researcher through which all of the study was built and viewed, as recognized in phenomenology (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006) and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), the point of having another person code transcripts was not to come to a right answer, but rather to serve as a point of discussion. In meeting with this peer at several points, especially through the formal analysis process, this peer helped me to understand more deeply why I had chosen the codes I had and why I saw specific aspects of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

This willingness to question my own choices in not only the more formal analysis process, but also at every step throughout the study, speaks to my intentional

acknowledgement that I needed people who did not share my insider status with the teaching profession to encourage my reflection on the decisions I was making throughout the entirety of the study (Unluer, 2012; Toy-Cronin, 2018).

4.7.3. Member Checking

As defined by Maxwell (2009), member checking is taking intentional steps to seek out a participant's perspective on the data you are gathering and your interpretations of this data in order to diminish the likelihood that you as the researcher are misunderstanding what participants are trying to communicate. Put another way, member checks are the tools used by a researcher to dialogue with participants about what the researcher is understanding of participant experiences (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). These member checks increase the credibility of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 2007), in ensuring that participants see the researcher as understanding and representing the data in a way that aligns with their experiences (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). Additionally, member checks ensure that what the researcher is hearing reflects participant experiences, as each person, including the researcher, comes to a conversation with their own set of experiences and knowledge (Seidman, 2006).

Initial member checks were defined as seeking clarification of terms that a participant used and asking for confirmation of researcher summary statements of what a participant had said during the interview (LaCroix, 2023; Lincoln et al., 1985). Throughout the PIs, member-checks were embedded into the interviewing process by asking participants for their definitions of (Seidman, 2006) or examples of the central phenomenon of this study (e.g. from one participant interview I asked, "Can you tell me a bit more about what you mean when you say 'bar'?"). These embedded member checks helped me focus on deeply understanding the participant's perspective, which inevitably differed in some way from my own (Seidman, 2006). As one example of this, in one participant interview I asked, "you had mentioned also that there's a failure and I think later a perceived failure…can you unpack for me…is there a difference between those?" This question was asked to help clarify why the participant used different terminology and to make sure that I was understanding the meaning of these words for the participant. For those who respond to the vignettes through the vignette response, follow-up interviews with participants acted as an opportunity to similarly clarify participant responses (Skilling & Styliandies, 2020).

After interviews were analyzed for themes, a summary of the themes (Saldana, 2013, p.17) from each participant's interviews along with corresponding quotes from the participant's interviews were shared by email with each participant who requested this summary to facilitate participant-researcher dialogue. These processes also helped to ensure I was doing my best to "demonstrat[e] fidelity" to what participants voiced to me and the meaning that they wanted to communicate (Carl & Ravitch, 2021, p.167). I invited participants to comment on these summaries to clarify any ideas they felt I had misunderstood or if there were other parts of the interview they saw as essential that were not included in the summaries. While I did not receive any comments from these participants, I tried to invite dialogue about the findings of the study with the participants who were open to doing so. All of these actions were taken with the goal of "seeing through another's voice" rather than focusing on my own perceptions of these interactions alone (Blackman, 2012, p.182).

4.7.4. Data in Context

While data analysis and data collection are interrelated and cannot be separated (Carl & Ravitch, 2021), I also specifically addressed trustworthiness in the data analysis process. To increase my ability to contextualize the data, I wrote data collection memos immediately after each interview (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). In doing so I tried to allow for an in-depth description of the data as well as ensuring that my own reflexive practices were structured and consistent (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). When coding the interviews, I chose to follow a more semantic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021) and to use the participants' own words to ground the study in participants' perspectives. This choice aligned with the phenomenological focus on the participants' experiences (Seidman, 2006) and a social constructionist perspective on the importance of an individual's own word choice to construct their social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). These approaches ultimately strengthened the credibility of the findings of this study (Carl & Ravitch, 2021). By not only analyzing individual teacher's interviews, but also coding and building themes across participants, I also sought to address the potential for individual participants to just tell me what they thought I was wanting to hear (Miles et al., 2014). In reporting findings, the questions asked by the researcher were included if any participant responses directly use the same language that was initially introduced by the researcher to be transparent about my larger role in shaping that data.

Chapter 5.

Findings

5.1. Theme 1: Teachers view student fears of failure as interwoven with many fears that students face

When teacher participants were asked if they had experienced students who were afraid of failure, all teacher participants unanimously spoke to interactions they had with students that they felt reflected students' fears of failure. Student fears of failure seemed so commonplace to one participant that when asked "have you encountered kids who are afraid of failure?" a participant responded, "is that a real question?...of course! Of course, we all have. Like the minute we get to step into this thing [teaching], you're going to." The surprise of being asked whether they as a teacher had encountered students who were afraid of failure was echoed by another participant, in this participant also responding "of course" to the presence of fears of failure among students. In these participant responses, fears of failure were affirmed as something that they saw their students face.

When asked about the students fears of failure that they had seen in their teaching experience though, teacher participants often shifted between discussing students' fears of failure and fear more generally. In some moments teacher participants used the direct phrase "fear of failure" and in other moments teacher participants spoke of students who "are just afraid." Additionally, participants at points shifted between students being "afraid of failure" specifically, and then replacing this word "failure" with other realities that students encountered. For example, one teacher began discussing students "failing" but then shifted shortly after to "they're afraid that they're...not going to make it to the place where they want to go." Others viewed fears of failure as more associated with students' fears of not attaining what students viewed as a high academic standing, or not receiving social affirmation. Others associated student fears of failure with students feeling the need to attain specific career outcomes. When asked what the difference between students' fears and students' fears of failure was, another participant stated, "fear of failure's specific," while others did not vastly differentiate between students' different fears and saw specific fears all as under a broader heading of emotion of being afraid. From the perspective of several other participants, students' fears of failure were inseparable from an array of other fears that students encountered,

so much so that one participant concluded, “do I think that it’s different for fear of failure versus fear of other things? No, fear is just fear.” Held together, teacher participants did not have a consistent definition of student fears of failure but rather discussed student fears of failure in relation to many other fears that students also experienced. Another participant advocated trying to find “where does the fear of failure come from and trying to help [students] through that fear,” indicating that student fears of failure did not stand in isolation to other fears but instead interwove with them. These fears seemed so interwoven that many teacher participants shifted between the fears seamlessly and only when asked directly to distinguish between the fears and fears of failure did they actually make specific distinctions between them.

Within the wide array of fears noted by teacher participants, across seven of the nine participants, each referenced some level of fear or fear of failure in their students regarding the anticipation of future outcomes, whether specific to students’ fears around post-secondary studies or more generally. In trying to define students’ fears of failure, one participant stated that it is “even before going into an assessment...or a situation...already going in there like ‘I’m going to fail.” While the type of failure in this specific moment was not further defined by the participant, the participant spoke to this fixation of students on future academic outcomes in relation to student fears of failure. This fear for students surrounding future results could also be connected to specific tasks, like “they’re worried that they’re not going to be able to make sentences well,” their decision-making in class where “fear stop[s] them...from acting because ‘what if I fail?” and longer-term decisions like how academic failures in junior courses could impact their future. The fear of the future was so strong that some participants noted the connection for some students between one task and the anticipation of the rest of the student’s life. This fear-filled anticipation of the future was evident in a participant recounting the story of a student who “came in like 15 minutes before the exam and…lost it...saying that their...whole future is going to be messed up because of this one exam.” Teacher participants recounted students’ fears and fears of failure as attached to students’ anticipation of the costly future consequences of their actions.

Students’ fears surrounding university entrance were also repeated across several teachers’ responses. For some this fear of university admission was the central component of students' fears of failure, and for others they perceived students’ fears of not being accepted to university as a symptom of deeper fears of inadequacy, again indicating the intermeshing of fears. For one participant, the weight for students of the

fears they carried surrounding university entrance was summarized in their statement that, “this university thing looms large” for many students. Even in this phrasing, the teacher participant’s description of university admission as “loom[ing]” denoted the inherent fear this process involved for many students. For another participant, the context they most frequently recalled encountering students’ fears of failure was not that students could not do a specific task, but instead that the fear “that the student actually has is fear of not getting admission to a university.” The fear of students not being accepted into university was so significant for the students that this teacher had worked with that it had become synonymous with failure. Even more troublingly, the fears this participant had encountered in their students in not getting into university was intertwined with even more weighty fears for the students of who they were. University entrance fears then became a symptom of an underlying fear that students “feel that they are less of a person if they have failed at something. But mostly they can’t articulate that...but they can all articulate the university thing.” Here, the participant foregrounded student fears of being a failure, especially regarding how they viewed themselves, as deeply interconnected with student fears of post-secondary admission. From these teachers’ stories, the fears of their students were not singular in just students’ fears of university entrance, but also in parallel fears of who they would be if they did not attain this outcome.

Adding another student fear to the web of fears teachers commented on, all but one of the teacher participants commented on their experiences with students' fears that were directly related to failing in terms of the grades the students did and had the potential to receive. One teacher in particular made the distinction between the numerical feedback, or grades, that the student received, and the actual work that the student did, attributing specifically that it was “their marks [that] are creating this fear” rather than “their skill level.” The grading process itself seemed to carry with it, according to this participant, a powerful fear for students that was specifically attached to the number students received as an evaluation of their learning. However, the exact grade that students were afraid of receiving was not consistent across all students, and instead seemed to connect to a specific grade the student wanted. As one teacher participant summarized, “some of them, they’ve been trying so hard and they get a C and they’re like, ‘yes!’ because they passed. And other ones, [they] get 95% and they’re unhappy because it’s not classed as a high A.” It was this grading process that seemed to carry with it the potential to instill fear in some students and relief in others. Two other teacher

participants cited students who were especially fearful of not “attaining...the high A,” situating the highest grades as potentially especially fear-filled for students. These students’ fears of a variety of grade outcomes, from the teacher perspective, also persisted beyond a singular learning task and instead cultivated a habituated response of fear in relation to both the grades and the assessments attached to them. As one teacher participant stated, “there’s a fear…because they know that the performance is going to be evaluated.” This same participant noted that students were sometimes already bracing when they even saw a paper in the hand of the teacher, “because of the kind of activities that we’ve done in the past that they know are evaluated.” For some students, their fear of seeing the grade outcome could be so strong that teachers observed them avoiding knowing the grade altogether: “so a student would go...‘I’m getting mine back. I don’t want it back. I’m scared.” The anticipation of grade outcomes in connection with assessments could carry such fear for a student that another teacher recalled a situation where that they had a student complete an assessment but the teacher ensured not to verbally call it an assessment just so that the student could successfully complete this task. In other cases, the fear of receiving a specific grade was so overwhelming that it caused students to compromise their integrity. As one participant stated, “the reason [one student] cheated was because she was...scared that her grade wasn’t going to be good enough.” Teacher participants’ observations of students’ anticipation of the grades they could receive and even the prospect on their work being graded connected to some students’ experience of fears and fears of failing in terms of the grades they received.

Three teacher participants also noted a chronic fear in students of not having the necessary skillsets or intelligence that students felt they needed. For two of these teachers, this fear for students remained even for students who had proven their capability. As one participant stated, “sometimes it’s scared to try, and...it can be, quote, ‘some of the smartest students.” In recounting the story of one student who had demonstrated their competence in a recent presentation, a teacher had come to learn of this student’s fear of lacking the capability to get into university because the teacher had observed such a significant shift in this student’s demeanor. In describing this student, the teacher said, “her shoulders dropped, her tone dropped, her eyes dropped, everything in her body language, everything said...this state of defeat,” which this teacher correlated with the student’s fear that “I don’t have the stuff in me to accomplish. I’m not going to be able to make it.” From this participant’s story, these student fears of

their ability seemed to be attached with their fear of the future, interweaving these fears together. This same teacher participant concluded that there seemed to be a gap between what they as the teacher had observed in terms of the student's capability and the student's fears, as they had "seen already that [the student] know[s] how to do it, or they can...they have no logical reason to be afraid." Student fears then were positioned by this participant as powerfully resistant to evidence to the contrary, pointing to an even deeper fear for students of having any ability to achieve their goals. Another teacher participant also told the story of a student who chronically missed turning in their assignments, which the teacher attributed to the student feeling that they were lacking the necessary intelligence to do what was being asked of them: "I'm thinking of one student who didn't hand things in regularly. And I think a lot of that is just, 'why would I bother? Because I'm not smart enough, or I can't do the work." Across several of these teacher participants interviews was the pattern in the participants' language that the students they had talked to felt that they "can't" at some level and for some this pre-existed any specific evidence in a course to substantiate this fear. For some, according to one teacher participant, students "c[ame] into the classroom with their perception of lacking something." This fear of not being capable enough, and for some this creating a feeling of having failed, was so embedded into some students experiences of school that for this teacher it seemed that it spilled beyond the boundary of any one classroom. For several of the students that these teachers had worked with, students faced fears of their capability and feelings of already being a failure, regardless of their actual level of capability.

Interconnected with fearing failure, four teacher participants also spoke to students' fears of not being perfect in all that they did. The fear of failing and fear of lacking perfection were recounted by one participant as directly bound together, as they stated "I see students fear making mistakes because mistakes will ultimately bring [them] to a state of failure." Here, the participant spoke to the potential for students to be afraid of instances of imperfection pointing to a bigger reality of the students' being afraid of failure that was attached to who they were. Another participant reinforced the idea of students holding to perfection and the cultivation of their fears as they recounted, "there's the fear of failure, even from doing a single question, never mind fear of failing a whole course" because "it's a fear of failure to make a single mistake with some students." Here, the participant reflected the interwoven nature of fears, as they shifted between several fears in a single statement: the fear of doing a specific task, the fears of

performance over time, and the fear of not achieving perfection. For another student that a teacher participant told the story of, this perpetual fear of not doing work to a standard of perfection caused the student to delete all that they had done, because they "didn't think [it] was good enough, so [they] just erase[d] it all and…start[ed] over." In this moment, the teacher observed the students' fears of not reaching a high standard that the student felt they needed to achieve and the destructive consequences this had on the student's progress; the student's fears of failing in terms of not being perfect, from the teacher's perspective, caused the student to act in a way that showed they did not feel they were achieving the standard the assignment required. In short, these participants recounted that students were afraid of imperfection, and in some cases, interwoven into these experiences was also the fear of failure.

Rather than observing students' fears as attached just to grade outcomes, their own capability, or imperfection, which already seemed to carry heaviness for the students that teachers spoke of, eight of the nine teacher participants also commented on the students they worked with fearing the impact of their actions on their interpersonal relationships. Repeated among several participants was the importance of parents' responses to students, and the fear teachers saw students carry that they would "disappoint their parents" and even face "judge[ment]" from their parents. Specifically related to students' academic achievements, a teacher participant wrote in their vignette response that for some students there is "a genuine fear that they [students] will be devalued by their parents as a result of a low mark." Another teacher participant recounted a story of a student they had worked with who was afraid that "if he didn't do well, he would add more chaos" to the discord and tension in his home environment. Held together these participant stories point to students' fear of failure in terms of not attaining a high level of academic performance, but even more so, student fears of the impact of these outcomes on their relationship with their parents. A different participant also commented that a student's fear of their parents' reactions was so strong that the student chose not to disclose their desire to pursue a different career path than what their parents wanted. In these stories, these teacher participants highlighted the fear that these students carried of their relationship with their parents being compromised as a result of the students' actions. However, teacher participants also spoke to students fears of the interpersonal cost of their actions extending beyond just students' parents. Two teacher participants also commented on students fearing the impact of potential failings on their relationships with their teachers, especially that the teacher would

“judge” the student. In short, these teacher participants conveyed the profound depth of the fears of students that their grades, goals, and decisions, would come at the cost of parental or teacher approval and stability in these relationships.

According to three of the teacher participants, students also feared the potential implications of what they would say or do on their peer relationships. As one teacher participant voiced, generalizing students who had talked to them, the students would say “I’m afraid of, I’m afraid....that other people will laugh at me.” This same teacher participant concluded that the fear for students of experiencing ridicule from their peers was both something students anticipated, and in some cases, was something students had already experienced, as they “don’t want to lose...the respect of their peers or be further down the road. Maybe they already don’t have the respect, so they want more of it.” This fear for students of ridicule also extended beyond the classroom, as another teacher participant noted the potential for peers to continue the social cost of a student’s action in electronic spheres. These actions could include peers using social media to remind students of any perceived failings. For one student that this teacher participant told the story of, the teacher concluded that the fear of being made fun of by her peers led her to avoid sharing her musical talent in whole-school settings. In this case, the teacher participant situated the student’s fear of failure not in terms of the student’s academics, as “it wasn’t a fear of failure as far as like her performance...but just putting herself out there in front of her peers.” Students fears, and fears of failure, then took on a social dynamic, as teacher participants identified the fear students faced for their relationships with others to be compromised if what they did was perceived by others as a failure. In short, rather than students experiencing just the fear of failure alone, teacher participants situated these fears of failure within the context of students’ experiencing a plethora of fears like students fearing the impact of their actions on those they cared about.

5.2. Theme 2: Teachers view students’ fears as multi-layered and deeply rooted

In the teacher participants' discussions of the fears that they saw in their students, student fears and student fears of failure were not consistent and unified concepts, but instead were multilayered in shifting in source and context. In terms of the source of students’ fear of failure, as one participant articulated, “it’s, it’s kind of vague because it can come from different places and different circumstances.” As another participant articulated, the source of a student’s fears of failure could shift from student

to student, as “their fear of failure is not necessarily because they don’t feel good enough. It can be. Sometimes they just…want to please their parents. Sometimes they want to please their friends. Sometimes…their own self-esteem.” Two teacher participants also differentiated between students fears of failure stemming from concrete evidence, like students’ academic outcomes, and students’ fears of failure that were based on how the student was perceiving their situation without outcome-based evidence. One participant called this distinction “real fear” and “reasoned fear,” as a student’s fears could stem from an outcome that had already come to pass, like actually failing an assessment, or could stem from a student’s anticipation of how they would perform. The source of students’ fears according to these participants then was not singular but instead multifaceted across the population of students that these teachers described.

The context surrounding students fears of failure also seemed to shift. As one participant, in thinking through the multiple courses they taught students, asked themselves the question “there, [referring to another classroom], fear of failure is also very common. Is it inherently different?” This same teacher went on to discuss that in a particular course the teacher was “upfront and explicit about the fact that we expect [students] to fail a whole bunch of times” because in that course “fear of failure...is always public” due to the subject requiring students’ group participation and observation. These contextual factors seemed to, in this participant’s explanation, shift the type of fear that the students experienced. In more one-on-one conversations with students the fear students had of “not...meeting [their] life goal” was more evident for one participant, whereas in the more whole-class performance context, students were afraid that “somebody will laugh at [them].” Another participant explained this shift of what fears students could experience as based on the types of tasks students were asked to do in different classroom contexts. This shifting positioned fear as multilayered in terms of being affected by more than one factor surrounding the student, both the way the course was structured and in the types of activities the students were engaged in.

The presentation of students’ fears could also vary immensely student-to-student. In one teacher’s experience students “could be shaking, they could be getting a headache...their heartbeat could be skipping.” In addition to fears being able to affect physiological factors for students, a teacher participant also noted that fears could change how students are “processing.” As such, teacher participants reinforced not only the variety of reasons they saw behind students' fears and fears of failure, and the

variation in these fears across contexts, but also the ways these fears could shift and could be expressed differently by each student. Student fears and fears of failure were not a universal construct across teacher participants in terms of source, influencing factors, or appearance, and instead was multi-layered.

The student fears of failures recounted by teacher participants were also deeply-rooted in students' experiences of school, as multiple populations of students mentioned by teachers experienced some level of fear. For those who some may expect to be insulated from fears due to their high level of academic performance, of the nine participants, five specifically spoke about students' fears of failure or fears generally in terms of the students who they perceived as the "highest achievers." Students' fears for these teacher participants were not lessened despite a student having a high level of proficiency in the subject area, but instead could actually be the opposite. As one teacher shared, "it's not even...a lack of ability. It can be, quote 'some of the smartest students'...you know? That are just afraid to try because they're scared." Another teacher shared the story of a student who they felt was a "very brilliant student and a good writer" but rather than this facilitating his ability to show his abilities in an assessment, he instead would "just be sitting there" paralyzed with "expectations for himself." In contrast to these five teacher participants though who saw student fears of failure extend across many students, especially those who may be seen as academically successful, one teacher had not considered the possibility that students who had a high level of academic success would be afraid, and instead saw fears more obviously in students with lower achievement. This teacher explained that they had not spent as much time considering the fears of highly academic students. These students often, in their experience, had the necessary coping strategies to continue on in spite of their fears, as this participant stated, "the high achieving student, I was like, I never actually thought about going into like how much they might be coming in with." While some student population's fears may be less visible for this teacher participant, what was unified across all teacher participants was that students in their classes did encounter fears, including fears of failure.

In teacher participants sharing about the students who they thought were afraid, the students mentioned in these stories were not just those who had high grades in their academics. Instead, the students who were mentioned by teachers as being afraid encompassed a wide range of students and was deeply rooted in many students experience of high school. Encountering students who were afraid was such a frequent

experience for two teachers that they even emphasized this by trying to quantify the large number of students they've worked with who experience fear. As if talking to a student one teacher exclaimed: "they're afraid that...they're not going to make it to the place that they want to go. So, I've...done this a lot. [as if talking to a fearful student] 'You're person number, you know 3,484." One teacher participant also tried to estimate the number of students in a grade ten class that they saw experiencing fear, and concluded "I've got a class of 26 and I would say there would be about five or six who when I handed out paper they, they give cues like moving back away from me or the paper...and they just don't want to look.... people around them can see that they are worried." While clear that not all students were afraid, some teacher participants also encountered students who were afraid so frequently that they did not know initially which student story to share. Student fears were also not contained to just what may be seen as typically academic courses, as one teacher participant also commented that students' fears extended into students' experiences of the arts where "the fear of failure is also very common." The frequent encounter with student fears even led one teacher participant to conclude that "what's difficult is getting a student who understands weaknesses and mistakes and fear of failure and all these things are a part of life." Here, the weighty experience of fear of failure was so frequent in the lives of high school students that it was the lack of these deeply-rooted fears in students that was uncommon in this teacher's experience. As another teacher participant summarized, especially in the context of a class of students who were facing final assessments, "so many of them are so scared." In short, from these teachers' stories, fear and a fear of failure were incredibly typical experiences for the students and extended across multiple student populations.

Rather than students' fears of failure just beginning in the classroom though, two participants also commented on the way student fears of failure, from their perspective, were deeply rooted in pre-existing students' entrance into the physical space of their classroom. As a participant stated, "I've had a number of students come to me over the last year and a bit...who have come into my classroom anxious and worried, not that they will fail the course, but that they will not do well, which I think is equal to failure." Student fears in this teacher's experience were present even before they entered the physical room. Similarly, another participant characterized students' fears as incredibly obvious and common in their teaching experience so much so that, "it's like with the big banner of like fear of failure when students are walking into our classroom." Here again,

these student fears of failure were seemingly already deeply engrained before this teacher interacted with these students. As encapsulated by these teacher participants' stories, the fears and fears of failure that they saw in their students extended beyond individual students or individual classes and were ingrained in many students' experiences of school, even before they entered the physical classroom.

Despite many of the teacher participants being acutely aware of both the potential for and reality of student fears of failure in their classrooms, in several of the teachers' experiences, students' fears were so deeply internalized that students struggled to initially voice their fears. For one participant their rationale for this silence was because students "don't have the self-advocacy skills to be able to say, I'm afraid of failing here." However, for others, this student hesitancy to voice their fears in and of itself demonstrated the paralyzing potential and discomfort of student fears. In their conversations with students who wanted to change their course load, one teacher stated, "for those students...they're scared to have that conversation. They don't even want to talk about it." In this situation, the participant seemed to indicate that students, when given the option, preferred to remain silent and to not have to voice what their actual fears were to others. Even when a student did decide to voice their fears, for one student that another teacher participant had worked with, this fear meant that the student did all that she could to diminish the potential cost of sharing her emotions. As this teacher observed, the student "was very tentative. And she looked around to see who else was listening...she...didn't seem like she even wanted to, to talk about this or admit this or certainly let any else know, and maybe not even herself." These fears were deeply rooted and protected within students' internal worlds so much so this teacher participant noticed even the student themselves struggled to acknowledge them.

This hesitancy from students to share their fears with others at times instead came out in student behaviours that communicated their fears in an indirect way; teachers encountered students fears not just in the depths of their emotional worlds, but also in their actions. Two participants recounted stories of having caught students cheating, however, the reason behind this cheating that these participants cited was the students' fears of failure. One student in particular who had just entered high school was pulled aside after she was found to have cheated. In the teacher's conversation with this student, the teacher discovered that "the reason [the student] cheated was because she was...scared that her grade wasn't going to be good enough...and...she doesn't want to disappoint her parents...she was also scared that people were going to judge her." The

compounding fears the student faced, from this teacher's experience, drove them to extreme actions to avoid their fears becoming reality. Several other teacher participants also situated student fears of failure as causing students to perpetually ask for confirmation of their responses, spend an excessive amount of time doing revisions, avoid handing in assessments, and remain paralyzed in the face of taking risks. As such, looking at these teachers' experiences with students, student fears were so deeply-rooted that they, at times, were not only difficult for students to voice, but were also so powerful that they could in some moments guide student behaviour.

5.3. Theme 3: Teachers view students' fears as intertwined with a plethora of expectations, but see this dynamic as malleable

Common across all teacher participants was some level of expectations they noted in the students' stories that they recounted, which included students' expectations of themselves, expectations from adults in the students' lives like their parents and teachers, and expectations that seemed to be embedded into the school itself. Together these expectations formed one part of the underlying fear that many students encountered in these teachers' experiences. However, rather that situating this relationship between students facing expectations and being fearful as unable to be shifted, several teacher participants not only challenged specific expectations on behalf of their students, but also sought to implement strategies to disentangle the potential for expectations to be fear-including.

5.3.1. Teachers recognize that students face a wide variety of expectations from a wide variety of sources

Teacher participants repeatedly referenced students' own expectations of themselves as one source of student fears. As one teacher put it, "a lot of them feel judged. They judge themselves" and another echoed this similar sentiment stating the need to help students take expectations "off of themselves." These self-expectations were particularly strong, according to several teachers, surrounding students' experiences with grades and interpreting what these grades meant. Multiple participants spoke to students holding themselves to a specific standard of performance and that this could then make them afraid that they would not reach this benchmark. In this case, one participant summarized that "sometimes the student views themselves as a failure. And so any...result that they get that hasn't measured up to some impossibly high standard is

therefore a failure." This self-expectation for students in teacher participants' experiences often appeared as students striving for perfectionism that only served to perpetuate students fears. Specifically, one teacher cited students' expectations of being perfect as causing students to be paralyzed with fear so much so that the teacher wanted students "to give up their perfectionism in order for it to not debilitate" them. In this teacher's experience "when students find they let go of some of their perfectionism and their expectations...there's a massive amount of freedom that comes from that process." However, this teacher participant emphasized that these fears were not true of all students. This teacher told the story of one student who experienced contentment rather than fear of failure despite not achieving top marks on an assignment, "because she was satisfied with what she got, or she felt that she wouldn't get any better so it was okay." For this teacher participant, it seemed to be students' misalignment between their expectations of themselves and their results that could amplify or dispel their fears, rather than the outcome itself being the source of the fear. Nonetheless, these teachers observed students holding often high expectations of themselves, even at the cost of experiencing significant fear from these expectations.

From the perspective of seven of the teacher participants, students also face the expectations of significant others in their life and these expectations could shape how much fear a student may experience. In several teacher participants' responses, parental expectations could come in the form of parents wanting their children to get the highest marks possible. In teachers' conversations with students, they also encountered students feeling the weight of their parents' expectations for them to attend post-secondary institutions and pursue specific careers. One teacher told the story where a student's "parents want[ed] the student to become...a doctor. But the student wanted to become an artist" and that the student was "very afraid" of dialoguing with their parents about their different life goal. Parental expectations being attached to students' futures after high school was echoed by another participant who stated, "sometimes students...as young as grade ten [have] s[at] here and told me that their parents are really why they want to be – a fill in the blank career path—...usually medicine or law...[and to] go to X University" and that "both are quite common." According to these teacher experiences, students could face tremendous pressure from their parents' expectations to achieve a specific career outcome after high school and could feel these expectations despite these students not having graduated yet. Even more all-encompassing expectations existed for students, as a teacher participant told the story

of students who faced parental expectations that connected to the reputation and legacy of the family lineage. As this teacher recounted, some students felt that they "need to get this job because [they] need to look after [the parent] when [they're] older" because the parent had "provided for [the student] as a son or daughter." The level of expectations a student could face then, like in this situation, could include the responsibility to make decisions in high school that would allow them to provide for the entire family after finishing high school.

These parental expectations may not always be directly verbalized in teacher participants' experiences with students, but may carry weight for students nonetheless. A teacher recounted their experience in talking with a parent at the school, as this parent asked questions about how to navigate the high school and post-secondary academic world for their primary school child. The teacher participant concluded that "the eight-year-old child will get those messages...[of] pepar[ing] students for university" from their parent. In connection with the implicit expectations from parents, these expectations may not always be the result of what the parent says or an intentional desire to communicate these pressures to students, but may be present for the student's experience of the parent-child relationship nonetheless. In one participant's experience, students may encounter the implied expectations of parents due to the absence of parents stating their larger goals for their children. As this participant stated:

> Even the parents who set outlandish goals for their children...when I've finally had to have the conversation with parent and student...almost always when the parent is here...they say, 'well what's really important to us is...what kind of person you [the student] are...but the student doesn't feel that that's the case up until that...—I don't know if it's they have never actually verbalized that to the student before...or if, everything else about how they communicate undermines that?

As such, this teacher conveyed that students could feel expectations from their parents to perform and adhere to their parents' goals, regardless of the actual intentions of the students' parents. Another teacher also recounted the potential added tension that students could face in trying to fulfill the sometimes-differing expectations of the significant adults in their life, as a teacher recounted a student who was asking questions like "I'm afraid—so what do I pick?...who do I pick? Do I pick what [my dad] is telling me? Or do I pick what you're [the teacher] telling me? Do I pick what I'm thinking?...What do I do?" Not only did this student have to navigate the expectations from parents, but they also had to navigate the potential for these expectations to conflict with others. Within this diverse range of weighty parental expectations that some

students encountered, one teacher made sure to clarify that these parental expectations were not always present, as “it is not all the parents” that put expectations on their children. While not generalizable to all students, across these participants stories the potential for students to feel the cost of spoken and unspoken expectations from their parents was not just a real possibility, but a fear-filled reality for some.

Teacher participants also spoke of the expectations they had for students or recounted stories of students in their classes who felt like their teachers had expectations for them as students. Some of the expectations teacher participants mentioned, while not calling them expectations directly, were that students need to expend effort to learn, to try their best, to understand and demonstrate understanding of the content or skills involved in their courses, and to do so “at grade level.” Also, there was an aspect of students building these skills within the time given in a specific assessment context or the semester. This diverse range of expectations was encapsulated by one participant who stated, “so, whether it’s through classroom discussion or anything...if they have...been coming to the classroom, they’re engaged, they’re invested, they’re doing everything we’re asking them—I think that’s what we’re looking for.” Rather than there just being one expectation from this teacher towards the students, there were several that required students to not just convey their knowledge, but also to reflect their skills in a way that teachers could observe. Not all expectations from teachers were performative-based though, as several teachers also commented on the expectation that they had that students would make mistakes. As one teacher reenacted a conversation they had had with their class, they stated: “I don’t want perfection. If you give me perfection, where’s your growth?...I want them to see, ‘hey, I have improved in this...few months’ And I want them to see like, it’s okay with making a mistake.” These shifting expectations across teachers, as some were based on meeting learning goals, some were based on effort, and some based on learning over time, required that students navigate a variety of different types of expectations from their teachers.

Amidst this multitude of teacher expectations, teachers themselves articulated the tension they felt in knowing that these expectations could have a deep impact on students. One participant spoke directly to a dichotomy noticed in several of the participants responses, as they had “very specific expectations...of what success look[ed] like” in terms of an assessment or project, but also felt the need not to “put [their] own expectation on [the students].” This tension, from another teacher

participant's stories, could carry through to a student's experience as well. As one of the starkest examples of this tension, one participant recounted a moment where a student they were working with "just kept apologizing because they had not done well enough" and that the student felt "they had let [their teacher] down." In contrast, the teacher remembered responding by reinforcing with the student that "I [the teacher] wasn't upset at them because they let me down. But it was like they felt that their high B was a way to let me down. So, they felt like a failure because of it." Here, the teacher participant highlighted the potentially very high expectations the students could feel from their teachers, even if these felt expectations differed from what the teacher participant wanted to communicate. The unintentional upholding of expectations by teachers towards their students was captured powerfully in one participant reflecting:

> I wonder at times...if we are...subconsciously culpable...There are probably things I say and do that...encourages this kind of culture. So, for example, I do tell students that they can become good if not great…and in doing that, while I'm encouraging, I might also be actually... subconsciously making them think that that's the only thing that matters.

Here, the teacher conveyed the difficulty of teachers at times maybe adding more expectations onto their students, even if this differed from what they hoped for on behalf of their students.

The expectations teacher participants saw students encounter could also be so ingrained that teachers attributed these expectations to culture as a whole. One expectation that several participants commented on was the strong prevailing norm within the school of students attending post-secondary after graduating high school. As one teacher spoke about students' fears of "looking bad in front of [their] peers," the teacher spoke to the implicit "ethos of the school" regarding post-secondary attendance that even outside speakers who came in to address the students fed into. The participant continued explaining, "even when speakers come...I remember one coming...and [saying] 'when you go to university,' there wasn't an 'if you go to university'...and I feel that maybe some students, maybe that's not the road they're going down and they feel that they're a failure if that's not the road they're going down." In this situation, the participant indicated that even those outside of the direct school community could feed into this implicit cultural expectation within the school of post-secondary attendance. This implicit expectation from others that students attend post-secondary could also compound students' fears with what another participant viewed as the built-up expectation within the school for students to achieve high grades. As this participant

recounted, “our school, being a school that is heavily academic, has developed a culture where a low A is deemed as...being low. And that they feel they need higher marks in order to get into university.” However, this culture of the school was something that this participant felt had been developed over time, as in the earlier part of this participant’s time at the school “the school culture...the clientele culture, was not as highly focused on marks” and the “pressure to...perform wasn’t as pronounced.” When asked where this culture came from though, the most specific this participant got was talking about the “school culture” generally. It was this cultural expectation that this participant strove to counter without fully being able to articulate where it came from stating:

> We don’t like to say that we’re a university prep school, but we do the work of a university prep school...the prevailing cultural messages are so strong that it’s really hard for a teacher to undo that cultural algorithm...I have tried on occasion...talking about the trades as a viable option...[and] it’s not the kind of message that these students seem to want to accept.

Others discussed expectations being held up by pressures within the school environment more generally but did not attribute these expectations to any one person. One participant discussed students feeling the pressure to “attain a bar” and another discussed some students feeling like they had “failed to measure up to some externally imposed standard.” In these participants’ portrayals of the fears that some students encountered, these expectations for students to attend university and maintain a high academic performance seemed to be so embedded in the fabric of the school and the population the school represented that it was challenging for participants to articulate exactly where it came from.

However, one avenue that seemed to have the potential to cultivate the expectations students faced in this high school from the perspective of some teacher participants, was the valourization of certain expectations within the school context. Some teacher participants recounted moments of praising students for their academic performance. In giving feedback on assessments, one participant commented that when a student is “going up [in grades] and improving, I was able to give really positive feedback.” Here, it seemed that this positive affirmation of the student’s work came more easily for this teacher participant when the student had performed well on an assessment. Another teacher commented on a student that the teacher had made accommodations for because of the student’s fears and that these “helped him achieve his best, and he ended up getting the Grade 12 award.” Those who performed well and excelled in the academic and character-based expectations of the school seemed to be

awarded according to several participants. Most poignantly, without asking the participant to connect the practices of the school with the potential reinforcement of student fears, a participant spoke to the school having awards ceremonies each year where some students are celebrated because of their academic success or the way they "embodie[d]...virtuousness and compassion" as foundational goals of the school. However, this participant questioned, "we do [the award ceremony] communally, like we have those award ceremonies...but we don't maybe spend as much time of going okay, for the students that aren't there celebrating, how do we just make sure they're okay?" This question remained unanswered by the end of the interview but suggested that those who may not have met the expectations of the school may not get the same level of positive reinforcement, especially publicly, as those who did.

5.3.2. Teachers see expectations as connected to students' fears, but also the potential for change.

Common through five of the participant responses was the teachers situating student fears as connected to the expectations that the students experience. As one participant summarized, the roots of students' fears of failure from their perspective "could be family dynamics, it could be all sorts of things with individual students but...the common denominator is that...fear of not meeting expectations, however, and whatever criteria you use to define that." For another teacher participant students' fears of failure were so closely intertwined with expectations that they saw "fear of failure" and "fearing failing to meet...expectation" as "the same." Further expanding on this relationship, this same participant situated the failure that students feared as not based on numerically not passing the course, but instead mentioned several students where "in their minds, dropping three or four percent [was seen as] a massive failure. So, it's all relative to what your expectations are." Other participants did not always use the word expectations directly, but instead spoke of student fears of if their work is "going to be good enough" or would be "what their peers—or what they think...I [the teacher] want[s] to hear." The ideas from this participant still point to a measuring of what others or the students themselves expect in comparison to what the student does as one component of student fears. Students' fears then, especially of failure, seemed to be interrelated from these participants' perspectives with students' expectations and students' encounters with the expectations of others.

Rather than viewing students' fears and the expectations that students encountered as a fixed relationship though, five of the nine teacher participants discussed that they could try to lessen student fears in how they conveyed expectations. Namely, participants recognized that the level of transparent communication of expectations that teachers used could impact student fears. For one participant, the role of the teacher amid addressing students' fears was to convey "clear expectations of learning outcomes" because "a lot of fear comes from the unknown" for students. Another teacher echoed very similar ideas and stated "I give...students very clear, or as clear as I can goals of success and what I'm looking for" because "part of the fear is not knowing what...the expectations are." This clarity surrounding what teachers were expecting of their students in these participants' experiences could counter the fears students had because the clarity countered the underlying fear students had of ambiguity. A teacher was so confident in the fear that a lack of clarity could create that they stated directly, "I know they're scared of the unknown." Another participant recounted that when one student they were working with was given a step-by-step plan for an assessment, the teacher noted that this clarity "completed unparalyzed" the student because "all he needed was, 'what do I do...what's the next step?" In this situation, the transparency of expectations for this assessment extended into clarity for the student in how to reach these teacher expectations for the assessment and reduced the effects of fear. As another participant reflected on their teaching experience, they concluded "maybe a lot of these fears can be alleviated...if we just communicated properly beforehand. 'This is what's expected...this is how much time you will have for it." The transparency in what the teacher was looking for and the parameters of when an assessment would need to be handed in, could provide clarity of expectations for not just what students were required to do, but also the process in getting there. For these participants, this clarity had the potential to reduce student fears.

However, not all expectations that teacher participants saw students face were in line with the experience teachers hoped their students would have. Instead, some teachers took it upon themselves to push back against some types of expectations for students, especially grades, as a means to try to shift the weight of these expectations and their potential to create fear. As one example of this, one participant noted the tension grade expectations had created for some of their students, in a student "crying and asking, 'why did I not get a high enough mark?" or students worrying "how...their parents [were] going to react to a specific grade or even their parents...coming in for

parent-teacher and [asking] ‘how can [the] low A be better?” The grades that seemed to carry such weight in the students' self-expectations and the expectations of the student’s parents though were viewed by this same participant as having a level of arbitrariness that necessitated lessening the importance of grade expectations for students. This tension was encapsulated in a participant stating, “it’s also hard...in education...how is their best compared to any educator? You know because...we are measuring to what we think it should be, when they’re all different individuals. So that’s hard as well.” Another participant critiqued the use of percentages due to their difficulty justifying the smallest of variations that would result in these grades. This participant stated, “it’s really, really, really difficult to explain a 1 and 2% margin...it comes down to...a degree of subjectivity of the marker.” In the words “difficult” and “hard,” the tension of these teachers regarding grading was evident. Another participant also noted a level of tension surrounding the standards of grading, as “marks and grades, it’s a label. At some point you’ve got to label their work,” but this at times conflicted with the amount of effort students put in. They recounted students who had come to them saying “but I tried really hard!”, and them as the teacher having to respond, “but unfortunately, I don’t give you a grade by how hard you’ve tried.” The language of “unfortunately” paralleled another participant who recounted apologizing to a student for their grade and remembered saying “I’m sorry that you’re stuck in the C+’s” because of the potential weight this grade could have for the student’s confidence. In both situations' participants recounted that they carried a level of tension knowing the expectations some students had for themselves and others had for them to get a specific grade; these teachers saw grades as burdensome in the expectations wrapped up in them, both for themselves and their students.

In an attempt to push back against this weight of grading and the expectations surrounding this that students face, two participants commented on the way the expectations of grades and moving through school at a specific, pre-determined pace did not mirror life outside of a school setting. One participant recounted having a class conversation with their students saying:

> I tell students how—the...rubric for [the subject] is far too narrow...it has so little to do with life, it has nothing to do with character. It has nothing to do with personality, it has nothing to do with the joy that a student brings...It has nothing to do with, with real life. It’s artificial in many respects. And yet we use it all the time, and we put so much weight on the rubric and the marks and the feedback. And, it is, it is important...but it’s not important...It does matter and yet it doesn’t matter.

This teacher, in highlighting to their students the limitations of grading, was in a small way pushing back against the expectations that were often put on students to achieve high grades. Another teacher participant also critiqued the inflexibility of the school system's expectation for students to graduate having all followed the same pathway. This participant emphasized, "there's many different ways to achieve your goals is really the bottom line" and they wanted their students to know that "the timeline is very arbitrary." Together, these teacher participants seemed to in small ways be pushing against the expectations students faced that could cultivate fear, especially around achievement-based outcomes. Instead, these teachers pointed to the need for these systems to be seen as fallible and limited, and the desire for students to see themselves as so much more than these systems of expectations could reflect.

5.4. Theme 4: Teachers focus on shifting students' perspectives rather than just addressing any one situation in relation to students' fears

Common across all teacher participants was the context of teachers wanting to equip students to be able to have the perspective they needed to face their fears in their future lives beyond any one situation. As one participant noted in an experience with one student, the student tended to focus on the specifics of an individual situation, "she's talking about this one thing." However, in response, this teacher shifted the conversation with this student to seeing overcoming fear as "a life skill you are going to need for your life in your future. This is not about this assignment. This is not about answering this question. This is about your life." Another participant echoed this same sentiment of focusing on students' long-term capacity to face difficult situations in saying, "if...they get a result, but they don't have any life skills to help them...I feel like we're failing in our job a bit." As such, teacher participants focused on a shifting of students' perspectives on fears and fears of failure so that they had a mindset that could last beyond a single situation.

5.4.1. Teachers normalizing fears and the potential for failures

Instead of taking the perspective of students' fears and failures as something stigmatized and separate from teachers' own experiences with fear and failure, all but one of the teacher participants conveyed a perspective of normalizing students' fears and failures by situating these experiences as something that teachers could relate to. Several teacher participants engaged in this normalization of fears of failure in their conversations with me in recalling their own fears that they had walked through.

Furthermore, in response to one of the vignettes where the student was afraid of everyone knowing about their failure, a participant responded, “I have had similar situations both as a student and as a teacher.” Rather than seeing students' fears of failure as separate and distinct from what the teachers themselves had experienced, these participants seemed to indicate a closeness in seeing aspects of students' fears reflected in their own experiences. For one participant, when asked if there was anything that that came to mind regarding fear of failure that they had not commented on but wanted to share, the participant responded, “well, you’re only looking at students fear of failure right?” This participant went on to explain that in their perspective “teacher fear of failure is a whole other exciting topic” because these fears were “related” to one another. Again, students’ fears were normalized by this teacher in also pointing to the prevalence of teachers’ experiences of fear and holding both student and teacher fears together. Another participant even recounted having begun to share their fears with their students, as they were “trying to show [their students] that [they] c[ould] actually empathize with [the students].” This posture of holding students’ experiences with fear and failure as something to be viewed with compassion was embedded in many of the participant responses. Other teachers recounted “see[ing] students going through similar experiences” to what they had and “empathiz[ing] with” student fears or “relating” to student fears. These teacher participants seemed to cultivate a perspective of viewing student fears as a normal experience that required teacher empathy because teachers also experienced fear.

Carrying a similar perspective of normalizing fears of failure, several teacher participants attributed the commonality of students’ fears with fears they had also experienced to a shared human nature between students and teachers. Most directly on this point, one participant stated, “our common humanity means that probably if they’re [as students] feeling a fear of failure and we’re feeling a fear of failure, they’re probably linked.” Another participant similarly stated:

> Student fear is no different from any other kind of fear. It’s just fear right? It’s...humanity right?...Students are...humans, they’re...just us smaller in the classroom. And so, all the things that...we, the rest of us, myself go through and how it manifests itself is...how it is when it comes to students.

Here, the participant normalized student fears by positioning them as part of the human experience rather than anything that situated the student as othered. In addition to the experience of fear as something shared between teachers and students because of being people, the tendency also to remain silent about fears was also identified by

another participant as a point of commonality. As they concluded, “part of it I think...comes down to our human nature to not want to reveal our own...fears, insecurities, because that leaves you to be vulnerable.” At other points, participants also shifted in their discussion of students seamlessly to their discussion of people in general, indicating a high level of shared experience between the two. At points, this shared experience was so strong that there was little differentiation between student experiences and the experiences of people in general. As one participant concluded, “successful people can have the fear and they experience it, and they still push through anyways...the best students will often do it.” Here, the participant connected both the generalized experience of fear across the broader population and students’ responses to fear. Fear also had the potential to eat away at a person’s self-esteem, which was not something a teacher concluded was unique to students but instead was seen as “a common fear in not only students but also in humans.” In these participants' discussion of students’ fears, they paralleled students' fears with the fears they and people in general encountered, leading to a perspective of normalizing fear as a fundamental part of being human.

All but one of the teacher participants also voiced a desire to help students to see failure as a normal part of learning. As mentioned above, several teacher participants saw themselves as having failed in the past, and coming to view this failure as something that is necessary for growth. As one participant recounted talking with their class, “sometimes we share things about the failures in our lives...and I think the more open we are and here’s how we grew from that, or here’s how it all turned out okay anyway, it can give students hope” because “we all make mistakes.” As another participant stated, one of their goals was to “normalize that...struggle” involved in the learning process. Again, rather than situating failure as something that needed to be feared because of it being a sign of something wrong, these teachers positioned failure as common in the process of learning. Not only was failure situated as normalized, but it could also even take on a positive quality, as one participant summarized, “failure is a natural part of the learning process, and it doesn’t define your intelligence or worth as a person. It’s through these moments that we grow, learn valuable lessons and develop resilience.” This perspective of trying to help students come to see failure as not needing to be feared but instead as a catalyst for personal development was frequently reinforced by teacher participants. Another participant, in recounting a student who had numerically failed a course, looked back on this failure for the student as “benefit[ing]

them to fail" from the perspective of allowing the student to "build a stronger foundation" in the subject area before moving on. For this participant, failure could allow the student an opportunity to re-learn aspects of their knowledge of the course that they otherwise may not have had the time and support to do. This normalization of failure for students in building their skills within the classroom also translated for two participants into specific ways that they adjusted their teaching practices. For a participant they frequently used whiteboards and encouraged students not to "erase their mistakes" so they could "get comfortable enough to leave them up" because "it's all part of the learning." This normalization of failure also shifted into trying to educate parents in the same mindset, as one participant commented, "I try to find ways with the student to reinforce to the parents...that failure is a necessary part of learning." For these participants, failure, rather than situated as something to be feared, was something to hold in the perspective of being something that students would encounter and could even be seen as a catalyst for growth.

However, one teacher participant cautioned the tendency for teachers to see themselves in their students and to overly-empathize with what students were experiencing. In this case, they highlighted that:

> One of the greatest skills as a teacher is to listen. There may be a point where the teacher does tell their personal story, but in this situation, it may be more important to listen and unpack the reasons for the students' feelings.

Held together, while teachers empathized with students' fears and fears of failure, and held the perspective of normalizing the experience of fear, how much they voiced their own experiences to the students in specific moments over taking a posture of just listening to the student's experiences was not always consistent across participants.

5.4.2. Teachers try to shift students' perspective on failure to have a flexible view of themselves as learners

Six of the nine teacher participants pointed to some aspect of students' perspectives on failure as impacting the level of fear students experienced and their desire as teachers to shift these students' perspectives. Teacher participants largely saw their students defining failure not by a specific predictable number. Rather they observed students using their own individual definitions of what it meant to fail that sometimes defied evidence to the contrary and amplified fears. As such, several participants made the distinction between a student "genuinely...failing," as in the academic outcomes

reflecting that they had not demonstrated an understanding of the subject matter, and a student who was afraid that they had failed “but in reality, they’re just fine.” In the second situation, teachers positioned failure being an internal feeling for the student that was not reflected in their academic outcomes. As one participant summarized, students “might be seeing something I [the teacher] wouldn’t consider to be catastrophic or a failure,” pointing to failure having the potential to be an amplified experience for students due to how they interpreted these situations. Together, these participants pointed to the students having their own perspective on failure that may differ from the teachers, and that it could be the definition of this failure for students that was one component of their heightened fears.

This student perspective on failure may include, in some participant’s experiences, students taking on failure as something that defined who they were despite this not reflecting the teacher’s view of the student. As one participant recounted, a student “a few weeks ago…said, ‘I am a failure.’ Not, ‘I’m...worried that I might fail,’ but ‘I am a failure.’ And when I tried to unpack that with them, it...was a self-image problem” where the student saw failure as “somehow inherent to who they were as a person.” The teacher observed this student’s amplification of fear of failing to the point of holding of failure as a part of how the student saw themselves because they could see no alternative to failing. Rather than failure being something that a student could work through, teachers also reported encountering students who saw failure as something they could not overcome or something that was a “state of failure” that would stick with them beyond a singular experience. This student perspective on the permanence of failure was further reflected in the same participant’s explanation later stating, “I don’t think they think in terms of I failed this assignment. I think that students view themselves as not enough, and I’m using not good enough instead of failure there, I think it’s the same thing.” Students’ perspectives on failure were also deeply personal from teacher participants’ experiences, as each student could come to their class with their own history with failure. As a teacher concluded, some students “have a track record...of failing the situation,” which could lead them to think “well, every class I’ve always...gotten a C-...or C’s every time I do it, I’m not...I suck.” Again, here the participant spoke to a student taking on failure as a part of who they were rather than viewing failure as a singular outcome. However, this perspective that this teacher observed in some of their students contrasted the teacher’s perspective where they observed the student’s work and could affirm their ability to do the task in front of them. That being said, this centrality

of failure to students' perspectives, in several teacher participants' experiences, was not something that was unchangeable.

Within teachers encountering some students who they felt saw failure as a fixed part of who they were, which only served to amplify student fears, teachers wanted to help students change their self-perspective. As one teacher participant advocated, students "need…to realize it does not have such a defining power of their self-worth, or at least it doesn't need to." As summarized by another teacher participant, academic performance, including failure, did not need to equate with students' perspectives on their identity. Instead, this participant wanted to "try to help the students see themselves as more than a mark" because they felt "as though [students]...see the mark is...on them as a person" and that students "take [these assessments] quite personally." This desire for students to see who they are as defined not by their academic performance or their failures was reflected in these participants advocating a shift in students' perspectives. Part of this perspective shift was for students to see outcomes as separate from how students saw themselves. One teacher also recounted trying to help students to shift their perspective by asking students to examine the reasoning behind their connections between performance outcomes and who they were. This participant recounted asking a student the question "why do you feel that you are a failure if you don't do this?" These attempts by teachers to shift their students' perspectives could actually result in tangible change for students. One teacher participant told the story of a student who the teacher encouraged repeatedly to "focus on their skill development and trust their instincts." This student later told the teacher, "thank you [teacher name], that my marks don't...create my identity." In short, these teachers advocated for a shift in students' perspectives from holding failure and academic outcomes as part of how a student viewed themselves to something that was separate from their worth as a person.

In the face of teachers encountering students with a fixed and often destructive perspective on failure and fear that brought down the student's view of themselves, teacher participants also sought to encourage students as another avenue to shift student perspectives. As one teacher participant stated, they sought to "advocat[e]...first of all, that [the students] believe in themselves." Teachers wanted to help students change how they viewed themselves beyond just giving students superficial encouragement though. For one teacher, a student had come to them afraid of failing in terms of not getting into a university and in this moment the teacher wanted to help this student realize their strengths and distinct experiences that qualified the student for their

future regardless of grade outcomes. This participant summarized their conversation with the student, saying that:

> [Students] think that because they feel fearful that that means they don't have it. That means that they can't make it...I said, 'Look at the thing that you did over there.' I said...'you are the only one that had the creativity, the ingenuity, the mindset, the forethought, and so forth to do that.

Ultimately, the student had gotten to the point of agreeing with the teacher's perspective. The teacher participant recounted, "when I said that to her, she was like, 'dang, that's-that's true.'...So we're taking the uniqueness of their circumstances, showing them that they have a set of unique circumstances...that it's worth...trying." As seen in this instance, several teacher participants recounted trying to highlight helping students to see their individuality and strengths, and shifting their view of any potential failures as not something to be feared or taken as a permanent fixture of who they were. In cultivating this perspective with students, any failures then became an indicator of something to "work on" and get "help with" where students could view failure through the lens that one failure "does not mean [this] is going to affect you for life." As such, these teachers sought to introduce a malleability into how students viewed both failure and themselves as student, in order to lessen the potential for fear of failing to distort students' narratives of themselves.

Rather than focusing on a perspective that emphasized academic performance, teachers also wanted to learn about students' goals and to help students become flexible in shifting their goals when needed to lessen the potential for fear. While several participants identified their students as grade motivated, several teachers wanted their students instead to focus on the effort they put in to learning. As one teacher participant identified in many of their students, "they are attaching their view of success to numbers or marks instead of...a 'do your best' attitude" and as a result the teacher had "been talking to a lot of [their] students about their view of success. And their view of...what would be considered failing...and trying to get them to change their mind." Several teacher participants also recounted talking with students about what the students hoped for after high school. This same participant also engaged in some conversations with students, particularly with those the teacher had a strong relationship with, that tried to help students evaluate the realism of a student's goals. This re-evaluation of students' perspectives for several teacher participants included questioning the need for everyone to go to university and offering the perspective that the students' goals after high school could be reached through multiple avenues. As one participant summarized, "almost

always I'm having that conversation as well...about what are the goals that we're setting? I would love for students to set goals about what they can learn in a class...rather than what they can achieve...and let the achievement fall where it does." For these participants, this shift to focusing on controllable factors for students rather than goals like marks or university admissions that could be unpredictable, included focusing on overcoming failures in the bigger context of a student's life. The rationale behind teacher participants wanting this shift in how students saw goals was to allow for students to not have so much fear surrounding failing to meet these outcomes.

All nine of the teacher participants conveyed also wanting to help students adopt a wider perspective on their learning. As stated by one participant, they "tr[ied] to shift the student's perspective away from a certain assessment outcome, and onto a broader perspective of life and learning" because it "helps bring clarity and calmness to circumstances that can be overwhelming." The wider-lens perspective could also, in one participant's explanation, help students to see that while "there are some assessments (e.g. high stakes tests or final exams) where the outcome may actually impact university admissions...often the students' concerns are unfounded—the assessment just isn't that important." In short, that teachers viewed the weight associated with performance outcomes as often less weighty and needed to be feared than the perspective they saw in their students. This lessened need for a fear of performance for some teachers came there being so many other facets of life that mattered more so. Another participant commented that this wider perspective on what constituted success and failure may have been a result of their age and life experiences:

> For me, being so old, university is this little speck in the distance…[as if talking to a student] and I understand why you find these things important now and you think your life's going to be over if this doesn't happen...but from the other end, I can tell you it doesn't really matter. And I try and tell them that I failed courses and I'm still breathing, you know?

In this way, teachers shared their broader life experience as a way to help shift students' focus toward long-term learning rather than fixating on individual failures. This diminishing of the importance of singular assessments and university entrance was replaced by several teacher participants with the perspective of students having the skills they need to cope with life after high school. As one participant summarized, "high school teachers are not just presenting curriculum...we're teaching them how to think and we're teaching them how to be human beings" and that "my goal is...for them to be the best human beings that they can be." Teacher participants favoured students having

a perspective that focused on building a strong moral character, on helping and empathizing with others, on thinking for themselves, on transferring their learning to real-life situations, and on gaining an in-depth understanding of material over focusing on failures.

5.4.3. Teachers can be mirrors of perspectives they want students to have

Apparent in all teacher participants responses at some level was the teachers adopting a perspective of a growth on behalf of their students and reflecting this perspective of growth back to the students they interacted with. Rather than seeing a student not demonstrating their learning on a past assessment as a sign that they would perpetually be unable to do so, or perpetually need to fear failure, one teacher participant instead focused on “reassurance [for the student]...that this assessment in not the same experience as previous assessments.” The teacher also took this focus on growth one step further by “encourag[ing] [the student] to consider the possibility that they have learned and will do better on this assessment than they have previously done.” Adopting a perspective of future growth by this teacher for their students took on the meaning that teachers continually needed to be open to seeing their students’ capacity to change and for students’ to also see this capacity in themselves. Another participant recounted the story of several students who came up to this teacher and said, “they were not good at” the subject they taught and that “didn’t have ‘[subject] brains” because they were “scared” of the subject matter. However, for the teacher, students' mistakes and failures became instead a way to reflect to students their ability to learn from these moments. As another teacher participant recounted saying to a student who felt that they had made an unrecoverable mistake, “I told them, I said, what a fantastic error you made here, because you will never make this again” and that “there was an acceptance that [doing an academic task] that didn’t get the mark was okay because next week we’re going to have another one.” Here, the teacher participant reflected to the student the importance of encountering moments of failure in order to deepen their learning. These teacher participants held the perspective for their students that the students were capable of great growth in their learning, even in moments when the students did not initially seem to hold this same perspective.

Teachers reflecting to students the potential for growth went beyond teachers wanting to see growth in students’ academic outcomes. Other participants also focused on students developing their confidence, in students coming to see their own growth in

their skills throughout the time that they were in class. For one participant this was such a focus that they “always start[ed] [their] classes with the importance of growth from the beginning of the semester until the end” because “when a student sees how much they have grown, their self-esteem grows and they are able to take that characteristic into the outside world.” This focus on growing students’ confidence in their own abilities paralleled another participant who recounted trying to make their course “less intimidating” to “reduce fear” so that “students can suddenly go, ‘O, I can do this, and then they can have hope.” These teachers intentionally made an effort to reflect to students their capability to grow in their trust of themselves and their skillsets. The ability for students to see their own capability also included teachers talking with students about the experiences that the students had walked through. With one student who was afraid of not getting into university, one participant recalled saying to this student “the first thing that you need to do is shift your mindset...[from] ‘I can’t’ to ‘I can.’ And then from ‘I can, it’s like okay,’ then ‘I will’ ‘I must.” In this moment, the participant reflected the student’s capacity to change their perspective about themselves and modelled how this shift could occur by identifying the various stages of fear the student may be feeling. This same participant also commented on the responsibility they felt to model this perspective as someone who “feel[s] the fear and do[es] it anyways...I have too many examples of that and I want to be an example to that. I have to be an example of that.” These teacher participants took on the responsibility of mirroring back to students a perspective that the students could grow in their capabilities and confidence in order to lessen student’s fears.

Especially for students who were chronically failing or fearful, teachers emphasized the need to positively-reinforce students and to model an affirming perspective that students may not readily extend themselves. For one student that had frequently failed assessments, one teacher recounted working with the student after school and then being able to see them respond “Actually? I passed? Actually? I did good?” and to be able to reaffirm then saying, “yeah, you did well!” Another teacher recounted “three students” who they “had to especially talk to these students saying, ‘you are a good writer. It doesn’t need to be perfect...trust your instincts” to try to counteract these students’ fears of inadequacy. Other teachers commented on their intentional structure of learning tasks so that students could feel some level of competency and affirmation, and that this could lessen student fears, including fears of failure. For one teacher, this positive reinforcement could extend outside of the

classroom into extra-curricular activities where students may be able to find different avenues of success that they could carry with them. In short, one teacher summarized that they were “always on the inspiration train” for their students because they too had overcome struggles and knew the importance of an affirming perspective to counter these challenges. As another teacher explained, the students they had worked with who were afraid of failing or afraid in general, “need[ed] encouragement more than reality” because “almost every time, rarely are they on track with an accurate assessment of their abilities.” While holding students as capable and wanting students to see this capability in themselves, these teacher participants sought to continually model this perspective in the frequent affirmation of their students and to chip away at the students need to be afraid.

In line with teachers’ attempts to shift students' perspectives to include the possibility for growth in their skills and their self-perception, the teachers interviewed viewed students as more than just a series of outcomes and wanted students to see this in themselves. For one teacher participant it was a practice to repeatedly verbally remind students in their class as a whole, “remember you are not your grade.” Another teacher recounted “see[ing] some students” and “say[ing], ‘I’d like to teach you again next year” in order to “let them know that I enjoyed them as a person...and that’s irrelevant in terms of marks.” Both of these teachers continually reinforced for these students the perspective that their worth as people was inherent and did not come from their performance. In reflecting on their own teaching practice, a teacher reinforced the importance of using encouragement as an opportunity for teachers to affirm who a student was rather than academic outcomes. As this participant reflected, “I’m an encourager. I love to encourage people where I should back off a bit and focus on who they are and say ‘you...light up the room with your personality’ ...instead of focusing on your [skills are] great, which is much more narrow” to help students see that “the teacher’s care and kindness doesn’t waver based on their performance.” This same participant saw this practice as something that would “reduce some of the fear that students have in terms of...knowing that the teacher’s going to like me anyway.” Teachers emphasized repeatedly their desire for students to take on the perspective that they were seen and supported as they were, without the need to obtain any specific academic standing. It was students having this perspective of security in who they were and the relationships around them, that these participants situated as having the potential to lessen student fears. As summarized by another participant in response to a

vignette of a student who was afraid of failure, “I would seek to assure them that their success or failure, or perceived failure, doesn’t really impact how I view them as a person.” These teachers reflected to students their core worth as a person outside of academic outcomes and sought to have students take on this same perspective to lessen students’ fears, including their fears of failure.

Six of the nine teacher participants also voiced the view of students as capable and wanted students to see themselves as capable as well. For one student that a teacher participant knew was going through home challenges, in addition to struggling to complete academic tasks in school, they recounted talking with the student and saying, “I know what you’re going through...but this doesn’t need to make you. And you are able—you can pull yourself out of this.” Another participant worked with a student who frequently asked for help, which the teacher participant attributed to the student’s fear of making a mistake. In describing this student, the teacher reinforced that the student “was actually quite capable of getting through the question on her own.” This teacher also tried to teach this student to be “a little more independent” by encouraging the student to first ask others before asking the teacher for support. Together, these participants situated students as having the capacity to overcome the circumstances that they found themselves in and to also problem solve. This view of students as capable could also include trying to help students to find the healthy limit for pushing through their fears. As one teacher participant emphasized, “sometimes we cripple students by just saying take the easy way out and don’t actually go through something that could potentially be safe...even though it’s hard” and that “we can’t just remove them from everything that’s fearful.” This same sentiment of viewing students as able to work through emotionally difficult situations was further affirmed by another participant. Held together, students were viewed by these teachers as capable in handling difficult situations both at home and at school, which meant that students could overcome more than they may have given themselves credit for, including their fears.

Stemming from this place of capability, several teacher participants also emphasized the need for the students they worked with to develop the ability to self-advocate and to see themselves as part of the solution. As summarized by one participant: “the onus is on them to learn. The onus is on them to do the work of learning.” Rather than positioning the teacher as the central figure, this participant advocated students coming to hold the perspective of seeing their own responsibility and capability. Another participant affirmed, that when needed, students could seek out help

from “the learning support department [which] is available until 4:00 every day” or that “they can self-advocate” for further support “which is another good skill.” In saying this, the teacher participants situated these students as having agency in their learning and as capable of voicing their needs. This responsibility on the students in terms of them taking on a leadership role in their learning was in the context of teachers remaining a “safety net,” and teachers continually affirming that the students had the skills they needed “in [them] already.” As such these teachers reflected to students the perspective of students as capable in their learning, including to access outside resources when they needed support, while remaining willing to help when students needed them to do so.

Three participants though pointed to the tension in viewing students as capable of meeting the tasks and circumstances in front of them, including the students’ fears. The tension that could arise were situations where “maybe, sadly we’ve pushed students through to do assignments or presentations when they haven’t felt comfortable.” Adding complexity to this situation, this same teacher identified that in their teaching experience, “most of the time when students are failing...they don’t have the self-advocacy skills.” Leaning on students’ ability to voice what support they wanted and when they were afraid, could overlook the students who have not developed the necessary skills to do so yet. Furthermore, teachers voiced that student capability did not make them invincible or immune to struggle or fear. Teachers then strove to balance reflecting to students that they were both highly capable, but also could still “have needs.” Another participant also articulated the need for teachers to also remain mirrors for students in ensuring that they as teachers themselves were continuing to work through their own fears. This modelling of seeing the potential growth in students in the face of fear, for this participant, looked like teachers taking on their own fears and growing through them. As this participant stated:

> This is a little bit sticky, but to what extent are teachers themselves continually facing fear?...when you come back in the fall, where will you be able to tell the kids, two, three four, five, six times that you intentionally had to face fear? And had to deal with [it]?...Because if you’re doing that then you’ll be able to relate...you will have an understanding...and you’ll be able to from the inside out, be able to connect with the kids on that.

In sharing this goal for teachers themselves to take on their fears, this teacher participant extended participants’ mirroring of a perspective of growth, security in identity, confidence, and capability that they wanted their students to also adopt.

5.5. Theme 5: More than a teaching practice- Teachers want to facilitate student's emotional well-being through their dedication to walking with students as they navigate through fear

Rather than teachers addressing students' fears of failure with a specific practice in a specific moment, teachers often spoke to taking on bigger dispositions of care that guided their interactions and support of students, especially as the students navigated big emotions like fear. This care and support of students was so central to one teacher's philosophy of teaching that when asked if there was a teaching practice that combatted student fears, they responded saying "I think that teacher practices, I think [teacher] kindness and... care transcends that."

5.5.1. Teachers are dedicated collaborator with students

All teachers in some manner closed the gap between student and teacher, by viewing their role as a trust-based collaborator with students rather than an expert on students' experiences. Instead, teacher participants discussed taking on a posture of listening to the student, especially amidst students' feelings of fear, so much so that one participant articulated that "the crucial element is that [the student] feel listened to and supported." Without students feeling heard and if "the teacher doesn't listen," in this same participant's words, a teacher may unintentionally "reinforce [the student's] feelings of low self-esteem." For one participant this listening to students was not just something that occurred on an individual scale in conversations one-on-one with students, but was also a part of the teacher's interactions with their entire class, as at the beginning of the year they made it routine to "start by [asking] 'what do you need from me?" In giving students the space to articulate their experiences and needs, these participants situated themselves as equal to students rather than above them in terms of power. Four teacher participants further reinforced their positionality as walking beside students. As one participant stated, in supporting students in their fears and fears of failure teachers needed "come alongside [students]...to help guide them." This togetherness with students was not just evident in teacher participants' summaries of what they hoped to do in working with students who were afraid, but also in talking about moments in class when they did not differentiate between student and teacher. Some teacher participants took on the role of collaborator so far that they involved themselves as teachers in the actions of the classroom making statements like, "there's times we need to...reflect on who we are as people...instead of having the mark as telling us

whether we did well or not." Evident in this statement is the teacher taking on a disposition of collaborative actions of "we" rather than separating the student from the teacher.

All teacher participants, both in their hopes and actions, expressed a dedication to support and a deep care that they held towards their students, including in moments of fear. As one participant recalled saying to a student, "I'm with you. I see you. I got you. If you need me, I'm here." However, this expression of emotional support was not just something teacher participants talked about. Instead, they mentioned specific examples where they had intentionally walked over to students to check how they were doing with a task, where they stayed at the end of the day to support students who needed extra help, where they met with students one-on-one during class time to talk about their progress, or where they submitted referrals to the school counselling team so that the student could get counselling support through the school. As one teacher recalled, one student "came after school [even] when he wasn't in my class...and he would work so hard" in order to complete his coursework. Amidst this student's efforts the teacher also tried to be "available [to] help [the student]" because "sometimes he needed...help to see how to do it." This teacher was willing to and followed through on walking this student through examples of questions in their subject area, despite no longer being this student's direct teacher, because the student needed extra support. For some, this desire to support students was the main reason they became an educator to being with, as one participant reflected "what drew me in to this, and I think...there's a lot of teachers here that seem to be here because they do care about the kids and seeing them grow and develop and learn in all sorts of different discipline areas." Taking on this disposition of a dedicated caring for students was the primary response these teachers had towards students as they navigated their fears and general experience of high school.

In their dedication to supporting students, several teacher participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of trust that facilitated students confiding in them and learning in the midst of their fears. One participant emphasized the need for a trust-filled partnership between the student and teacher, where they "work really hard to be a good teacher so that [students] will be [able] to trust" them in the moments of conversation to share their fears. This sense of responsibility to earn the trust of their students and the recognition of the emotional vulnerability involved in the learning process was also

reflected in teachers' descriptions of students engaging in their work in class. As a participant stated:

> It involves massive trust for a student to [do academic tasks] for me. They [do the task for] an hour and a bit and they give me some very personal stuff. I don't mean personal by personal details. I mean that what a person [does] I see that as massively personal. And I try to tell my students that they have to trust me.

Rather than placing the responsibility on students to cultivate this trust, another participant affirmed the responsibility of the teacher to dedicate themselves to building this trust. As one participant articulated, it "is an intentionality on the part of the teacher...that they're doing more than just teaching…they're building people." By cultivating a trust with students that helped teachers be able to truly see students and support them, including amidst their fears, these teachers reinforced their need to be dedicated to students learning both inside and outside of the classroom.

Despite teachers' desire to support students though, six of the nine teachers articulated facing limitations in supporting student needs, which included student fears. This persistence of teachers to support students amidst limitations further grounded their dedication to students' emotional well-being. These teachers were very aware that there were "finite resources," which was one reason that teachers relied on students "self-advocating" for their needs. The most mentioned resource that teachers felt was the limited was the amount of time they had, both to work with students and to refine their curriculum or pedagogical practices so these practices could be more sensitive to students' fears. One teacher felt that frequent student low-stakes quizzes would be a helpful practice to help students be less afraid of failing larger assessments. However, this same participant did not feel that they had the time to build these quizzes. Another teacher's way of maximizing the connection points with their students amidst this time limitation was to have "very short interviews with students about their assessment, how they felt about it" during the "first week of the course." However, even in this strategy, the lack of time in contrast to the desire to talk with each student was an evident tension point in the need for "short" interviews. Another teacher noted the potential of teaching students individually more often to ensure students had the chance to voice their fears. However, this participant quickly concluded that "that's not realistic" because "when you have six classes and 25 students each, you're like, can you do that for everybody?" This same teacher participant compared teaching in some moments to "triage," as the attention of educators often needed to go to the students who were at-risk of not

completing the course rather than “the high achievers that are putting stress on themselves” because “it’s not as much of a dangerous situation.” In the limited time in an educator’s day, it seemed that several of the educators made the conscious decision to prioritize students with lower academic achievement levels than those who may be experiencing fears but with less of a direct impact on their academics. This perspective though was not due to these educators not wanting to support all students. Instead, it was largely because “in some places there is an overwhelming feeling that we can’t get all the needs” and because “if we continue to have huge class sizes...you know, it’s not manageable to...see every student.” Here, the teacher participant pointed to the tension they felt of trying to support students amidst the constraints of having many students in the classroom at one time that needed the teacher’s help. Teachers’ desire to collaborate with students in hearing students’ needs and fears, even amidst these limitations, evidenced their dedication to the students as well as the tensions they faced in this daily work.

5.5.2. Teachers are places of safety for students in the emotions they have, including their fears

In talking with teacher participants, all could identify at least one student that they had worked with in the past year who had faced the emotional toll of being in high school. This noticing of students’ emotions by teachers spoke to their attunement to the emotional needs of their students and their desire to be responsive, sensitive, places of safety for students amidst the fears students walked through. Teacher participants noted the tears their students shed for grades and the “frustration” or “distress” students experienced, especially regarding making mistakes. Teacher participants also recounted students who had experienced significant pressure to obtain high level academic outcomes and please their peers. Additionally, teacher participants commented on their students navigating intense anxiety, worry, stress, and encountering frequent moments of overwhelm or even “guilt.” One teacher also recalled a student in particular who had incredibly low self-esteem to the point that this student “c[ouldn’t] even put their shoulders back [or] their head up.” Another recounted a student who had both “a lot of anxiety” and “a fear of failure” that compounded together to create a world of emotional turmoil for this student. The heightened emotions that these students navigated were at the forefront of teacher participants’ stories. In noting these emotional responses, it was clear that these teachers cared about their student’s emotional well-being.

Amid these big student emotions, including fear, all teacher participants were actively willing to engage with students' emotions and expressed not shying away from these conversations, while recognizing their professional boundaries. When a student was distraught a teacher participant chose to initiate action in "call[ing] them over" and reassuring the student in this moment. In addition, rather than sitting at their desk while students were working, this same participant made the intentional effort to go around to each student and ask them "how [they] [were] doing." The attention to students' emotional states was also reflected in other participants who recounted circulating during times when their class was working, and it was in these interactions that participants often recounted students opening-up about how they were feeling. As summarized by one participant, they prioritized being as "proactive...as [they] can to talk with students" rather than waiting for students, especially those who may be more hesitant to share, to initiate conversations about their experience in the classroom and what they needed. Another example of this intentional action included a participant sharing about a moment where they went "over to [a] student and they asked…a question and then [the student] started to cry and [the student] said, 'I just don't get it. I don't get it." The teacher went further though that just initiating the interaction with the student, as in the moments following the participant recalled recognizing that the student "was in distress" and responded by "g[iving] her some Kleenex" and talking with her. This same participant in other moments recalled "know[ing]" that some student's "fear [was]...already up" and responding "right away" with encouragement. These participants actively invited students sharing their emotional landscape, including their fears, through creating a space where student emotions were recognized and responded to.

Again, this pattern of teachers noticing student's emotions and entering these moments as a support to students was evident in many of the teacher participants' responses. Sometimes these interactions were also student initiated, however, even still, teacher participants took a posture of openness in welcoming conversations about students' fears. This welcoming of conversations about fears for one participant seemed to be a common occurrence, as they recounted that "every time the grade 12's…come and say, '[teacher name], will you help me?...I'm so scared" and proceeded to then detail the conversations that this teacher had with their students. Another participant echoed the frequent conversations that they had with students about the students' emotions as they stated, "I have many conversations with students about their fear of failure...and have for many years." This same teacher participant also recounted engaging in

conversations with students directly about what to do with fear, in “talk[ing]...about how do we manage our fear...how do we take risks even when we’re afraid?” As a whole, teacher participants articulated a willingness to discuss students’ fears and emotions. At several points, they even conveyed their attempts to provide opportunities for students to share how they were doing in making sure to talk with students throughout a class. In this way, these teachers sought to facilitate students’ emotional well-being amidst student fears.

Ensuring that students could talk with teachers about their emotions was only one part of teachers situating students’ emotional safety as “foundational” to students’ learning. Creating a classroom environment that was calming and safe for students was another avenue that teacher participants sought to support students in their fears. This emotional safety was viewed by one participant as central not only to learning, but also to the building of a student’s security in who they were. As this teacher concluded, “if you feel like...you’re loved and accepted no matter what...then it doesn’t matter what room you walk into. It doesn’t matter if the kids are accepting of you or not. Like none of that stuff matters” because each student has “got someone” who is there to support them. Another teacher echoed this same sentiment of the crucial role that teachers had in facilitating student emotional safety so that they could have the capacity to learn. This participant stated, “the environment...to me the biggest thing is that students feel that they are loved and accepted by the teacher” because that is the “foundation” and “then learning can take place a lot better.” Practical ways that teacher participants recalled trying to foster a feeling of comfort and emotional security in the classroom included teachers not sharing the students’ academic performance with others, and using music in their classroom particularly during assessments to create a sense of emotional calm. Teacher participants also ensured that practice questions aligned with assessment structures, encouraged students verbally to seek help when needed, reinforced the students’ agency to share what they felt comfortable to in class discussions, and gave more anecdotal feedback instead of attaching marks to everything. Teacher participants also recounted celebrating students when they improved no matter where they were starting from, interspersing tasks like colouring amidst intensely academic tasks, and providing stuffed animals that students could play with as a reprieve. These choices for one participant reflected “symbol[s] of a safe environment...where you can feel hugged and loved.” The sometimes-intangible feeling of safety within a classroom space that

was cultivated by the teacher, according to these teacher participants, could have a profound impact on students' focus on learning in contrast to their fears.

In addition to pro-actively seeking to create a classroom space that welcomed students as they were and that was a safe place of support, teachers also sought to support students to move through fear so that they did not perpetually remain in these fears. The strategies teacher participants reported using included teaching coping strategies to students like using manipulatives to provide some tangible energy output for their stress, helping students develop a process that was unique to the student's needs for approaching potentially more fear-filled situations like exams, and supporting students to plan out their time at home to avoid the piling up of school work. Teacher participants also recounted working with students to think through the worst-case scenarios that they may be afraid of in order to recontextualize the student's high level of capability to adapt and persist in challenges. In these moments several teachers also spoke to providing examples for students of people who had overcome their fears as a model that students could draw on for inspiration in these moments of fear. Together these supports, as summarized by one participant, could not only help to "let...the student know you are on their side and, as a teacher, [that] you will work with them to develop strategies to overcome" their fears, but could also "take some of the pressure off the student so they c[ould] achieve greater confidence" over time. By directly coaching students and working with them to develop plans for how to cope with their fears, teacher participants tried to build student capacity to handle these fears in future situations within the context of being safe places that students could trust. While these teachers did employ specific tools to facilitate students' well-being in contrast to their fears, these were rooted in teachers' broader disposition of dedication to their students

5.6. Theme 6: Although teachers can distinguish students' unique profiles as learners, conversations with students are essential to understanding their internal worlds

All the teacher participants in some way reflected an awareness of the individuality of the students they worked with, which they often correlated with the need to talk with the students rather than making assumptions about what students were feeling or what students needed in the midst of their fears. Of these participants, eight of the nine participants overtly recognized that students had a wide range of responses to learning opportunities. This individuality that participants identified included the individual

learning challenges that a student faced, a student's areas of strength and weakness in terms of subject matter, and the amount of time they need to complete a task. Other aspects of this student individuality was noted by participants in students' unique trajectory of growth over time, the behaviours students leaned on in moments of fear, the amount of interaction the student had with the teacher, the types of avoidance behaviours the students sometimes employed, and the types of fears that they experienced.

However, this focus on student individuality was not always immediately the case, as some teacher participants also generalized student experiences in their process of trying to understand what students' fears of failure could look like. As seen in one participant's statement that generalized the experiences of high school students in moments of fear, they recounted that "most adolescents would just take the easier road to say nothing or [not] hand the assignment in." Another participant also stated that "some students...don't want to talk" or "very often the student comes into the office, flops into the chair." In each of these participants discussions of students there was a level of generalization, in discussing "some students," "very often," and "most adolescents." However, even still there was a level of individuality recognized by these participants in other parts of their responses. One participant noted a student that they had worked with who struggled to bring the necessary materials to class and another spoke of a student that had come to the teacher and articulated that they felt that they were "a failure." Others did not generalize experiences to all students, but instead articulated patterns in student behaviour that they had seen within a class, as seen in one participant's response, "I've had...three students in my grade [number] class I've had to especially talk to" regarding these students' pursuit of perfectionism. This same teacher participant also noticed the pattern for "about five or six [students]" that they were often "worried and or anxious about opening th[e] page" of their graded assessment. Even within the moments when teachers generalized the behaviours they were noticing in students, this was done through the lens of seeing patterns in the behaviour rather than not wanting to seeing a student's individuality.

These patterns were identified by teachers through being observant of students' behaviours. In coming to recognize specific students who were afraid, including afraid of failing, one teacher participant advocated that "sometimes it's not that hard" to notice students who were afraid because "they say it" to the teacher directly. However, the majority of participants relied upon noticing and interpreting cues from each student that

pointed to their fears. The need to be observant then was not necessarily due to the subtlety of the signals that students were giving, as sometimes “they’re not small cues. Like people around them can see that they’re worried.” Instead, teacher participants' description of their process for identifying student fears highlighted their need to be observant in noticing a student’s individual behavioural patterns amidst these cues. Cues articulated by teacher participants included students crying, frequently asking for help, coming to the teacher for clarification of a concept only right before an assessment, a shift in the student’s disposition in class, a shift in a student’s tone of voice, and a student physically distancing themselves or gasping when receiving their assessments back. Further cues mentioned by teachers of students’ potential fears included a shift in a student’s facial expressions, a student’s hesitancy to answer questions, a student appearing like they were not making progress on a task or not handing in school work, a student “sit[ting] in the back of the room,” and chronic absenteeism. All these cues required teacher participants to not only notice students’ behaviours, but also be observant of trends in these behaviours for individual students. As one teacher participant identified, “I remember one student who was lovely until...we did reviews and they turned into [a] very rude and argumentative [student].” The teacher “noticed a common factor” and concluded that this student was “scared of failing her test...and she started blaming [the teacher] for things as well...I don’t think, like on a good day, she would genuinely blame me for it...that’s [just] how it came out.” In short, this teacher used their observation of the frequently harsh response of this one student around the time of assessments to cue the teacher to this student’s fears. This participant then had a conversation with the student where they agreed with what the teacher noticed. However, this conversation was only possible because the teacher had noted a pattern of the individual student’s fear-based responses over time.

Although the teacher participants identified a wide variety of patterns in student behaviours that could indicate students’ fears, teacher participants were aware that their perceptions may differ from students’ internal worlds, which added to the complexity of both identifying and addressing students’ fears. As one participant spoke about students leaving the classroom mid-lesson, they viewed this action as a potential sign of students’ fears, but also articulated that this behaviour “could be...they just want to see their friends in the hallway.” This same participant mentioned another student who they felt was “not enjoying class and...[was] fearful” but in “talking wither her parents...after a couple [of] months in” they recalled the parent saying “oh, no, she’s enjoying the class”

and realized that these cues were “actually just [the student’s] demeanour.” As another teacher participant concluded, the cues that they had noticed from students did not mean that they could always accurately identify what the student was feeling, as “you can’t know what’s going on in every single student’s mind and you don’t know what’s going on in every student’s life either. You’ve only got a little snapshot.” These teachers noted that the cues they observed in their students were not always reflective of the fear that the participants thought was present.

Additionally, several teacher participants identified that the failure that students were afraid of, differed from what teachers felt constituted failure. One teacher participant summarized that sometimes they and the students are “using two different benchmarks. [The teacher is] using the course. [The student is] using the grade that they want.” Another teacher participant spoke similarly saying that “even though [the student is] not even close to what we would technically call failing the course. That’s irrelevant...For them, not meeting a certain level of accomplishment is...a failure.” As such, several teacher participants’ responses evidenced a potential disparity between what they as teachers viewed as failure and the type of failure that they saw their students fearing. As one participant recounted, some students “don’t want people to know that they’re even applying [to university] because if...they don’t make it, then no one has to know.” This participant concluded that a “fear of embarrassment” existed in some students, but then the teacher questioned the need for this fear as if the student was present asking “why would you be embarrassed?” Another participant recounted the potential for students to also face elevated fears because some students viewed a situation as having an elevated sense of danger in contrast to the teacher perspective. This participant stated, sometimes students “make this to be a life-or-death thing or a bigger risk” but “this is an assignment, like getting [in] front of the class and sharing…I don’t think this is going to be a risk.” Across these teacher participants’ responses, a gap could sometimes exist between what the teacher themselves believed to be fear-inducing or a sign of a student’s fears, and the student’s actual experience of fear or failure in their internal worlds

Because of the potential for a disparity between teachers’ beliefs about a student’s experience of fear and what the student was actually experiencing, teacher participants articulated an awareness of the need to learn students’ internal realities through talking with them. Through these conversations, the teacher could try to understand whether what the teacher was noticing aligned with what a student felt. In

response to a vignette about a student who was afraid of the social implications of their actions, one participant articulated “I would ask the student more open-ended questions to find out why they are feeling that way.” Another participant also spoke to the importance of teachers asking questions of students in terms of how students came to the conclusions they did, and recalled asking a student who felt that they were a failure, “what is it that makes your failure a ‘I am’ problem rather than ‘I did’?” This focus on asking students questions was reflected in other participants responses as well, especially the focus on the “why” behind a student’s feelings or behaviours and “where...their fear of failure come[s] from.” Rather than these participants assuming they understood students’ fears of failure, they instead reiterated their need to talk with students and inquire about what these fears meant to students. This teacher exploration through conversation with the student about what the student was feeling and the student’s rationale for these feelings for one teacher participant meant that teachers took on the role of “an investigator” who sought to be curious about students’ worlds rather than assuming that their perspective as a teacher was accurate. This necessity of talking with the students also stemmed from the reality that “it’s the student who’s actually the expert on...what they’re feeling” and because without this context from the student, what the teacher suggests “may be totally inappropriate or different because you don’t really know where the student is coming from.” In terms of students’ experiences of their emotions, including their fears, all teacher participants emphasized that talking with students to hear their perspectives was necessary because the teachers carried their own set of experiences and perceptions that could vastly differ from a student’s. As summarized by one participant, in trying to “understand... how individual students...how you can help them specifically” the “only way to do that is to get input from them” because “each student is different.” In short, because of students’ individual perspectives on what was fear-inducing, the ways these fears could manifest in their behaviours, and what failure meant to them, teachers could only gain insight into when students were afraid and what this meant to each student through conversation.

Along with the individuality of each student that teacher participants recognized in talking with students about their fears, teachers also viewed each student as unique in their learning needs and what strategies would work in supporting each student when they were afraid. The variation in student needs mentioned by teacher participants included some students wanting to use manipulatives like fidget toys, some students needing different supports like a scribe or questions read to them rather than written

down, or others needing an outlined process for approaching an assessment task. Other teacher participants also referenced some students needing a simplification of more complex questions, others needing to demonstrate their learning not in high-stakes assessment contexts, and still others that needed more time. The individuality of student needs led one teacher participant to conclude:

> You need to know your students...you need to tailor the experiences for them...I've realized that I teach – you know they always say it in teacher training – but I've come to realize over the years that I do teach individual students...and I've got to adapt as much as possible to give them the best experience.

As such, there was no universal solution teachers upheld for all students when it came to specific tools to support students in specific moments of fear. Instead, teachers relied on tailoring the supports offered to students who were afraid after learning the student's specific needs through conversation.

However, this recognition of each student's unique needs was not always a simple adjustment in the classroom. As a teacher participant recounted, one student was afraid of social situations and had an individualized education plan, but that they as a teacher wanted to implement a pedagogy of "thinking classrooms." This teacher recalled asking the question "how do I accommodate this student who needs a quiet environment and who is allowed to leave and go to the learning commons whenever they feel overwhelmed, when I'm trying to get them in a group up at the whiteboard in a noisy room" and also asked "how do I accommodate the student and not run my class around one student?" However, amidst this complexity of navigating this student's specific needs, the teacher participant also had tremendous creativity, as they told me of their decision to have this student remain in class for the explanation of a question, get into a group, and then move with their group into a separate room that also had a whiteboard to work before returning back to the classroom and getting another question. While all teacher participants articulated a recognition of students' individual learning needs and the ways they tried to accommodate these needs, sometimes these needs came with tension regarding how much the teacher could accommodate individual needs to lessen students' fears while also building the skills that they felt students needed.

Part of many teacher participants support of students' individual needs and the desire to seek out each student's individual perspective on their fears in the learning process, stemmed from teachers viewing each student as unique in their experiences. As one participant recounted, "there were extenuating circumstances that were causing

[one student] to be stressed about [doing an academic task].” One teacher participant told the story of a student who was navigating their parent’s separation, another told the story of a student who had encountered significant bullying for sharing their talents in a public setting, and another told the story of a student who had encountered frequent near-failing of assessments and had difficulties with friendships. Teachers also recounted other students who navigated conflicting cultural expectations, other students were frequently away due to health challenges and the health challenges of family members, and others who had a habituated fear of assessments because of their academic history. In short, teacher participants acknowledged that there was a wide range of personal contexts that each student could bring to their classroom learning experience, which participants also situated as having the potential to impact student fears and fears of failing. As one participant summarized, “if they have a history of failing in this area...they’re right and they have...a reason to be afraid...they have a track record” and that this could be an obstacle for students to overcome their fears of failing. These teachers viewed the students' emotions within the classroom, and their fears, as interconnected with their past experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. Being aware of the potential for students’ unique set of experiences to impact their emotional state and potential to perform academically was crucial, as one participant concluded:

> For a kid, like I mentioned, that’s going [through] home problems, like maybe it’s okay to drop the school ball that you’re juggling because you’ve got to worry about just your mental health and like taking care of your sibling and working your part time job. And that’s more important to you right now....it would come down to if we as teacher, we don’t recognize that. And then you’re like, ‘well, this is the bar...’ and then we add one more thing that they can’t carry.

With this participant example in mind, student fears and fears of failure were unique not only in why they arose for each particular student, but also their potential cumulative effect, and in how teachers should respond to these fears. As such, talking with students about their individual needs could help teachers come to learn the complex, individualized circumstances that students were navigating.

Chapter 6.

Discussion

6.1. Worth Attention: The breadth of students' fears cannot be ignored

Despite the lack of clarity surrounding whether participants viewed student fears of failure as one fear for students or the underlying fear for many fears that students encounter, what was consistent is that in teacher participants' experiences many students face fear. Teacher participants viewed students' fears of failure as intertwined with other fears that students face, which aligns with the complexity in research surrounding whether fear of failure is the overarching label for a variety of sub-fears (Conroy, 2001) or if fear of failure is viewed as one fear amidst a variety of other fears (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Hargreaves, 2015).

Teacher participants spoke to students' fear of lacking capability, students' fear of future outcomes, and students' fear of the social cost of their actions, which included the potential loss of parental and teacher approval. These fears align with all of the fears noted in Conroy's (2001) Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory Scale that situated fears of failure as composed of the sub-fears of "a) experiencing shame and embarrassment, b) devaluing one's self-estimate, c) losing social influence, d) having an uncertain future, and e) upsetting important others" (Conroy, 2001, p.431). The wide range of fear that teacher participants cited in their experiences with students necessitates teacher awareness of the potential cumulative effects of the fears that students encounter. Any tools used by educators to lessen students' fears therefore must also recognize that student fears cannot be viewed in isolation but instead could be a part of a web of fears, including fears of failure, that students navigate. The alignment of this study's findings with Conroy's (2001) measurement of fears of failure in largely post-secondary contexts also points to the commonalities across contexts on the fears that students currently encounter and may continue to encounter after graduating high school. In short, student fears of failure is not a temporary issue, but rather one that may hold life-long implications. Combining the wide range of student fears referenced by teacher participants, teachers' awareness of the presence of these fears within the school community, and the potential for fears to persist into adulthood (Conroy, 2003), administrators will want to ensure that regular conversations occur that continue to equip

staff on how to respond to these fears and remind them of the presence of fears within their classrooms.

Extending the list of sub-fears within fears of failure noted in Conroy's (2001) research from a largely athletics and post-secondary focus, teacher participants in this study also spoke of students being afraid of their grade outcomes and not meeting a high academic standard. While these additional fears could be viewed as another form of future outcomes that Conroy's (2001) research also speaks to, these fears are more specific to the context of students' learning within a school system where grades are an everyday part of their experience. This specifying of the fears that teachers see students encountering could help highlight the potentially fear-filled experience of high school for students in particular. Developing a specific scale or self-assessment tool for fears of failure that is specific to the high school context may be warranted in order to gather more consistent information on the level of fears of failure that students encounter.

Examining the specific fears that teacher participants saw in their students, teacher participants identified that the students were afraid of the social implications of their actions, especially not pleasing their parents. The prevalence of students worrying about their parents' approval of them, mirrored research were students feared the potentially strong emotional response of their parents (Kahraman & Sungur, 2013; Singh & Chand, 2022) and the pervasive fear noted across several studies of students experiencing a parent's disapproval (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Miloseva, 2012; Nunes et al., 2022). While Carlhed Ydhag et al.'s (2021) research focused on these fears specific to an immigrant student context, and other research found that these fears were particularly strong for students who struggled academically (Life, 2015) or students who were older in age (Miloseva, 2012), teacher participants did not make distinctions between who this fear affected in their classes. Nevertheless, rooted in these participants stories of working with students who faced fears of disappointing their parents, the strength of the potential influence of parents in students' experience of school cannot be minimized. Instead, this parent-child relationship may have particularly strong influence over students' fears of failure due to the amount of time children spend with their parents and the attachment formed in a parent-child relationship (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Elliot & Thrash, 2004; Wong, 2015). In order to address student fears of failure then, teaching staff and administrators of the school will need to ensure that parents are included in these conversations about student fears and to continue encouraging dialogue between parents and students that affirm the security of the

parent-child relationship regardless of student outcomes (Kaharman & Sungur, 2013). Having a regular, open dialogue between the teacher and parent may also help ensure that the parents are also able to see the bigger context for the student's learning that the teacher participants in this study advocated for.

In terms of the potential loss of peer approval, several of the teachers in this study commented on students fearing being teased by peers if they failed to align with social norms. Teacher participants also commented on instances of bullying in relation to student fear like those seen in Hargreaves' (2015) study of grade six students, reinforcing the potential power of the sometimes-harsh social dynamics of school that students face and its potential to amplify fear. Participants also reflected on the tendency for high school students to withhold their participation in activities due to their fears of failing in front of their peers, which is also reflected in some literature on students in university (Downing et al., 2020; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Yost, et al., 2019; Wonder, 2021). While teacher participants did not often go into depth about why the approval of peers for students could have such weight in terms of students fears, Turner et al.'s (2021) study focusing on university students could provide some explanation, as Turner et al. (2021) theorized that "students who are high in fear of failure, may be oriented towards making social comparisons" and as such "want to avoid performance situations in which they demonstrate their lack of mastering material" (p.10). As such, the high school students noted by these teacher participants may view the responses of others as weighty enough to cause them to choose not to engage in learning opportunities so as not to risk their social status. Additionally, as also summarized by Bartels and Ryan (2013), those afraid of failing may seek to assure themselves that they have not failed by comparing themselves to peers, but for some this may only reinforce these fears. Due to the potential strength of peer relationships in amplifying student fears, from the teacher perspective, facilitating healthy peer relationships amongst students becomes even more essential. As such, teachers may want to consider recommendations like those by Vanderhoven et al. (2012) that emphasized giving students the opportunity to give feedback to one another anonymously with diminished potential for social risk, or by Downing (2020) that emphasized ensuring that students have peers in their groups that they feel safe with when doing collaborative tasks. These strategies (Downing, 2020; Vanderhoven et al., 2012) may help account for the social sensitivity student fears of failure may have to their peers' reactions in particular (Turner et al., 2021).

Students' fears of what would happen in their futures, as noted by many of the teacher participants, also mirrored existing literature on students being concerned with life after high school (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Vehkaokoski, 2020). In particular, students having to decide about what post-secondary institution to attend, if any, and how to remain competitive to get into the university of their choice was mentioned by several teacher participants in relation to students' fears of failing. This finding aligns with Carlhed Ydhag et al.'s (2021) study on Swedish high school students, as students in this study also worried about having the necessary academic outcomes needed to allow them entrance into university. Students' fears noted by teacher participants also were often verbal proclamations of them not getting in to university, which mirrored the "pessimistic remarks" that students sometimes used to convey their "failure expectations" to their teachers (Vehkakoski, 2020, p. 413). As such, these comments on university should be viewed not just about university in isolation, but may be connected to larger fears and fears of failure that lie under these statements. Teacher participants in this study also focused on the common experience of students connecting a future outcome on an assessment with the prospects they would have for their futures after high school. This finding in this study extends current research (Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Turner et al., 2021) in connecting teachers' observations of students' fears of assessments not being about the assessment itself so much as its implications longer term. What teacher participants in the current study also emphasized, beyond Carlhed Ydhag et al. (2021) and Vehkakoski's (2020) findings, was that this fear of university entrance for some students was wrapped up in who they saw themselves as people. Knowing that in these teachers' experiences, students' fears of university entrance could carry with them far more weight than just the acceptance to university itself, teachers and academic advisors engaging in dialogue with students about their future after high school need to remember the personal nature of these conversations and fears for students. This finding could also help administration and counsellors to provide even more targeted support for students by ensuring that students have strategies in navigating their fears of what could come after high school rather than just having a plan of what students want to do.

In terms of teacher participants' observations of student fears surrounding grade outcomes, students feared not just failing, but also not getting the highest grades possible. Even when receiving an assessment back, teachers saw that some students preferred to not know the grade they received in order to not have this grade be able to

impact their fears further. This intertwining of fears of grades and fears of failing is also affirmed by researchers like Ladejo (2021) who found that, for the university students studied, fears of failure were impacted by whether or not students "achieved grades which were considered desirable" (p. 12). Held together with Ladejo's (2021) study, the findings of this current study point to grades as having far-reaching implications beyond just the number or letter on a page; these grades can carry socialized expectations that can reinforce students' fears. Schwinger's (2022) meta-analysis conclusions could also explain some reasoning behind why grades for students could have such a strong impact on the intensity and prevalence of a student's fears, as "students' school grades are often interpreted by students as an indicator of ability in a given field, which in turn, is interpreted as an indicator of students' personal worth and value to others" (p. 579). Any gap then between the highest potential mark and what a student received, as teacher participants observed, could then be viewed by students as stemming from their inadequacy both in their understanding of a subject area and as a person. Students' fears of failure then, grounded in these teachers' observations, have the potential to take on a deeply personal meaning for students in impacting their self-concept and feelings of competency. Teacher participants report of students fearing the grades they received, not only because of the grade itself but because of its perceived implications on their self-worth, could help educators to hold moments where they are returning graded assessments with even more sensitivity knowing the high emotional impact this exchange could have in reinforcing or lessening students' fears. Additionally, policies surrounding how grades are communicated to students may also want to be reviewed by administrators to ensure that the communication method used for these grades reflects students' worth as a member of the school community regardless of grade outcomes.

Continuing this attention on the role of grades in student fears, in Hargreaves & Affouneh's (2017) study of elementary school students, they concluded that students even at times "compet[ed] for approval and acceptance" from their teachers through vying for higher grades (p.235). Held with the other student fears that teacher participants noted, including students fears of the social implications of their actions, fears of failure, and fears of future outcomes, fears all intertwined to seemingly feed each other in a cycle that was difficult for students to break out of on their own. As supported by the research of Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, (2016), Hargreaves (2015) and Huang (2021), teachers offering frequent reassurance to students of their acceptance as part of the community and the strength of the teacher-student relationship regardless of

grade outcomes is recommended by this study to try to lessen the potential for students to be afraid of grade outcomes as the only way to receive affirmation that they are not a failure in the eyes of the teacher.

Teacher participants also identified a fear among students that they lacked the capability needed to obtain their desired outcomes. Rather than focusing on their strengths, the students mentioned by teacher participants who feared failure predominantly viewed themselves as unable to do what teachers were asking them to do or to reach the future outcomes they were hoping for. This pervasiveness of students' deficit mindset identified by teacher participants aligned with Cox's (2009a) findings with university students where "for the majority of the students, past failure provided objective evidence of academic inadequacy" (p.61). However, extending this finding, teacher participants commented on students that demonstrated their capability and were even the highest-achieving students but were still afraid. Fears of failure then, with the teacher participants observations from this study in mind, may not depend at all on the amount of evidence a student has to counter their fears of inadequacy. As Balkis and Duru (2019) concluded in their survey of college students, "self-doubt and irrational beliefs significantly predicted fear of failure" (p.308). Students' fears of failure may then not be able to just be addressed with rationality alone, as these student fears, as noted by several teacher participants, may be so deeply rooted that they prevail despite evidence to the contrary. Students' fears of failure may be more affected by a student's own belief about themselves that they have "internalized" throughout their experiences in school (Conroy, 2003, p.779; Balkis & Duru, 2019; Fremantle & Kearney, 2015). The awareness of teacher participants that some students, despite high achievement, could still be afraid even of their own capabilities, emphasized the potentially high level of pressure that these students could experience and that students' fears may not always be dispelled by just providing more evidence to students of their successes; instead, to address student fears, including student fears of failure, helping students deal with the underlying reasons for students' insecurity in how they may view themselves may be more effective.

6.2. Understanding student fears of failure as deep and multi-layered

Consistent with Fremantle & Kearney's (2015) conclusion in their conversations with university professors that "failure is a multifaceted and complex concept" (p.316), and Conroy's (2001) conclusion that "fear of failure is multidimentional" (p.431), the

responses of teacher participants in this study positioned students' fears of failure as multilayered rather than being a unified concept across all participants. Some teacher participants identified student fears of failure as being present both in public contexts and more private ones like one-on-one conversations. Other teacher participants focused on the definition of student fears of failure in terms of the fears of future outcomes or embarrassment. Other teacher participants focused on the variety of sources of students' fears of failure being based either on academic outcomes or student perceptions. Others defined student fears of failure based on the impact these fears had on students' physiological and cognitive functions. Teacher participants then focused on different layers of student fears of failure, from the sources to the context and the effects of students fears of failure. Wide variation in terms of definitions for fears of failure is also seen across current literature, as some studies focused on how people view themselves as central to their fears of failure (De Castella et al., 2013; Whittle et al., 2020), other researchers focused on the emotional implications of fears of failure (Bartels & Ryan, 2013; Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016; Dinc & Eski, 2019; Schwinger et al., 2022), and others still positioned fears of failure as primarily stemming from and impacting people's motivations (Choi, 2021; Regueiro et al., 2018) or goal-orientation (Kahraman & Sunger, 2013). This diversity in what it means to fear failure could point to fears of failure permeating many spheres of students' lives, necessitating that the definition of fearing failure encapsulates a wide range of causes and effects, or the need for more clarity surrounding the process of how students come to fear failure and its consequences. If based on a lessened conceptual clarity for teacher participants, definition of fears of may be multilayered because of the infrequent number of conversations participants reported having with colleagues about student fears of failure previous to this study. As such, more conversations are then needed between staff members about the student fears that they are noticing in the classroom, the sources of these fears, and how to distinguish between different fears that students may face.

Despite this complexity, students' fears of failure were seemingly deeply rooted in students' experiences of school, as it was something that teacher participants regularly came across in working with their students. This frequent interaction of teachers with students who feared failure echoed several researcher's noting the pervasiveness of student fears, as student fears were present in elementary school (Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017) and could continue into adulthood (Buchanan, 2014; Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, 2016; Turner et al., 2021). While this study focused just on

high school teachers and their experiences with high school students, teacher participants did comment on students' fears pre-existing students' entrance into their classroom. As such, interventions used by educators must recognize the potentially long history students have had with fearing failure and that countering these fears may be a long-term process. Furthermore, the students who were afraid of failing, according to teacher participants, were both students who had high levels of academic achievement and those who struggled in academics. Similarly, looking across students in studies like Dai's (2000) research with gifted teens and Hodis and Hodis' (2020) survey of "at risk" students, fear of failure also is not limited to one group of students but instead is pervasive (p.1678). Where this study differed was that some researchers have found student fears of failure to be particularly common amongst female students (Alkhazaleh & Mahasneh, 2016; Jerrim, 2022; Michou et al., 2013; Wach et al., 2015). However, student fears of failure were not situated by teacher participants in this study as an experience unique to female students. Instead, students' gender and its impact on students' fears of failure did not come up as a focus of teacher participant responses. To address student fears of failure, at least initially, a whole school approach should be implemented, as fears of failure in this study extended beyond populations who were failing the course on paper to include a wide range of students.

The experience of fear for some of the students that teacher participants worked with could have deeply negative ramifications on students' emotional health, decision making, and relationships with others. This largely negative impact of fear that teacher participants noted in observing their students reinforces research that situates student fears as often debilitating (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017). The paralyzing potential of fear has been associated in other studies with students being incapacitated and unable to do a task due to their fear (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014) and employing avoidance tactics (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Cox, 2009b) as a form of "self-handicapping" (Martin & Marsh, 2003, p. 33). Unlike some research that situates fear as having potential temporary benefits in motivating people to do all that they can to avoid failure (Downing et al., 2020; Putwain & Symes, 2011), only one teacher participant spoke to an experience they had with a student when fear had caused the student to progress in their studying. Instead, teacher participants largely commented on paralysis and avoidance as the most common experiences associated with fear for students. The awareness these teacher participants had of student decisions potentially being controlled by these debilitating fears, necessitates that high school teachers across the

entirety of the school stay alert to the potential for students' difficulty making progress and to students' use of avoidance tactics to actually be expressions of their fears rather than students actually wanting to avoid learning opportunities. The school adopting systems that could alert administration and teachers of these student choices early on may help educators to engage with students in conversations pro-actively to see if students are feeling afraid and to lessen students experiencing a prolonged experience of fear-induced paralysis without teacher support.

In teacher participants' responses, student fears of failures were also positioned as deeply rooted in terms of their potential power not only over student emotions, but also over their behaviour. Student fears of failure, according to teacher participants, had the power to keep students silent in their struggles with fear, to lead them to cheating on assessments, and to shift their posture in the classroom to avoid drawing attention to themselves. The silencing effect of student fears echoed the experiences of Palmer (2017) in encountering students who did not voice their fears because this put them at less social risk, and Whittle et al.'s (2020) action research with English university students in their critique of failure as a "hidden" reality for students (p.9). However, unlike Hargreaves and Affouneh's (2017) and Fremantle & Kearney's (2015) conclusions that educators remained silent in their discussion of student fears, the silencing of student fear of failure was positioned by teacher participants in this study as an indicator of students' fears and the potential for embarrassment in failure for students rather than an unwillingness of teachers to engage with students about their fears. In terms of students' behaviours surrounding academic dishonesty, from at least from a few teachers' perspectives, fear to led to some students to compromise their integrity in assessment situations. This observation aligned with Caraway & Tucker et al.'s (2003) research on high school students who, at points, used cheating and other avoidance methods as a coping tool when the fear of failure became unbearable. Furthermore, teacher participants' observations of some students' shifts in posture to make themselves smaller, while not directly commented on by the studies reviewed, could also convey physically the poor self-esteem noted by some researchers in those who feared failure (Balkis & Duru, 2019; Conroy, 2004; Schwinger et al., 2022). With these findings in mind, students' fears of failure in this high school context could have far-reaching effects in the way teachers observe their students by being aware that students could be engaging with behaviours based on their overwhelming fears of failure. Teachers who notice a student cheating or frequently remaining silent, or administrators who deal with

these situations in a disciplinary context, should inquire whether the student experiences fear or fears of failure that could be guiding their behaviour.

6.3. Demystifying the expectations intertwined with student fears

Reinforcing the socialized aspect of fear (Elliot and Thrash, 2004; Nunes et al., 2022), teacher participants' experiences with students identified that students faced fear-inducing expectations from themselves, adults in their lives like parents and teachers, and also expectations from the broader culture within the school. Students' expectations of themselves have been studied in relation to the high academic standard students hold for themselves (Simpson & Matlese, 2017), and the emotional toll that these expectations can take (Haghbin et al., 2012). Teacher participants in this study discussed the emotional weight these self-expectations could have for students, including shifting their identity to being defined by their failures. In doing so, these experiences paralleled Whittle et al.'s (2020) findings that connected students' experience of fear, expectations, and their identity, as the higher education students they surveyed feared failure in terms of "feeling like an imposter" because they were "not living up to [their] own – or others' – high expectations" (p.4). While the context of these findings differed, in terms of Whittle et al. (2020) studying higher education students and the current study focusing on high school students, together these findings point to the role of a student's self-expectations in having the power to impact their sense of confidence and amplify their fears. Teachers employing tools like student self-assessments that foster critical reflection self-expectations could help teachers become even more aware of individual students' expectations and the role these expectations may play in students fears in the classroom. Ultimately though, these tools may need to be used with support, as in some teacher experiences students on their own may be overly self-critical. Teachers having conversations with students about what they expect from themselves in a course could also help teachers gain even more insight into not only individual student's self-expectations, but also if these expectations are fear-inducing in individual cases.

These student self-expectations though cannot be viewed in isolation. In Nunes et al.'s (2022) survey of 574 university students in the USA, 23% of students who responded identified "personal standards" as contributing to their fears of failure, followed by 18% identifying "external expectations and judgement" as a secondary factor (p.27). Similarly, teacher participants in this study conveyed the high level of

expectations that students in their school could encounter from others. The expectations cited by teacher participants included students experiencing fear of and facing pressure from the parent community in terms of students' academic achievement, pursuit of post-secondary studies, and future career decisions. As viewed by Conroy (2003) and Deneault et al. (2020), parental influence in terms of how they interact with their child could imprint on the child's interpretations of future interactions with others and their child's fears of failure. This passing down of expectations from parent to child in a way that could augment students' fears of failure (Conroy, 2003; Deneault et al., 2020) was also mirrored in this current study, as some teacher participants viewed parental expectations of students as unrealistic or overly focused on outcomes like getting into university. Education at the school-level for parents could focus on the potential impact of their expectations on their children in fostering support or amplifying their children's fears, including fears of failure (Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Conroy, 2003; Deneault et al., 2020; Elliot & Thrash, 2004). These conversations could also include the importance of parents assuring their children of their support to counter potential narratives for students of shame associated with fearing failure (Caraway & Tucker, 2003; Kahraman & Sunger, 2013).

Teacher participants also discussed the socialization of students' fears in terms of the expectations the students they worked with could feel from their teachers. Teachers both identified moments that they had articulated their expectations to students, and also in their conversation with this study's researcher conveyed more implicit expectations for their students. Often the expectations in teacher participants responses were performative-based, in meeting the curricular objectives. However, at the same time teacher participants also articulated an expectation that students would not be perfect and needed time to learn. Even in moments when teacher participants did not feel that they were holding a student to any specific expectation, they had encountered students who still felt the pressure to try to please their teachers. This desire to please was also reflected in Kahraman & Sunger's (2013) and Dai's (2000) findings where students felt that any failure in a course would result in damage to the student-teacher relationship. Held together, the assurance several teacher participants mentioned towards their students that a student's performance did not dictate the strength of the teacher-student relationship of support becomes even more integral. As also reinforced by participant responses, to allow students the opportunity to reach

expectations, teachers need to be as transparent as possible with what they are looking for in student behaviours and demonstrating their learning.

The power of even unintentional transmission of expectations from teachers to students seen in this current study also takes on a greater weight and affirms Florescu and Pop-Pacurar's (2016) summary of research where “when teacher say something to a...student, they implicitly send a message...each message reveals what the teacher thinks about the student and frames the way in which the student will subsequently relate to [them]self” (p.48). What expectations teachers hold for students and how they communicate these expectations so as to not unintentionally reinforce students’ experience of fear, was an area that several teacher participants reflected on. Unlike in studies like Putwain and Symes’s (2011) survey of secondary students where students identified teacher’s use of fear to try to increase students’ motivation to engage in academic tasks, teacher participants did not report any use of these same fear appeals. However, a few participants did recognize the potential power of their role and they affirmed that teachers could convey a focus on students having to perform well based on the types of praise they give to students, even if unintentionally. Teachers then, based on this finding, must be conscious of what types of outcomes and behaviours are given praise, as these moments may unintentionally reinforce performative-based expectations that some researchers have connected with student fears (Lou & Noels, 2016; Michou et al., 2013; Pantziara & Philippou, 2015). Instead, praising students’ efforts over outcomes may be more affirming of students who fear failure (Vaughn et al., 2021) as part of a larger process of teachers being conscious of their use of praise and their potential to indirectly communicate expectations.

Teacher participants also identified school culture and the valorization of performance-based success criteria within the school, as other potential expectations students faced in their high school journey. These cultural expectations existed despite not being attributed to any one person. Instead, teacher participants articulated a general perception of the school being focused on high-level academics and post-secondary attendance. The potential for expectations, within an independent school especially, for a high level of academic performance (Heller-Sahlgren, 2018; Leonard et al., 2015) was affirmed by teacher participants’ articulation both of the culture of their independent school, and also the power of these expectations to drive fears of failure at some level for students. While about a different school entirely, Carlhed Ydhag et al. (2021) spoke to students’ experience of a school where academic performance was also

steeped within the school's culture, as "high grades seem to be expected and something that came naturally by attending school" (p.5). While high level academics may be desired at the school, as affirmed by teacher participants, avenues must also be created for students to be recognized in other arenas than excelling academically. This recognition in other spheres may help to counter the narrative that going to university and getting exceptional grades is expected for everyone. School-wide assemblies or workshops may also consider highlighting the stories of those who either did not attend post-secondary after high school or those who did not receive the acceptance to the institution they were hoping for. As affirmed in teacher participant responses, telling these alternative stories could help lessen the connection for some students between university acceptance, student fears, and students viewing themselves as a failure.

These school-wide expectations in the current study, which were built into the school culture from several teacher participants' perspectives, were also reflected in the giving of awards. However, some participants questioned the impact of these practices on students who may not receive an award or align with the university-bound orientation of the school's culture. Teacher participants in this instance both acknowledged the weight expectations embedded in the school culture could carry for students, while not always agreeing with these expectations. This tension of teachers upholding institutional responsibilities while feeling torn about some of the practices within educational institutions were also recognized in Frelin's (2015) and Straehler-Pohl & Pais's (2014) interviews with secondary teachers who were known for their care for students. While not spoken about by the teacher participants in this study, Nunes et al.'s (2022) study also identified "institutional" expectations as conveyed through school documentation like "policies regarding course failure and program requirements" as an area the university students interviewed wished could change to help lessen their fears of failure (p. 27). In light of this finding, administrators may want to review the system of awards given for academic performance and explore further what aspects of all-school ceremonies may uphold an expectation for post-secondary attendance and unintentionally reinforce fears of failure for some students.

Together, teacher participants articulated an understanding of the connection between student fears and expectations that is strongly supported by current research (Dai, 2000; De Castella et al., 2013; Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Conroy, 2003; Cox, 2009b, Hargreaves, 2015, Nunes et al., 2022, Podlog, 2002, Simpson & Maltese, 2017). However, rather than teachers viewing themselves as unable to shift the fears students

may experience because of the many expectations they faced, teachers attempted to be more transparent with their students and question expectations they disagreed with on behalf of students. Teachers taking action to make their expectations as direct and obvious as possible for students aligned with Cox's (2009b) conclusion that "students are not generally equipped with the 'skills' or knowledge to determine what their professors expect or how to meet the expectations" (p.84). Teacher participants in this current study recounted trying to tell students what the criteria for each academic task was, giving models for students on what this looked like in practice, and helping students to structure their approach to tasks so that the fears of newness and ambiguity were lessened.

Similarly, clarity and predictability of classroom routines and assessments were also advocated by Bergold and Steinmayr (2016), Bledsoe and Baskin (2014), and Konings et al. (2008) in supporting students who experience high levels of fears of failure. As some teachers in this study also spoke of, teachers looking at the whole of their teaching practice should continue trying to make their expectations transparent for students to lessen fears. This high level of teacher support that this study's participants articulated for students, in lessening the number of implicit expectations they had to navigate, aligned with the 19% of students in Nunes et al.'s (2022) study who desired greater support. These participants' focus on supporting students also contrasted Meijer's (2007) findings where students articulated that their fears of failure stemmed from not receiving adequate teacher support. Not as prevalent across all teacher participants in this study was the structuring of "instruction...in a way that allows for failure on achievement-related tasks so that…students can test their skills without being afraid of getting punished for bad outcomes" (Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016, p.236). However, participant's lessened focus on the structure on a specific lesson in their responses to this study may have been because teacher participants seemed more focused on the long-term change that could come with shifting students' perspectives rather than just adjusting individual academic tasks. In line with Bergold and Steinmayr's (2016) call for teachers review of their specific teaching practices, ensuring teacher transparency of their expectations for students could also include teachers reviewing their assessment practices. This re-examining of teacher assessment practices could help to ensure that students know what they need to do in a course through reviewing the ways individual lessons communicate teacher expectations for student behaviours and outcomes, and through reviewing course documentation so that students know the

specific kinds of failures they can make in their learning process without facing larger consequences for their academic progress.

6.4. Teachers as perspective-shifters: fears and failures as normalized and surmountable

All but one participant articulated seeking to normalize the experience of failure as part of learning, including viewing failures as an indication that students need to work on foundational skills before they proceed. In line with this positioning of failure as normal and even a positive, Bartels and Ryan's (2013) survey of university students concluded that educators should "assis[t] students in viewing failure as an opportunity to learn from mistakes" (p.48). This same re-framing of failure also mirrors findings where teachers positioned students' mistakes as both common and helpful in the learning process. This type of teacher response has been studied in relation to lessening students being afraid of poor grade outcomes and feeling embarrassed in front of their peers (Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016; Downing et al., 2020). While several studies also aligned with the participants' view of failure as something that could indicate learning (Bartels & Ryan, 2013; Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016; Downing et al., 2020), there is the potential for the normalization of these failures to remove the validation of the weight the emotions, like fear, than can be associated with these failures for students. As Myers (2019) concluded, "popular failure rhetoric, specifically 'fail forward' and 'build resilience' messaging brings failure out of the shadows but it does not eliminate the shadows" (p.51). No participants in this study conveyed the possibility that failure could be removed from the context of school. At the administrative level, both individual schools and school districts should review their grading policies to discuss whether the existence of failure, in terms of a specific grade outcome, should still exist. Additionally, in reviewing these policies, administrators could clarify the different types of failure that could exist in a school setting and the consequences for each type of failure in terms of whether it should be normalized; failure being both viewed as potentially positive learning experience in a classroom setting (Bartels & Ryan, 2013; Myers, 2019) and failure that results in academic consequences like not completing a course may not be equally beneficial to normalize.

Despite the complexity surrounding the impact of normalization of failure for students, teacher participants in this study sought to normalize both failures and the fear of failure amongst the students that navigated these realities. As part of this

normalization, several teachers recounted their own feelings of fear and fearing failure that they had experienced both as teachers and in times when they were students themselves. By closing the distance between the fears that teacher participants recalled experiencing and the fears they saw their students walking through, teacher participants communicated their goal of humanizing their students and building empathy with them. While teacher participants likely were not consciously acting on this research, teachers sharing their stories of failures were upheld by students as a means to lessen the potential shame associated with failing (Nunes et al., 2022; Shepherd et al., 2020; Whittle et al., 2020) and to lessen the potential for students to employ avoidance behaviours (Vaughn et al., 2021) by several studies with university-aged students. This posture of compassion and of recognition that students' fears were real by teacher participants countered conclusions like those in Hargreaves' (2004) review of failure in schools. In this review Hargreaves (2004) concluded that teachers in high schools specifically tended to situate student emotions as something to be lessened in the classroom but the opposite disposition was seen in this study's teacher participants. Instead, teacher participants repeatedly situated their students and their experience of fear and fears of failure as profoundly human. More dialogue between teachers and students about their experiences with fears, including fearing failure, may continue to help lessen the potential for students to feel isolated in their experience of fear and failing. In a model like Whittle et al.'s (2020) participatory action research project in a higher education setting, staff and students regularly met to share their fears and realized that "the affectual experience of failure was not a shaming personal secret but common to many across the university...the sense of relief at discovering that others felt the same way was palpable" (pp.8-9). A similar model could be adopted in a high school setting to allow for continued normalization and de-stigmatization of fears of failure for staff and students. However, if a model like this is adopted, the normalization of fear and failures in these conversations that foster teacher-student empathy should not be done without also looking to shift the larger contexts that make these fears and fears of failure such a commonly debilitating experience for students (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014; Myers, 2019)

Teacher participants, in the context of seeing students encounter failures and fears, emphasized the need to help students recalibrate their perspective on what failure meant and to help students see a bigger picture for themselves and their learning trajectory. The all-encompassing feelings of failure teachers saw in some of their

students mirrors Carlhed Ydhag et al.'s (2021) findings where high school students "talked about…failure or as a matter of life and death. And with it there was fear" (p.7). In contrast to what they saw in their students though, several teacher participants identified these situations as not being failures or as not necessitating being fearful of drastic consequences. Teacher participants recognition of failures as not as weighty as what they saw in their students' experiences could reflect teacher participants benefit of more life experience that contextualizes these failures as moments of growth (Simpson & Maltese, 2017), or reflect teacher's being in a position of power, which enabled them to have the ability to see failures as distanced rather than present realities (Whittle et al., 2020). That being said, teacher participants did not blame students for their views of failure as something that could have long-term consequences. Instead, they sought to understand the student perspective through conversations with students.

More specifically, teacher participants noticed that students, in their experiences, sometimes connected their failures to their identity as an individual rather than to a specific situation. The potential for students' failures to intertwine with their perception of who they are was also found by Myers (2019) and Fremantle & Kearney (2015). However, teacher participants wanted to help students disentangle student performance outcomes and failure from who they were through reminding students that these outcomes did not define who they were. This process articulated by teacher participants in this study, mirrored Bartels & Ryan's (2013) recommendation that students need help to "de-emphasize the relevance of one instance of failure on one's global self-estimate and... that one's future does not ride on the outcome of one test or assignment or grade" (p.48). Teacher participants in this study sought to do just that by trying to shifting the weight that failures carried for students towards seeing failure as part of learning. In this way, teacher participants' broader life experiences with failure that had helped them to see failure as a growth opportunity could allow them to be models of this perspective shift for students. Teacher participants trying to shift students' fixation on grades and university entrance to embrace learning for learning's sake, also aligned with a focus on mastery and skill-development that has been found to increase students' willingness to embrace even challenging learning opportunities (Dickhauser et al., 2016). This approach of perspective shifting could be adopted by other educators in the study site school to help lessen the tendency for students to equate failure with who they are. However, if adopted, educators must remember that failures for students may seem

closer and larger than for teachers due to their differing levels of authority and life experience within the school setting (Whittle et al., 2020).

Teacher participants also strove to model what focusing on growth instead of failures could look like on behalf of their students. Teachers' focus on students' growth in their learning over achievement-based outcomes has been connected to students increased self-efficacy (Kahraman & Sunger, 2013) and students' ability to move through, rather than be incapacitated by, the fear of failure (Borgonovi & Han, 2021; Dweck, 2006). Teacher participants took on this responsibility of reminding students that past outcomes on assessments did not dictate how they would do on current assessments, of responding with praise to student mistakes, and of having whole-class and individual conversations stating to students that the goal for the class was growth over flawlessness. Teacher participants also reported trying to reflect to students in conversations the need to hold a mindset that focused on students' adaptability and capacity to move beyond past experiences. As such, teacher participants in this study sought to foster growth mindsets (Dweck, 2006) in their students, which aligned with research that connected this mindset with lessened student fears of failure (Borgonovi & Han, 2021). Some teacher participants took this idea of fostering a perspective of growth one step further though, and commented on the potential for this perspective to cultivate "hope" in students and to "reduce fear." In doing so, some teacher participants sought to not just point to students' potential to grow from a teacher perspective, but also their attempt for students to come to believe this narrative themselves. This ability for teacher comments to reinforce students' experience of "optimism" rather than fear was also supported by Vehkakoski's (2020) study with elementary special-education schools (p.408). In the current study this pursuit of encouraging students of future growth was also true of what high school teachers sought to cultivate for their students. Administrators ensuring that growth in student learning is prioritized by all teachers across the school may help continue to foster the same messaging for students that failure is not something to be feared but rather can be part of growing in their learning.

In the midst of trying to shift students' perspectives, teacher participants also viewed their students as capable and having inherent worth, even when the students they worked with did not appear to see these same traits in themselves. Rather than the teacher's approval being associated with a student's performance, teacher participants articulated moments where they tried to remind students verbally that they were valued no matter what their academic outcomes were. In this way, teacher participants also

recognized and sought to address the underlying need of students for “acceptance” (De Castella et al., 2013, p.862) and to counter one component of fears of failure that is “a defensive adaptation made by children who learn that the affection they crave is...likely to be withdrawn following unsuccessful performance” (Conroy, 2003, p.764). These reminders of student capability and worth may prove especially effective if they are able to counter the “self-doubt” that can be a root of fears of failure for some students who view themselves as perpetually incapable (Balkis & Duru, 2019, p.306). The perspective of these teacher participants that students are capable, is also directly supported by the recommendation of Dinger et al. (2013) that “educators should...try to support students in viewing…themselves as competent” (p.99). With this in mind, teacher participants affirmation of the strength of the student-teacher relationship regardless of students’ performance takes on a much deeper role in potentially undoing students’ habituated fears of damaged relationships (Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017). Additionally, positioning students as having the capability to learn and overcome difficult situations, including their fears and failures, emanated a teaching style focused on student independence that has been viewed by some researchers as lessening students fears of failure (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Huescar Hernandez et al., 2020) and increasing students’ desire to participate in classroom learning opportunities (Leptokaridou et al., 2016).

However, as several participants highlighted, this focus on student capability must not mean ignoring students’ voicing of their limitations and must be done within the context that students still have access to the reassurance and support of the adults in their life, like their teachers. As Coudevylle et al. (2021) found in their survey of teenaged physical education students, students having the opportunity to voice their limitations to the teacher could in and of itself lessen students’ fears of failure. Likewise, several teacher participants in this study commented on the importance of allowing students the space to voice their needs, while also affirming student capability, without one diminishing the other. As such, educators are recommended to adopt frequent affirmation of their students that their capability and belonging in the school community does not depend on performance outcomes. At the same time, educators should also provide opportunities for students to voice where they may not feel fully capable yet and where they may want support.

6.5. Walking with students through fears and failures: teachers as encouragers and places of safety

Being aware of students' needs, teachers positioned themselves as working with students rather than dictating to students what would help their fears. This partnership with students included asking students what they felt they needed, building a foundation of trust with the students, talking with students about their emotions including their fears, building a space that sought to create a feeling of emotional security, and being available to meet with students. Seeking first to build trust with their students, teacher participants aligned with the educators in Frelin's (2015) study who saw "students' trust [as]...a prerequisite for being able to teach, which highlights the relational underpinnings of education" (p.599). Teacher participants did not automatically assume that they had the power or right to speak into students' emotional states. Instead, teacher participants reinforced students' agency in what they choose to share with their teachers and the privileged role of responsibility teachers inhabit when students do choose to confide in them. In teacher participants asking students about their fears and asking students what support they felt they needed, they reflected the need for teachers to be "attuned" to their students (Hargreaves, 2015, p.633). Teachers also reflected the need to be "aware" of students' reasons for being afraid and what students felt would help them in these moments in order to meaningfully help students shift away from this state of fear (Niederkofler et al., 2015, p.405). In order to foster a community of teachers within the school who, like the participants in this study, take on the role of a being a dedicated collaborator with students, administrative hiring practices may want to adopt this pedagogical perspective as one criterion for prospective teacher applicants to the school. Furthermore, continued professional development for current educators could focus on research-driven strategies to build trust with students as one avenue to not only learn about, but also address student fears of failure.

Having tangible representations of this environment of trust and security, in this study, was reflected in teachers' descriptions of using of music, stuffed animals, verbal encouragement, and predictable routines and assessments to lessen student fears. These tools used by participants connect to the way students perceive a classroom atmosphere that has been connected in some research to the potential for decreasing students' fears of failure (Niederkofler et al., 2016; Simpson & Maltese, 2017), and increasing their motivation within the classroom (Life, 2015; Martin & Marsh, 2003). The use of verbal encouragement, especially when focused on efforts over outcomes, has

also been recommended by some researchers (Hargreaves, 2015; Huang, 2021; Simpson & Matlese, 2017; Vaughn et al., 2021) to decrease students' fixation on the potential for negative consequences to result from failures both for their own view of themselves and others' perception of the student. Assessment feedback that also focused on giving written feedback to students over prioritizing grades, could be effective in lessening the perceived stakes associated with this task (Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Nunes et al., 2022; Turner et al., 2021) and therefore lesson students' fears of failure. While all teacher participants sought to develop trust with their students and to cultivate a safe, predictable environment, the tools they used varied across teachers. Because some teachers used stuffed animals, others used music, and others focused more on assessment structure, providing educators the opportunity to share the tools they have found to be effective in specific circumstances may help teachers to learn from one another. These discussions may also help equip educators to have an even wider range of tools to use when working with the individual needs of students who are afraid.

Teacher participants' dedication to working with students was also evident in their intentional initiation of conversations with students and their working in the face of several limitations they identified. In particular, teacher participants spoke to the large number of students they taught in contrast to the finite amount of time they had. Despite having a large number of students, teacher participants in this study took on the responsibility to initiate opportunities for students to share how they were doing. As Vehkakoski (2020) concluded, "the most effective and supportive means of promoting a more positive perspective on stressful experiences and improving one's confidence...seems to be the use of highly person-centered support messages...[that]...encourage people to share their fears of failure [and] legitimize their displays of difficult emotions" (p.410). Teacher participants' openness to engaging with students and even inviting conversations with students when the students were in a state of fear, could then help to create a classroom culture that de-stigmatizes these experiences. When the sharing of failures is viewed as personal and held alongside conclusions like those seen in Whittle's (2020) study with university students where "sharing was most likely to take place in 'informal' spaces where trusted interpersonal relationships had time and space to develop," the need for time for students and teachers to cultivate a professional relationship becomes even more integral. Teacher participants' feelings of tension in the lack of time they had to foster these types of relationships with students, where students could bring up their fears and failures,

necessitates a greater prioritization of teachers' time to interact with students. This tension where teachers must navigate time constraints and conflicting demands on their time is not new and reflects tensions noted by other secondary teachers (Frelin, 2015; Straehler-Pohl & Pais's, 2014). Nevertheless, administrators must be aware of the limitations of time and high levels of student needs that, at times, limited their teacher's ability to support all students in their fears. As such, class sizes and the amount of time allocated each day to teachers talking with students about their experience of school should be an area prioritized and protected by principals as much as possible if student fears of failure are to be addressed in the context of a strong teacher-student bond.

6.6. Intentional conversations: the individualization of emotional learning

Many of the teacher participants in this study were able to identify the specific needs of each of the students they shared about, despite sometimes generalizing the trends they had noticed in the heaviness of students' emotions and students' tendency to avoid fear-inducing experiences. As Elliot and Trash (2004) emphasized in their research of undergraduates and their parents, each individual's life-long series of experiences interacting with others has the potential to shape their fears of failure in unique ways. Teacher participants likewise articulated the vast difference in each student's experience both inside and outside of school, as some students that they had encountered had gone through instances of bullying, others experienced immense pressure from their parents, others faced the separation of their parents, and others had a long history of struggling with performing academically. As such, teachers being able to approach students with an awareness that no two students are the same, facilitates their understanding of students' fears of failure that are specific to the student they are working with rather than applying a universal rule to these situations. This acknowledgement of students' individuality by teacher participants also counters what Florescu and Pop-Pacurar (2016) claimed to be the norm of dehumanization in some school systems where "educational institutions...regard their pupils as students not as individuals, but as subjects devoid of identity" (p.48).

While something to be cautious of to not remove the individuality of students' stories, teacher participants' noticing of patterns across students, like students' tendency to opt for ways to avoid the possibility for failure, are reflected in research like that of Bartholomew et al.'s (2018) study physical education students. In this study, Bartholomew et al. (2018) concluded that "challenge avoidance and fear of failure were

positively related to each other… [and] suggest that students will begin to avoid challenging situations in order to manage their concerns about failing" (p.61). Held with this study's findings, teachers observing patterns in their students' behaviours may help educators better anticipate ways to support students as they work through fearing failure, so long as teachers do not over-generalize these patterns across all students. Counsellors or administrators could support educators in developing a way to track the consistency of a student's avoidance behaviours over time using a method that is not time consuming. A tool like this may help cue both teachers to students who could be afraid of failing and who may need further support. Additionally, having systems that allow counsellors, educators, and administrators to communicate individual factors that may be affecting students' level of fear in a classroom context, like home-life challenges or a student's specific learning needs based on their past experiences of school, could help further individualize students' educational experience so that any fears are held in context.

Building on the uniqueness of each student and the attunement of teachers to this individuality of their students, teacher participants also identified specific instances where students they worked with were afraid and that teachers used gestural, facial, and verbal cues from students to help teachers become aware of these students' fears. The verbalization of students' fears and fears of failure are noted by other researchers (Ledoux, 1998; Davey, 2006; Vehkakoski, 2020). Shedding insight on the role of these cues for students, these cues could be a way that students who may not know how to navigate their fears of failure on their own to receive help (Vehkakoski, 2020). As such, like the teacher participants in this study, teachers cannot dismiss the power of these cues in communicating to educators that students need support in navigating their emotions (Simpson & Matlese, 2017). Furthermore, teachers, when do they do notice these cues and invite students into conversations about their observations, could demonstrate that they "were attuned to pupil's feelings of fear [and] could also [then] play a role in reducing these" (Hargreaves, 2015, p.633). Teacher participants' observations of students crying and changing their posture to embody the weightiness of their fears extends current research into what these fears could look like for high school students specifically. This participant observation also builds on research that situates students fears as being associated with significant emotional discomfort for students (Bartels & Ryan, 2013; Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016; Whittle et al., 2020).

However, some teacher participants voiced that observing these cues from students was not enough, as teacher perceptions of what students were feeling did not always align with what their students were experiencing. The potential gap between teacher participants' perspective on students' fears and students' own perspectives is established in literature on university-aged students (Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, 2016; Wonder, 2021). This gap at times may be so present that researchers like Coudevylle et al. (2021) advocated that "developing programs in which educational psychologists help teacher to listen to their students could be promising way to reduce students' fears of failure" (p.263). While no program like this existed in the independent school where these teacher participants worked, most were aware that their perspective on students' fears were limited because they were not the students themselves. In order to more fully grasp a thorough picture of the cues that teachers are relying upon across the school to identify student fears, professional development opportunities could be provided by the school's administration or counselling team to collect a full list of fear cues that teachers are noticing in their students. This professional development could also explore the alignment of these teacher observed cues with the counsellor's expertise and current research. Additionally, adding the specific cues used by students who experience frequent fear to a student's individualized education plan may help teachers to more readily identify what fear may look like for that student.

One main area that teachers noted regarding the individualized perspective each student held, and the differences in perspective between teachers and students, was what constituted failure. This lack of a fixed definition of failure across teachers and students is not surprising, as several researchers have concluded that the concept of failure can range in not reaching a specified curricular standard (Lutovac & Flores, 2022), can shift according to different environments (Podlog, 2022), can be seen as an area for growth (Fremantle & Kearney, 2015), or can be associated more with its emotional consequences rather than an academic outcome (Hargreaves, 2004; Lutovac & Flores, 2022; Myers, 2019; Whittle et al., 2020). Teacher participants saw that quite a few students' definitions of failure varied from not achieving the grades they had hoped for, fearing not achieving entrance into a specific university, taking on failure as part of who they were, and positioning failures as being the end of the road for their pursuit of academia. Between the awareness of teacher participants of the individuality of students' experiences that shaped students' fears and students' unique definitions of

what failure meant, teacher participants forefronted the importance of talking with students in order to understand their students' worlds.

Aligning with Conroy's (2003) situation of fears of failure as partially due to "beliefs" that have been "internalized," conversations between teachers and students could allow teachers to better understand students' internal worlds and better address where students' fears were coming from (p.760). As identified by students in Nunes et al.'s (2022) study, including more conversation about failure and fears of failure was also the leading recommendation of students in de-stigmatizing failure. Given the reinforcement by teacher participants of the power of conversation to understanding more about students' home-life context, their goals, and their fears, teachers may choose to prioritize these moments as a larger portion of the class time they do have with students. Additionally, like teacher participants in this study advocated, in moments when students voice that they are afraid that they are failing or when an educator suspects this to be the case, teachers could invite further conversations with students about these fears and what failing means to individual students rather than assuming their perspectives are the same. As part of a continuing conversation, counselling or further supports can then be put in place to support the individual student to better understand their own fears of failure and help them articulate these fears to the educators who work closely with them.

For a summary of the recommendations mentioned above based on all findings, see Appendix G.

Chapter 7.

Limitations

In making the decision in this study to focus on a person's experience in a person's own words as a core way to gain insight into how they perceive the world around them, this study prioritized interviews with participants and participant responses to open-ended responses to vignettes. While this choice allowed this research to prioritize the experiences of the teachers included in the study, some may critique the limitation of this type of research in not being able to verify to what extent what teachers commented on was reflected in the classroom. For example, several teacher participants recounted having whole-class discussions reminding students that their grades did not determine their worth and sharing their own failures. However, verifying how frequent these conversations actually occurred in the classroom was outside of the scope of this study. Additionally, because this study focused on teachers' perceptions, no students were included in this study. While strengthening the emphasis of the teacher participants experiences in this study, the absence of students' voices is a limitation. Furthermore, the effectiveness of teacher approaches used, like teacher participants recounting helping students shift their perspective to see the potential to learn from and overcome fears and failures, was not examined from the perspective of students, as no students were a part of this study.

In terms of the analysis used, this study's focus on reporting themes across participants as part of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) strengthened the study in looking at the patterns common between participants. However, this analysis method also limited the reporting of findings for individual teachers. Additionally, in prioritizing maintaining internal confidentiality, given that teacher participants knew one another and worked at the same institution, I made the decision not to attach quotations from participants with pseudonyms (Tolich, 2004). As such, the reader will not be able gain significant insight into the personal factors that may have shaped individual participants responses. Due to this research also being phenomenological case study, the transferability of the findings will also not be possible for settings that differ in their characteristics from the sample school (Cohen et al., 2007). This study only reflects the findings within this specific group of independent school high school teachers at this one independent school.

Chapter 8.

Implications for Future Research

In order to better understand the level of impact that teacher participants' attempts to address students fears of failure had, interviewing students to hear their experiences and comparing this with teacher responses could help provide more clarity about how effective these strategies are. More specifically, understanding from the student perspective whether teachers' normalization of fears and failures amplifies or diminishes students' fears could solidify this strategy as an intervention for students' fears of failure or explore unintended consequences of this strategy for students. From a student perspective, better understanding of teachers' uses of music and stuffed animals, and whether these strategies are as effective as some teacher participants articulated, would be of value to also guide when to even more effectively use these tools. As such, future research may benefit from interviewing both teachers and students in the same school to compare their perceptions of the teaching practices used by the teacher to address student fears of failure. As highlighted by several teacher participants, the reality that teachers also face fears of failure in addition to students also facing these fears could invite future research that examines the way teacher fears of failure may interact with student fears of failure and vice versa in the same school context.

Furthermore, despite teacher participants wanting to help students' view grades and failures as not something to be feared because of the more important traits that the students could seek after, like developing themselves as a well-rounded person, the effectiveness of this strategy for students needs further examination. As much as teachers may hope that grades and failures could play a less debilitating role in students' academic journeys, as summarized by Nunes et al. (2022), "one of the main challenges for instructors in reducing students' fear of failure is in fact that students are in an institutional structure for which grades remain the primary proof of learning" (p.34). Until the broader system of school shifts to valuing a broader view on student learning, teachers may face a continued uphill battle. Research that that examines how the school systems could shift away from using grades to evaluate the progress made by students could greatly support work to diminish students fears of failure in providing alternative methods of assessment that are less performative based.

Across several participants, fears of post-secondary admission and fears of not being perfect were repeated experiences teachers saw in their students. Because this study did not specifically seek to examine teachers' perception on the relationship between high school student fears of post-secondary entrance or student perfectionism and student fears of failure, both of these areas in relation to student fears of failure warrant further research. Gaining a better insight into the relationship between student perfectionism, student fears of post-secondary admission, and student fears of failure may help educators and researchers to build more effective interventions for students who frequently navigate these realities.

The noticing of student cues by teacher participants that they attributed to students' fears, whether cheating on tests, frequent help-seeking, chronic absenteeism and missing assignments, attempts to avoid drawing attention to themselves, and students' questioning of teachers, could all be examined from the student perspective to ensure that these cues noticed by teachers do actually reflect student fears. Future research could benefit in compiling a list of student behaviours that students' attribute to their fears and even more specifically their fears of failure. This list could then be shared with educators to help better understand potential warning signs of students' fears. If more clarity was reached between teachers and students on what fears of failure could look like in a classroom context, educators may also be able to encourage students to share how they are feeling in these moments before these fears of failure become attached to students' identities where they may come to view themselves as failures.

While some teacher participants did speak to their educational background, the specific cultural and geo-political background of the teachers included in the study and the cultural heritage of students they shared about were not a direct focus of this study. Because Jiang's (2016) research with pre-service teachers from different countries of origins illustrated a shift in what teacher identified as the cause of students' failures in an academic setting, and because Matteucci and Gosling (2004) also identified that the French teachers who partook in the study felt a greater degree of ownership toward student failures than the Italian teachers surveyed, future research could examine the how the cultural background of independent high school teachers may shift their beliefs and responses to students' fears of failure. Additionally, the frequency of students encountering fear of failure may differ according to the cultural context of the education system that a student learns in, as Ma (2021) concluded that Chinese students could face failure more frequently and therefore see failure as more normalized than their

European peers. Therefore, future research would benefit from examining how and why teachers perceive and address students' fears of failure in cross-cultural contexts. Future research would also benefit from recruiting participants from multiple sites in order to allow for reporting of the data to be tied to participant pseudonyms that may help the reader gain more insight into the personal factors that shaped individual participants responses.

While some studies have also found that female students may experience and report more intensified fears of failure in comparison to their male peers (Alkhazaleh & Mahasney, 2016; Borgonovi & Han, 2021; Jerrim, 2022; Michou et al., 2013; Miloseva, 2012), this study did not ask teacher participants to reflect on just their experience with any particular gender of student. Having teacher participants think through the students who they have encountered fearing failure through the lens of gender may help shed light on potential inequalities between these groups in either the prevalence of fears of failure, or help compare if the ways these fears appear in the classroom differ.

Lastly, this study's use interviews and vignettes were also mentioned by several participants as helpful in providing them an opportunity to consider students' fears of failure. Because student fears of failure has not always been a topic of professional development in some of these teachers' experiences, it would be helpful to further explore whether the process of interviewing teachers or the combination of using phenomenological interviews and vignette responses about students fears of failure could be used as an intervention for teacher professional development. The effectiveness of using either one of these tools or this specific combination of tools to shift teacher practices and address student fears could be another avenue of exploration in future research.

Chapter 9.

Conclusion

In this research, high school teachers who worked at one independent school acknowledged the stories of students that they had worked with who were afraid of failure, and who also faced a variety of fears and expectations woven together amidst their high school experience. Teachers also perceived students' fears as multi-layered in their complexity and deeply-rooted in not only individual students' experiences, but also across a variety of student populations in the school. In highlighting these stories, this research sought to foreground the weighty reality of fears for many students and to contribute to the research community's acknowledgement of these fears as a problem worthy of being considered. To address these students' fears, rather than focusing on the minute details of a lesson plan, teachers focused on broader dispositions of care and perspective shifts away from performance-oriented affirmation. These approaches were teachers' attempts to facilitate students' emotional well-being in contrast to students fears and to help each student feel seen by teachers in their uniqueness. Drawing upon these insights, strategies to address student fears of failure that are holistic in nature may better align with teachers' approach to supporting students in the midst of these fears. Nonetheless, it is clear from this research that continued effort is required by educators in collaboration with students if social realities like of fear, failure, and the fear of failure are to be changed.

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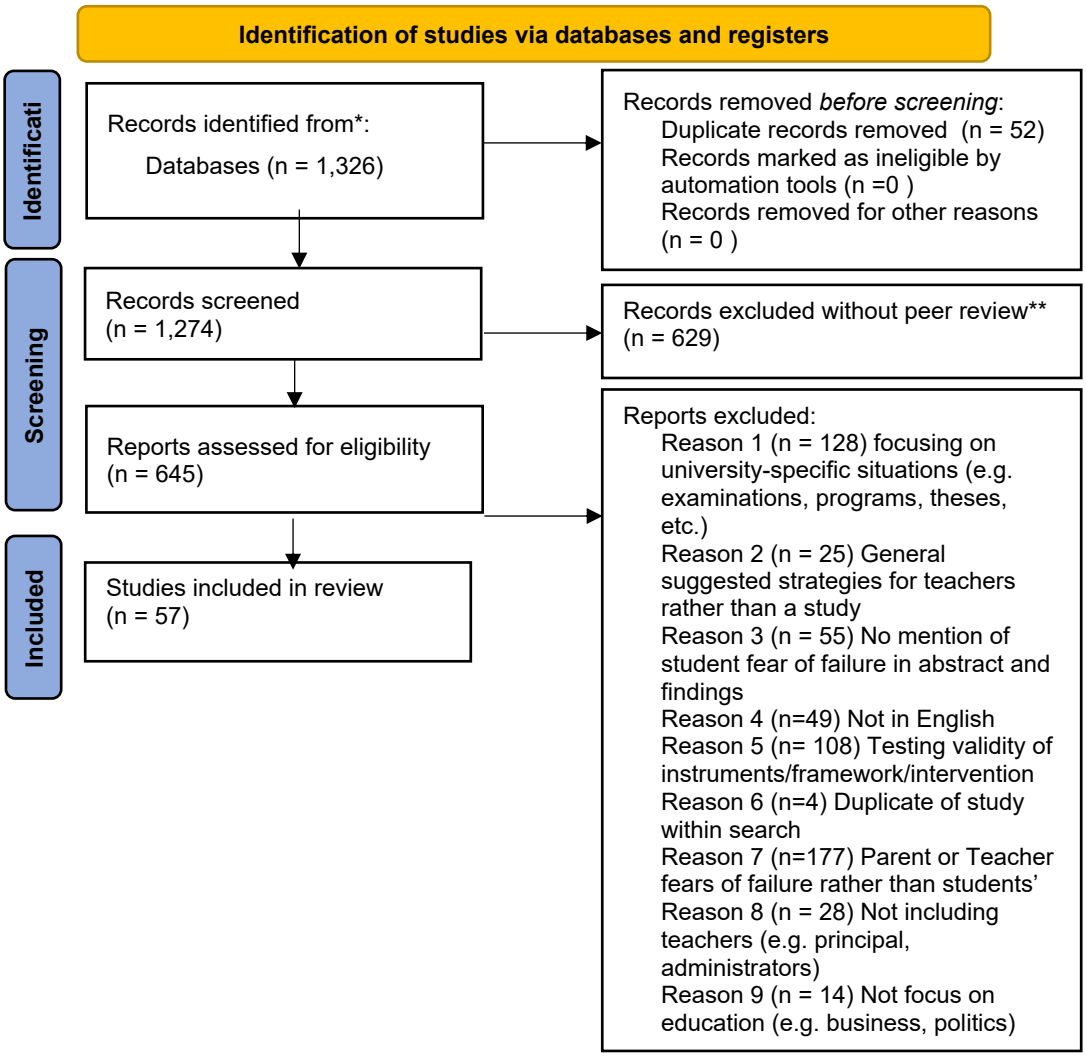
Appendix A.

Literature Review Process

Figure A.1. Summary of Inclusion Process for Literature Review Based on All Searches



Note: Structure for Reviews Adapted from: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al.. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71

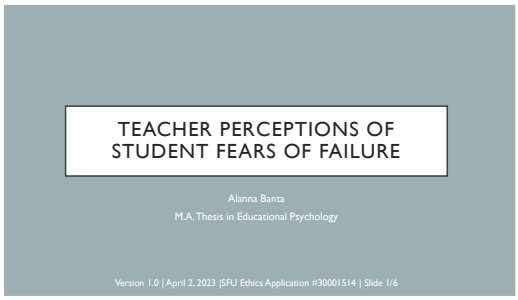
Table A.1. Studies of Fear of Failure Based on Age Group

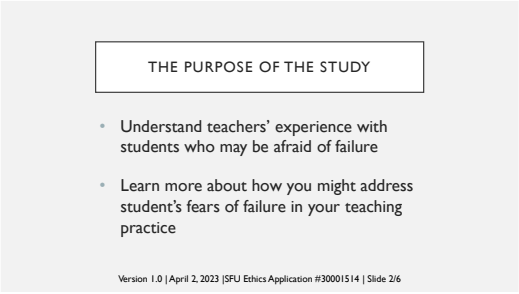
Age Group Studied	Studies Reviewed by Author
Elementary Students	(Bartholomew et al., 2018; Bergold & Steinmayr, 2016; Hargreaves & Affouneh, 2017; Leptokarido et al., 2016; Michou et al., 2013; Niederkofler et al., 2015; Pantziara & Philippou, 2015; Singh & Chand, 2022)
Elementary Teachers	(Sigh & Chand, 2022; Vehkakoski, 2020)
Secondary Students	(Borgonovi & Han, 2021; Caraway & Tucker, 2003; Carlhed Ydhag et al., 2021; Coudevylle et al., 2021; Dai, 2000; De Castella et al., 2013; Dickhäuser, 2014; Dinç, S., & Ekşi, 2019; Dinger et al., 2013; Huang, 2021; Huescar-Hernandez et al., 2020; Hodis & Hodis, 2020; Jackson, 2003; Jerrim, 2022; Kahraman & Sungur, 2013; Könings et al., 2012, Ma, 2021; Martin & Marsh, 2003; Matteucci & Gosling, 2004, Meijer, 2007; Miloseva, 2011; Putwain & Symes, 2011; Regueiro et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2012; Vanderhoven et al., 2012; Wach et al., 2015; Weissman, 2022; Wong, 2015)
Secondary Teachers	Staehler-Pohl & Pais (2014)
Post-Secondary Students	(Alkhazaleh, Z. M., & Mahasneh, 2020; Balkis & Duru, 2019; Bartels & Ryan, 2013; Benson et al., 2022; Choi, 2021; Cox, 2009; Deneault et al., 2020; Florescu & Pacurar, 2016; Haghbin et al., 2012; Karim & Minari, 2022; Ladejo, 2021; Life, 2015; Lou et al., 2106; Martin & Marsh, 2003, Nunes et al., 2022; Vaughn et al., 2021; Weissman, 2022; Whittle et al., 2020; Wonder, 2021)
Post-Secondary Professors	(Cox, 2009; Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Forescu & Pacurar, 2016; Whittle et al., 2020; Yost et al., 2019)
Mixture of K-12 Teachers	(Evans et al., 2012; Jiang, 2016; Lutovac & Flores, 2022)

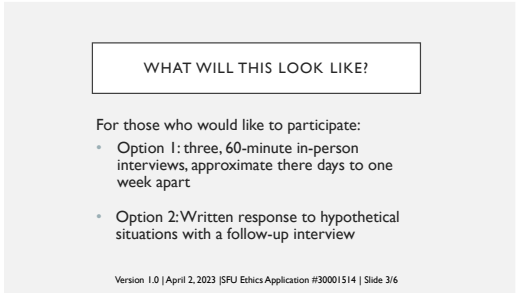
Appendix B.

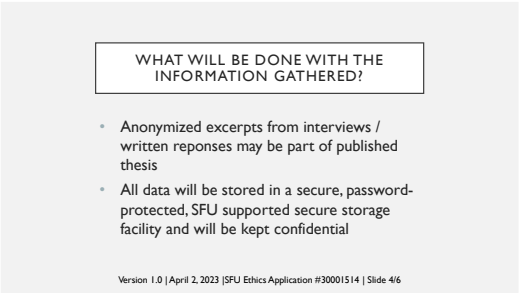
Recruitment Materials

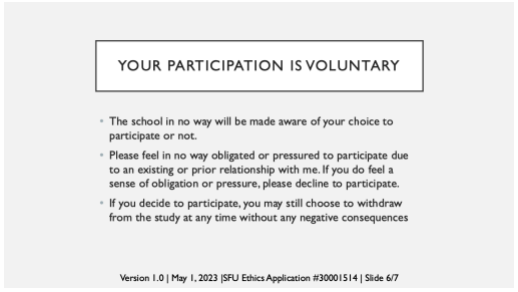
Teacher Recruitment Presentation Slides











Follow-Up Recruitment Email to Participants

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for your time in considering participating in this study about how independent high school teachers view students' fears of failure. If you choose to participate, we hope to gain insight into your perspective on what students' fears of failure may look like and how you think teachers can address student fears of failure.

If you want to be a part of this study, there are two opportunities to participate:

1. Three, 60-minute interviews at the time and place of your choosing (each will be approximately one week apart).
2. Writing your responses to five hypothetical teacher vignettes via a SurveyMonkey. Each of these vignettes will be accompanied with two questions. To build on your responses to these vignettes you will also be invited as part of this survey to have a 60-minute follow-up interview.

As mentioned in the presentation, any teachers who have worked in the school for 2 or more years and who have a teaching certification (independent teaching certification or provincial teaching certification) are invited to participate. Please feel in no way obligated or pressured to participate due to a relationship with me. If you do feel a sense of obligation or pressure, please decline to participate.

If you would like to participate in the online response to the hypothetical teacher vignettes, you are invited to visit [survey link] to participate. If interested in participating in the in-person interviews, please contact Alanna Banta either in person, by email or by phone.

Sincerely,
Alanna Banta

Recruitment Email to Principal and/or Head of School

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____,

My name is Alanna Banta. I am currently a master's student of Educational Psychology at Simon Fraser University. As part of this program, I am currently seeking schools that are interested in participating in research that looks at how high school teachers at independent schools perceive student fears of failure. This research will ultimately be used as the basis for my masters thesis.

Why are we doing this study?
Student fears of failure can decrease student motivation to participate in academic tasks (Caraway et al., 2003; Dinger et al., 2013). However, when teachers acknowledge and respond to these fears, students' fears of failure can lessen and students may feel more able to persevere in difficult tasks (Coudevylle et al., 2021; Huescar Hernandez et al., 2020). As such, the goal of this study is to explore what student fears of failure look like from a teacher perspective and how teachers' beliefs about student fears of failure may impact their teaching practices or interactions with students.

What happens if you say, 'Yes, I would like our school to be part of the study?' How is the study done?
For teachers who are interested in participating, there are two ways to share their experiences. The first would be having three 60-minute interviews with me at the time and place of the teacher's choosing (each will be approximately one week apart). The second would be writing responses to five hypothetical vignettes via a WebSurvey and then having a follow-up interview with me for no more than 1 hour.

What are the benefits of participating?
During this process, teacher participants would be able to reflect on this aspect of their own practice, share the story of their own teaching approach, and see their efforts to support students recognized. Neither the individual teachers nor the school will be identified. Following the interviews, teachers will also be given an opportunity to respond to the findings before they are reported. The school will also receive a copy of the study findings.

If interested, what are the next steps?
I can meet with you either by phone, online meeting, or in-person to further discuss the details of the study and any questions you may have.

Thank you for your considering allowing your school participate in this study. If interested, or if you have any questions or need additional information, please reach out to myself, Alanna Banta or the faculty member overseeing my work, Dr. Robert Williamson.

Sincerely,
Alanna Banta

Appendix C.

Consent Forms

Teacher Phenomenological Interview Consent Form

Teacher Perceptions of Student Fears of Failure

Who is conducting this study?
Student Lead: Alanna Banta, Graduate Student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University [SFU].

Principal Investigator: Dr. Robert Williamson, Associate Professor of SFU Faculty of Education

Why are we doing this study? We are doing this study to learn more about independent high school teachers' experiences with students who may fear failure. You are invited to participate in this study because we want to learn from your experience as a teacher and because you are a teacher who has worked for more than 2 years at this independent school.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. You should feel in no way obligated or pressured to participate due to an existing or prior relationship with me. If you do feel a sense of obligation or pressure, you should decline to participate. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences to education, employment, or other services to which you are entitled or are presently receiving. You will not receive compensation for your participation in this study.

What happens if you say, 'Yes, I want to be in the study?' How is the study done?
If you decide to take part in these interview sessions, three, 60-minute interviews will be conducted in-person and can be scheduled at a time and place that is most convenient for you. The goal of these interviews is to learn more about your experience with students who may fear failure. During the interviews, our conversation will be audio-recorded in order to transcribe it. Each of these interviews will be scheduled anywhere from three days to one week apart whenever possible. During these in-person interactions, the research team will abide by the latest provincial health guidelines in relation to the COVID19 pandemic.

Is here any way that this study could be harmful for you? There are no foreseeable risks to you in participating in this study.

What are the benefits of participating? In doing this research, we seek to recognize your efforts to support students and your expertise in working with students who may fear failure. While we do not think taking part in this study will help you directly, in the future, others may benefit from what we learn in this study.

Organizational Permission: Prior to contacting you, we have obtained permission from the head of school to conduct this research study at the school. However, your choice to participate or not to participate in the study will not be communicated to the school in any way.

How will your data be protected and your privacy be maintained? Your identity will be kept confidential. Audio recordings of the interview will be stored in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility and will be permanently deleted once they have been transcribed. We will transcribe audio-recorded interview using Adobe Premiere Pro's transcription software and these files will be stored in an SFU supported secure storage facility. We will permanently delete the audio files and Adobe Premiere project file after the transcript has been produced. The resulting transcript will

not include your name or place of work and instead will use a pseudonym. We will keep the anonymized interview transcription in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility following the conclusion of this study for a period of 5 years.

How will your information be used? The results of this study will be reported in the student lead's master's level graduate thesis and may be published in journal articles or presented at academic conferences. The study results may include anonymized quotations from your interview. Anonymized interview transcripts will be kept for 5 years after the conclusion of the study in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility. The student lead, Alanna Banta, may use these stored anonymized transcripts as a reference for future graduate studies work, as she considers future research questions that may be relevant to educators.

What if you decide to withdraw you consent to participate? You may withdraw from this study at any time without giving reasons and with no effects on employment or any other services you may be entitled to receive. You may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the student lead, Alanna Banta. If you choose to enter the study and then decide to withdraw at a later time, all data collected about you during your enrolment in the study will be destroyed.

Where can you find study results? Study results will be reported in a publicly-available graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles or presented at academic conferences.

Do you want to receive a copy of the study findings before the findings are made public? You can also choose to provide your contact information at the end of this interview to receive the study findings in order to have an opportunity to comment on the findings before they are made publicly available. Upon receiving the findings, you will be invited to respond to these findings within 7 days in order to comment on the study findings and to identify if there any quotations from your interview that you do not want to appear in the publicly available study findings.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study? If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the student lead, Alanna Banta.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study? If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, please contact the Director, SFU Office of Research Ethics, at dore@sfu.ca or 778-782-6593.

Participant Consent and Signature: Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your employment, or any services to which you are presently entitled to receive.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this Consent Form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.
- You do not waive any of your legal rights by participating in this study.

_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date (YYYY/MM/DD)

_____

Printed Name of Participant

Consent to Participate in the Teacher Vignette Survey

Teacher Perceptions of Student Fears of Failure

Who is conducting this study?
Student Lead: Alanna Banta, Graduate Student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University [SFU].

Principal Investigator: Dr. Robert Williamson, Associate Professor of SFU Faculty of Education.

Why are we doing this study? We are doing this study to learn more about independent high school teachers' experiences with students who may fear failure. You are invited to participate in this study because we want to learn from your experience as a teacher and because you are a teacher who has worked for more than 2 years at this independent school.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. You should feel in no way obligated or pressured to participate due to an existing or prior relationship with me. If you do feel a sense of obligation or pressure, you should decline to participate. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences to education, employment, or other services to which you are entitled or are presently receiving. You will not receive compensation for your participation in this study.

What happens if you say, 'Yes, I want to be in the study?' How is the study done?
If you choose to participate:

1. You will be asked to complete an online survey via SurveyMonkey that includes reading five hypothetical vignettes about students who feared failure and responding to each vignette's two corresponding questions. In total the survey is expected to take 30 minutes.
2. You will be invited to including your contact information in the survey if you are willing to have a follow-up interview. If you include this information, we will contact you to schedule a 60-minute in-person interview at the time of your choosing. Should you choose to include this contact information with your responses, your survey will be identifiable to the research team in order to contact you. This contact information will be permanently deleted at the conclusion of this study.
3. For those who include their contact information, the study findings will be sent to you via the contact method of your choice in order to allow you the opportunity to comment on the findings and to identify any quotations from your interview that you do not want to appear in the publicly available study findings. You will be invited to respond to these findings within 7 days.

Note: The survey will be hosted by SurveyMonkey, any data you provide may be transmitted and stored in countries outside of Canada, as well as in Canada. It is important to remember that privacy laws vary in different countries and may not be the same as in Canada.

Is here any way that this study could be harmful for you? There are no foreseeable risks to you in participating in this study.

What are the benefits of participating? In doing this research, we seek to recognize your efforts to support students and your expertise in working with students who may fear failure. While we do not think taking part in this study will help you directly, in the future, others may benefit from what we learn in this study.

Organizational Permission: Prior to contacting you, we have obtained permission from the head of school to conduct this research study at the school. However, your choice to participate or not to participate in the study will not be communicated to the school in any way.

How will your data be protected and your privacy be maintained? Your identity will be kept confidential. If you choose to include your contact information in the survey, your responses will be identifiable to the research team until the conclusion of the study in order to schedule follow-up interviews that build on your survey responses. At the conclusion of the study, your contact information data will be permanently deleted. Only transcripts of your survey responses that use a pseudonym rather than your name or contact information will remain. When results are reported, only anonymized information will be presented. We will keep the transcribed, anonymized responses in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility following the conclusion of this study for a period of 5 years.

How will your information be used? The results of this study will be reported in the student lead's graduate thesis and may be published in journal articles or presented at academic conferences. While the SurveyMonkey will be deleted at the conclusion of this study, the study results may include anonymized quotations from your survey responses. Anonymized survey response transcripts will be kept for 5 years after the conclusion of the study in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility. The student lead, Alanna Banta, may use these stored anonymized transcripts as a reference for future graduate studies work, as she considers future research questions that may be relevant to educators.

What if you decide to withdraw your consent to participate? You may withdraw from this study at any time without giving reasons and with no effects on employment or any other services you may be entitled to receive. You may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the student lead, Alanna Banta. Please note that in order to withdraw from the study, you can also exit the survey at any time. For those decide to include their contact information as part of their survey responses, should you choose to later withdraw from the study at any time all of your responses and contact information collected during your enrolment in the study will be destroyed. For those who do not choose to include their contact information, once you press submit, we will not be able to withdraw your responses because the research team will not be able to know whose responses belongs to whom

Where can you find study results? Study results will be reported in a publicly-available graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles or presented at academic conferences.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study? If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the student lead, Alanna Banta.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study? If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, please contact the Director, SFU Office of Research Ethics, at dore@sfu.ca or 778-782-6593.

Would you be willing to have a follow-up interview based on your survey responses? If you are willing to be contacted by the student lead, Alanna Banta, to schedule a 60-minute follow-up interview with you based on your survey responses, please indicate the contact information you would like to be reached at below. This information will only be used by the research team to schedule the follow-up interview. Note, if you choose to include this contact information your responses in this survey will be identifiable to the research team, as the follow-up survey builds on your written responses:

Preferred Contact Information (optional): _____

Do you want to receive a copy of the study findings before the findings are made public? You can also choose to provide your contact information below to be contacted by the student lead, Alanna Banta, with the study findings in order to have an opportunity to comment on the findings before they are made publicly available. Upon receiving the findings, you will be invited to respond to these findings within 7 days. Note, if you choose to include this contact information your responses in this survey will be identifiable to the research team.

Preferred Contact Information (optional): _____

Participant Consent: Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your employment, or any services to which you are presently entitled to receive. By consenting to participate in this study, you do not waive any of your legal rights.

By checking "yes" you indicate that you consent to the above. By checking "no" you indicate that you do not consent to the above.

- ☐ Yes, I have read and understood this Consent Form and agree to participate in the study.
- ☐ No, I do not wish to participate in the study.

Teacher Follow-up Interview to Survey Consent Form

Teacher Perceptions of Student Fears of Failure

Who is conducting this study?
Student Lead: Alanna Banta, Graduate Student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University [SFU].

Principal Investigator: Dr. Robert Williamson, Associate Professor SFU Faculty of Education

Why are we doing this study? We are doing this study to learn more about independent high school teachers' experiences with students who may fear failure. You are invited to participate in this study because we want to learn from your experience as a teacher and because you are a teacher who has worked for more than 2 years at this independent school.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. You should feel in no way obligated or pressured to participate due to an existing or prior relationship with me. If you do feel a sense of obligation or pressure, you should decline to participate. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences to education, employment, or other services to which you are entitled or are presently receiving. You will not receive compensation for your participation in this study.

What happens if you say, 'Yes, I want to be in the study?' How is the study done?
If you decide to take part in this 60-minute follow-up interview, this interview will seek to clarify and build upon your responses to the vignette survey. This interview will be conducted in-person and can be scheduled at a time and place that is most convenient for you. Should you choose to participate in the interview, our conversation will be audio-recorded in order to transcribe it. During these in-person interactions, the research team will abide by the latest provincial health guidelines in relation to the COVID19 pandemic.

Is here any way that this study could be harmful for you? There are no foreseeable risks to you in participating in this study.

What are the benefits of participating? In doing this research, we seek to recognize your efforts to support students and your expertise in working with students who may fear failure. While we do not think taking part in this study will help you directly, in the future, others may benefit from what we learn in this study.

Organizational Permission: Prior to contacting you, we have obtained permission from the head of school to conduct this research study at the school. However, your choice to participate or not to participate in the study will not be communicated to the school in any way.

How will your data be protected and your privacy be maintained? Your identity will be kept confidential. Audio recordings of the interview will be stored in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility and will be permanently deleted once they have been transcribed. We will transcribe audio-recorded interview using Adobe Premiere Pro's transcription software and these files will be stored in an SFU supported secure storage facility. We will permanently delete the audio files and Adobe Premiere project file after the transcript has been produced. The resulting transcript will not include your name or place of work and instead will use a pseudonym. We will keep the

anonymized interview transcription in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility following the conclusion of this study for a period of 5 years.

How will your information be used? The results of this study will be reported in the student lead's master's level graduate thesis and may be published in journal articles or presented at academic conferences. The study results may include anonymized quotations from your interview. Anonymized interview transcripts will be kept for 5 years after the conclusion of the study in a password-protected, SFU supported secure storage facility. The student lead, Alanna Banta, may use these stored anonymized transcripts as a reference for future graduate studies work, as she considers future research questions that may be relevant to educators.

What if you decide to withdraw your consent to participate? You may withdraw from this study at any time without giving reasons and with no effects on employment or any other services you may be entitled to receive. You may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the student lead, Alanna Banta. If you choose to enter the study and then decide to withdraw at a later time, all data collected about you during your enrolment in the study will be destroyed.

Where can you find study results? Study results will be reported in a publicly-available graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles or presented at academic conferences.

Do you want to receive a copy of the study findings before the findings are made public? You can also choose to provide your contact information at the end of this interview to receive the study findings in order to have an opportunity to comment on the findings before they are made publicly available. Upon receiving the findings, you will be invited to respond to these findings within 7 days in order to comment on the study findings and to identify if there any quotations from your interview that you do not want to appear in the publicly available study findings.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study? If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the student lead, Alanna Banta.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study? If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, please contact the Director, SFU Office of Research Ethics, at dore@sfu.ca or 778-782-6593.

Participant Consent and Signature: Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on your employment, or any services to which you are presently entitled to receive.

- Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this Consent Form for your own records.
- Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.
- You do not waive any of your legal rights by participating in this study.

_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date (YYYY/MM/DD)
_____	
Printed Name of Participant	

Appendix D.

Phenomenological Interview Questions & Rationale

First Interview

While following a customized replication approach (Carl & Ravitch, 2021), the initial questions used to guide this interview were as follows:

1. When you hear the phrase “fears of failure” in the context of students, what does it mean to you?

   This first question is meant to invite participants to share the context surrounding their understanding of student fears of failure. Situating the participant’s insights context is the crux of the first interview (Seidman, 2006), as it allows me as a researcher to understand how they have come to construct their perception on fears of failure. If teacher participants did identify a specific context that they thought of regarding student fears of failure, this part of their response would highlight the specific places and times that the teacher participant saw as important context for understanding student fears of failure from their experience. In asking “what does it mean to you,” I sought to clarify the aspect of teacher’s perceptions that dealt with their “beliefs” (Novita et al., 2022, p.2) about what student fears of failure were without having to be tied to a specific experience with a student.

2. In what ways have you encountered students who fear failure? What was their fear of failure was about?

   This second question established the first part of perception, recognition of a reality (Collins, 2024b), in exploring a teacher’s initial perceptions of how they recognize if a student fears failure or not (e.g. do they look at students’ body language? listen to verbal communication from students?). For participants who have encountered students who they think fear failure, asking them to ‘recall what it was about’ invited participants to reflect on the second aspect of perception, in exploring their “assumptions” (Giles & Tunks, 2015, p.523), about what the failure was that students were afraid of in that moment and what may have caused those fears. Asking teachers to ‘recall’ this experience more generally, allowed them to choose the contextual details that they feel are relevant. Both the details participants include and the ones that they did not

pointed to the assumptions they may made in the moment, and helped to answer what perception these teacher participants have regarding students' fears of failure.

a. If you haven't had this experience, how do you know you haven't encountered students who fear failure?

Through inviting teacher participants who may not feel that they have encountered students who have feared failure to explain their thought process for why they have not, still helped reveal the way teachers perceived students' fears of failure (e.g. do they view fears of failure as non-existent? Or not their responsibility to think about?) or other contextual factors of their role (e.g. do they not have enough time to think about it?)

3. Have you thought about students' fears of failure before and if so, what made you think about it?

This question sought to help me understand what situations or experiences may have prompted participants to consider students' fears of failure. It is the details of these situations that gave context for what spaces the teacher participant were familiar with and the interactions the teacher has had (e.g. do they attend pro-d about this topic? do they talk with colleagues frequently about student fears of failure?). This contextualization of experiences is central not only to PI (Seidman, 2006), but also social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and also helps to set the foundation for the social constructionist approach to reflexive thematic analysis that looks at participant responses in light of underlying social factors (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Asking 'what made you think about it?' also related to teacher perceptions of student fears of failure, in exploring what teachers' assumed about students fears of failure (e.g. Does the teacher recall conversations with students and views student fears of failure as a shared teacher-student responsibility? Does the teacher recall a specific policy that was implemented and view student failures as connected to systemic factors?).

4. What have you observed any impact of these fears of failure on your students if any?

   Exploring the 'observations' of teacher participants, more specifically sought to understand how teachers' perceived, as in recognized, student fears of failure (e.g. what situations have they been in when they have seen students fear failure? Is student fear of failure something that can be seen?). Exploring the 'impact' teachers' have observed asked teacher participants to consider their assumptions about student fears of failure (e.g. is it a negative emotion? is it a helpful tool that motivates students?). However, by asking teachers 'have you observed any impact...' rather than 'what is the impact…' the researcher also invited the possibility that teachers may not be aware of student fears of failure or may view fears of failure as nonexistent in the lives of the students they interact with. Either possibility still spoke to the perceptions, which includes the "assumptions" (Giles & Tunks, 2015, p.523) and "beliefs" (Novita et al., 2022, p.2), of the teacher participant regarding student fears of failure.

   a. What was happening at the time you noticed the impact of these fears of failure?

      Through asking participants to recount "what was happening at the time you noticed," I am able to gain even more insight into the contextual details of the teacher participant's surroundings (e.g. do they spend a lot of time interacting with students at lunch while on supervision vs. in the classroom when they're doing more direct instruction style teaching?) and also what situations teacher participants cite as linked to student fears of failure (e.g. are teachers more aware of students' fears of failure during assessments because they have more time to observe student's responses?). This question specifically helps to refine my understanding of teacher participant's perception in terms of their process of "notic[ing]" (Collins, 2024b, para.2) students' fears of failure.

   b. If student fears of failure haven't had an impact on the students you've observed, why do you think that is?

      This question centers around asking teacher participants their rationale for "why" they believe students' fears of failure have not had an impact. In asking "why," I sought to gain insight into the "beliefs"

(Novita et al., 2022, p.2) aspect of participants surrounding student fears of failure (e.g. do teachers not believe that student fears of failure have a high cost and therefore do not make mental note of their impact on students? Or, do teacher participants comment on not being able to know the impact of students' fears of failure because this is something that only students can know for themselves? Do they situate the impact of student fears of failure as observable or only internal within the student?)

5. When I write up this study's findings, what would you want those reading to know about you as a teacher, why you became an independent high school teacher, or why you work at this school, if anything?

   Rather than asking teacher participants a set list of questions related to demographics (e.g. age, educational background, gender), asking this question in an open-ended format allows participants to choose the aspects of themselves that they feel is most relevant contextual information for those who will read this study. This open-ended invitation to hear participants' contextualization of their own experiences follows Seidman's (2006) recommendations for phenomenological interviews. Noticing trends in the contextual information teacher participants choose to reveal could point to how teacher participants situate themselves in relation to students fears of failure and could speak to the first research question of how teachers perceive student fears of failure (e.g. do they tell their own story of overcoming their fears of failure to become a teacher and in doing so situate fears of failure as a common experience between teachers and students?).

Second Interview

While following a customized replication approach (Carl & Ravitch, 2021), the initial questions used to guide this interview were:

1. If a student comes to you and says that they fear that they are going to fail, what would be your response to them? Why would that be your response?

   This first question was meant to invite the participant to consider this hypothetical moment as an entry way into their own experiences with students who fear failure. In asking teacher participants 'what would be your response', the word 'response' allows participants to identify whatever teaching practice

they feel is relevant to the situation. These participant insights to this question explored the teaching practices they considered relevant to address, or respond to (Cox, 2009b; Lutovac & Flores, 2022), students' fears of failure. The second part of this question that asked teacher participants 'why that would that be your response,' not only to ensure that I was not making assumptions about participant rationales for their actions, but also to connect the practices teachers use to address students fears of failure with the way they perceived student fears of failure (e.g. if a teacher says that they would talk with the student individually, they may explain that they would respond this way because they didn't want to embarrass the student in front of their peers. In doing so, the teacher could highlight both the practice used to address the fear of failure through conversation, but also the way they view student fears of failure as stigmatized in the classroom). Teacher explanations of why they responded a certain way may also invite them to share about experiences that were similar to the hypothetical situation.

2. Do you recall a case in your recent teaching experience when a student has come to you and said that they fear that they are going to fail?

   If participants have not already started sharing the details of their experiences, which is the focus of the second PI interview (Seidman, 2006), this question shifts the conversation from the hypothetical to focus on the teacher's specific experiences. The word "recent" is included to help both the participant and the researcher focus on the current experiences of the teaching participants that are reflective of their current teaching role.

   i. If so, how would you describe the situation?

      Asking participants 'what was the case' encourages participants to describe in specifically whatever details they feel are relevant. Because the question is open-ended, where participants start to describe their experience may speak to how they perceive student fears of failure (e.g. do they start recounting their interaction with the student who feared failure with something they did or something the student did and therefore connect student fears of failure with individual actions?). This open-ended questioning also aligns with the goal of PI's in allowing participants to "impart meaning" to their experiences by choosing what details to share as part of their retelling of these experiences (Seidman, 2006, p.19).

i. What teaching practices did you find worked well to address the student's fears of failure in that situation? Why do you think those practices worked well?

In using the word 'practices' rather than any specific teaching strategy or approach, participants can include the details of addressing student fears of failure that are relevant from their perspective in the situation they are describing. However, because of the subjectivity involved in defining what 'working well' may mean, this question also invites teachers to share not only the teaching practices they use to respond to student fears of failure, but also what practices they view as favoured over others in the moment. This aspect of the question also adds more detail to the recounting of their experience, as it may introduce more specifics of what was happening in the moment of the experience, and adds nuance to the data collected on addressing student fears of failure by recognizing that not all practices teachers use may be equally valuable in every situation

ii. How did you know what practices to use when responding to this student?

This question focuses on gaining even more details into the participant's experience with the student who feared failure (e.g. Did the student have a specific mannerism that prompted their use of a specific teaching practice?) and their experience as a teacher in the school (Did they have a conversation with an administrator that day that recommended they use that practice?). These details allow the researcher to gain insight into the underlying factors that explain how teachers address students fears of failure, not just with a specific action in a moment, but also throughout their daily teaching interactions.

b. If not, are there any other recent cases when you responded to a student's fears of failure? If so, how would you describe the situation?

This question allowed participant to share other experiences that may not have been prompted by the question that asks about a student coming to the teacher and telling the teacher that they're afraid of failing. In doing

so, teachers who perceived student fears of failure as being address outside of a conversational setting, or as an interaction not initiated by the student, could also share their experiences.

i. What teaching practices did you find worked well to address the student's fears of failure in that situation? Why do you think those practices worked well?

This sub-question is identical to the previous sub-questions for question 2a(i). As such, the rationale for the sub-question is identical to that of 2a(i).

ii. How did you know what practices to use when responding to this student?

This sub-question is identical to the previous sub-questions for question 2a(ii). As such, the rationale for the sub-question is identical to that of 2a(ii).

2. From your experience, are any barriers that arise when responding to students' fears of failure? If so, can you describe what barriers you encounter?

In the context of a social constructionist perspective, each individual navigates within their given roles in an institution (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Because of this context, how teachers address students' fears of failure encapsulated not only their direct actions (e.g. conversations with students, structuring assessments etc.), but also the ways that they worked within or to overcome the limitations and pressures of their teaching role to help lessen students' fears of failure. This question then allowed teachers to speak to aspects of their experiences with students who fear failure with these structural-related factors in mind (e.g. perhaps a participant wants to have one-on-one conversations with all students who stop handing in assignments because of fears of failure, but they don't feel like they have the time to do so. As a result, maybe they choose to respond to a student's fear of failure through a sticky note message to save time even though they do not view it as the ideal teaching practice to address these fears).

Third Interview

While following a customized replication approach (Carl & Ravitch, 2021), the initial questions used to guide this interview were:

1. After sharing about your experiences with students, how do you make sense of student fears of failure? How will you know that a student is afraid of failing?

   Asking teacher participants to state how they made sense of student fears of failure was left open-ended to allow participants to speak about the causes of student fears of failure, the impact of students fears of failure, their own role in students fears of failure, etc. All of these responses were used to explore participant's perceptions of student fears of failure, as the first component of perception is the "assumptions" (Giles & Tunks, 2015, p.523) and "beliefs" (Novita et al., 2022, p.2) participants have about a phenomenon. The follow-up question, asked participants to form a guiding principle for how they would identify students fears of failure in the future. Their responses were used to address the second aspect of perception, "recognition" (Collins, 2024b, para.2).

2. After sharing your experiences with students who fear failure, are there ways that you wish you responded to student fears of failure differently?

   This question was meant to invite teachers to critically reflect on their own actions and the teaching practices that they used to address with students who fear failure. In getting teachers to evaluate their actions in the experiences they shared, teachers were given the opportunity to speak to any ways that they thought students' fears of failure could be addressed better and to provide an explanation for why their use of teaching practices may have shifted (e.g. maybe a teacher chose not to accept a student's late assignment despite the student voicing that they were afraid of failing because they thought it would help the student grow. However, maybe after reflection they realize that they should've responded by being flexible with deadlines because they've come to see the negative effect of students' fears of failure). This recognition that participant perspectives were malleable also aligned with Merriam's (1998) approach to case-studies, as "reality…is ever-changing…not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon" (p.202). In explaining why the teaching practices they used to address student failure shifted, if at all, their perceptions of students' fears could also be interrogated (e.g. as in the previous example, maybe after reflecting on their experiences the teacher then

situated students' fears of failure as a mental health concern instead of just a passing experience of the student).

3. Based on your experiences, what do you see as your role as a high school teacher in addressing students fears of failure?

   By asking participants to think about the role of a high school teacher specifically, teacher participants were encouraged to consider what they saw as their professional responsibility to students who fear failure. As a result, this question invites discussion specifically about the "high school teachers from an independent school," aspect of especially the second research question. Participants could also explain how they saw themselves as situated to address student fears of failure in relation to other members of the school community. This question also aligned with the social constructionist framework and case-study focus in this study, as individuals are influenced by and influence those around them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), especially when fulfilling a particular institutional role (Berger & Luckman, 1966).

4. To what extent do you think that there is a specific teaching practice that high school teachers can use to address student fears of failure effectively? How would you see these practices being implemented?

   This question again invited responses that could address both research questions. Participants' responses to the effectiveness of various practices in dealing with students' fears of failure, allowed the researcher to understand if they generalized their own use of teaching practice to independent high school teachers as a whole, and if they viewed all teaching practices as equally adequate to address students' fears of failure. This insight become valuable in determining if teachers across the participant sample agree on what teaching practices are to be prioritized, could help those reading this research explore how to focus on ensuring new teacher candidates or in-service teachers have adequate training in these areas. However, this question also invited teacher participants to explore how stable and universal their perceptions of students' fears of failure were (e.g. is the fear of failure and the strategies to address it particular to a specific demographic of students? is it situation or teacher specific?). Knowing how stable or universal teachers viewed students' fears of failure could then provide the researcher with information on what the teachers perceive, or believe about (Novita et al., 2022, p.2), students' fears of failure.

Appendix E.

Vignette Response Questions & Rationale

Vignette Response Survey

Written responses to vignettes were collected through SurveyMonkey. Participants only saw the following information if they have indicated their consent to participate after reading the online survey consent form that will be the landing page of this survey. The content of the survey after the consent form was as follows.

Instructions. 5 hypothetical vignettes will be presented using a hypothetical student and teacher. After each vignette you will be asked 2 questions: *1) How would you address this student's fears of failure and why would you respond that way? 2) In what ways does this situation remind you of an experience you've had?* If the vignette in no way corresponds to your experience, you can either comment on how your experience differs from the vignette or move on to the next vignette.

Vignette #1. A student in a class is working on an assessment and comes to the teacher and says "I'm afraid I'm going to fail and then everyone will know." The teacher responds by asking, "Has that happened to you in the past?" and asks the student questions about the failure the student has experienced.

Questions

1. *How would you address this student's fears of failure and why would you respond that way?*
2. *In what ways does this situation remind you of an experience you've had?*

Vignette #2. A student in a class is working on an assessment and comes to the teacher and says, "I'm afraid I'm going to fail…and then I'll feel terrible about myself." The teacher responds by affirming the strengths of the student and the areas they've demonstrated competency in.

Questions

1. *How would you address this student's fears of failure and why would you respond that way?*
2. *In what ways does this situation remind you of an experience you've had?*

Vignette #3. A student in a class is working on an assessment and comes to the teacher and says, "I'm afraid I'm going to fail…and then I'll never be able to do what I

want to after high school." The teacher responds by suggesting that they meet after class to talk more about it.

Questions

1. *How would you address this student's fears of failure and why would you respond that way?*
2. *In what ways does this situation remind you of an experience you've had?*

Vignette #4. A student in a class is working on an assessment and comes to the teacher and says, "I'm afraid I'm going to fail…and then no one will want to hang out with me or listen to what I have to say." The teacher responds by sharing stories about moments from their own life when they failed or felt afraid of failing.

Questions

1. *How would you address this student's fears of failure and why would you respond that way?*
2. *In what ways does this situation remind you of an experience you've had?*

Vignette #5. A student in a class is working on an assessment and comes to the teacher and says, "I'm afraid I'm going to fail….and then my parents will know." The teacher responds by reframing failure in a positive light and emphasizing that failure is a necessary part of learning.

Questions

1. *How would you address this student's fears of failure and why would you respond that way?*
2. *In what ways does this situation remind you of an experience you've had?*

Final Screen Before Responses are Submitted:

This is the final screen before your responses are submitted. Please note, if you have chosen to include your contact information at the beginning of this survey, your survey responses will be identifiable to the research team.

If you would like to withdraw from the study at this time, please exit the survey now without clicking "done" to ensure your responses are not to be recorded in the survey. For those have decided to include their contact information as part of their survey responses, should you choose to later withdraw from the study at any time all of your responses and contact information collected during your enrolment in the study will be destroyed. For those who did not choose to include their contact information, once you press "done", we will not be able to withdraw your responses because your responses will not be identifiable.

Rationale for Questions asked in Vignette Response

After each vignette, participants will be asked the following two questions:

1. How would you address this student's fear of failure and why would you respond that way?

   This question focuses primarily on the second research question in asking participants to reflect on what teaching practices they would use to address, as in respond to (Cox, 2009b; Lutovac & Flores, 2022), a student's fears of failure. The words 'address' and 'respond' are both included in this question, as 'address' might not be as familiar of a word to educators but is core to this study. The word 'respond' then allows educators who did not understand what was meant by 'address' could still answer this question and accounts for the fact that participants are not able to ask the researcher clarification questions if the vignettes are conducted remotely (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). Asking educators 'why would you respond that way' allows the teacher to explain not just what actions they would do but the rationale behind these actions. This rationale not only provides context for the way factors surrounding the situation may have impacted teacher responses, which emphasizes the social constructionist emphasis on no individual acting in isolation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), but also seeks to specify the process they engage in to address student fears.

2. Have you experienced a situation like this? If so, what happened? If not, does reading this situation remind you of any experience you've had? What happened?

   The first part of this question 'have you experienced a situation like this,' first seeks to establish the credibility of the vignette in the participant being able to identify with the events in the vignette (Skilling & Stylianides, 2020). Additionally, this question seeks to encourage participants to share the details of their own experiences with students who fear failure. Because the questions are open-ended in asking 'what happened,' the details participants include or exclude can speak to the way they perceive student fears of failure (e.g. do they start with the student because they first noticed the student's fearful facial expression, and therefore view fears of failure as an emotional experience for students?). The open-ended nature of the question also allows participants to include the contextual details they view as relevant, which can also speak to their perception of student fears of failure (e.g. does the teacher participant

connect the student's fear of failure to an interaction the student had with their parent earlier that morning, and therefore assume that the fears of failure are connected to parental influence?).

Rationale for Vignette Construction: According to studies from the literature review that supported different types of students fears of failure.

5 sub-fears from Conroy (2001)'s research that make up a person's fear of failure

1. Vignette #1: "Fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment" (Conroy, 2001, p.431; affirmed by Choi, 2021; McGregor & Elliot, 2005; Niederkofler, 2015; Vanderhoven et al., 2012; Whittle et al., 2020)
2. Vignette #2: "Fears of devaluing one's self-estimate" (Conroy, 2001, p.431; affirmed by Covington, 1992; Simpson & Maltese, 2017; Whittle et al., 2020)
3. Vignette #3: "Fears of having an uncertain future" (Conroy, 2001, p.431; affirmed by Cox, 2009)
4. Vignette #4: "Fears of important others losing interest" (Conroy, 2001, p.431; affirmed by Bartels & Ryan, 2013)
5. Vignette #5: "Fears of upsetting important others" (Conroy, 2001, p.431; affirmed by Bartels & Ryan, 2013; Conroy, 2003; Niederkofler, 2015; Nunes et al., 2022; Pope, 2001; Whittle et al., 2020)

Studies supporting different ways that teachers could address student fears of failure:

1. Vignette #1: Understanding of past student history (Cox, 2009a)
2. Vignette #2: Affirming student strengths (Cox, 2009a; Stipek, 2013)
3. Vignette #3: One-on-one meetings (Cox, 2009a; Cox, 2009b)
4. Vignette #4: Sharing own story (Fremantle & Kearney, 2015; Nunes et al., 2022; Shepherd et al., 2020)
5. Vignette #5: Reframing failure as necessary to learning and talking about failure (Fremantle & Kearney, 2016; Nunes et al., 2022; Vehkakoski, 2018; Whittle et al., 2020)

Follow-Up Interview with Participant After Vignette Response: Questions & Rationale

1. Previous to these vignettes, have you thought about students' fears of failure before? If so, what made you think about it? If not, why not?

*This question focused on contextualizing participant responses, which is central to case-study methodologies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Additionally, this question invited participants to share if it is the vignette that prompted their reflection on students fears of failure or if these experiences preceded reading the vignettes. This information was essential to determine the credibility and confirmability of findings in being transparent about how the data gathered may affect the data collection process (*Carl & Ravitch, 2021*). Asking 'what made you think about it' not only contextualized the participant's experiences in exploring what spaces teacher participants find themselves in (e.g. Pro-D workshops, staff meetings, whole-classroom discussions), but also related to teacher perceptions of student fears of failure, in exploring what teachers' assume about students fears of failure (e.g. do student fears of failure center around conversations? Peer interactions that prompt strong emotions of fear?)*

2. In response to vignette number _____, you mentioned <u>teaching practice</u>, can you tell me a bit more about what that means to you?

By asking for clarification about what a specific teaching practice or term means to the participant, I sought to gain more insight into the details of the participant's experience (Seidman, 2006). Doing so also helped to answer the question of 'how independent high school teachers address student fears of failure' by not only learning the name of the practice teachers used but also what this practice looked like from the participant perspective. In clarifying what a teaching practice was according to the participant, I also embed a form of member checking into the interview itself (LaCroix, 2023; Lincoln et al., 1985).

3. Do you recall a situation in your recent teaching experience when you a student has come to you and said that they are afraid of failing?

One challenge of vignette research can be participants not always interpreting the vignette as anticipated (Schoenberg & Ravdal, 2000). To address this limitation, if participants comment on areas of confusion, the question will be re-worded verbally and asked again following the same question as in the PI's (Seidman,2006). If the participant does not know how to respond because they haven't encountered a student who fears failure, the question 'how do you know you haven't encountered students who fear

failure' will still allow the researcher to gain insight into how the participant perceives students fears of failure (e.g. perhaps the participant views students fears of failure as non-existent and therefore non-identifiable or a participant may assume that students are not afraid of failure because failure doesn't have a negative connotation for the students they interact with).

a. If so, how would you describe that situation?

   The rationale for this question is identical to that of the PI Second Interview, Question 2a. For detailed rationale for this question please refer to the PI rationales.

   i. What teaching practices did you find worked well to address the student's fears of failure in that situation? Why do you think those practices worked well?

      The rationale for this question is identical to that of the PI Second Interview, Question 2ai. For detailed rationale for this question please refer to the PI rationales.

   ii. How did you know what to do when responding to this student?

      The rationale for this question is identical to that of the PI Second Interview, Question 2aii. For detailed rationale for this question please refer to the PI rationales.

b. If not, are there any recent situation when you responded to students' fears of failure that you didn't mention in your written response but would like ot share? If so, how would you describe the situation?

   The rationale for this question is identical to that of the PI Second Interview, Question 2b. For detailed rationale for this question please refer to the PI rationales.

   i. What teaching practices did you find worked well to address the student's fears of failure in that situation? Why do you think those practices worked well?

      The rationale for this question is identical to that of the PI Second Interview, Question 2bi. For detailed rationale for this question please refer to the PI rationales.

ii. How did you know what to do when responding to this student?

The rationale for this question is identical to that of the PI Second Interview, Question 2bii. For detailed rationale for this question please refer to the PI rationales.

4. In response to vignette number ____, you mentioned that the vignette did not align with your experience. Can you tell me more about that?

This question prioritized participant experiences in ensuring that if participants did not see themselves in the hypothetical situations, they still had an avenue to share about the students they've encountered who may fear failure and the teaching practices they used in response. These teaching practices and how the practices were implemented were used to answer the research question about how teachers address student fears of failure.

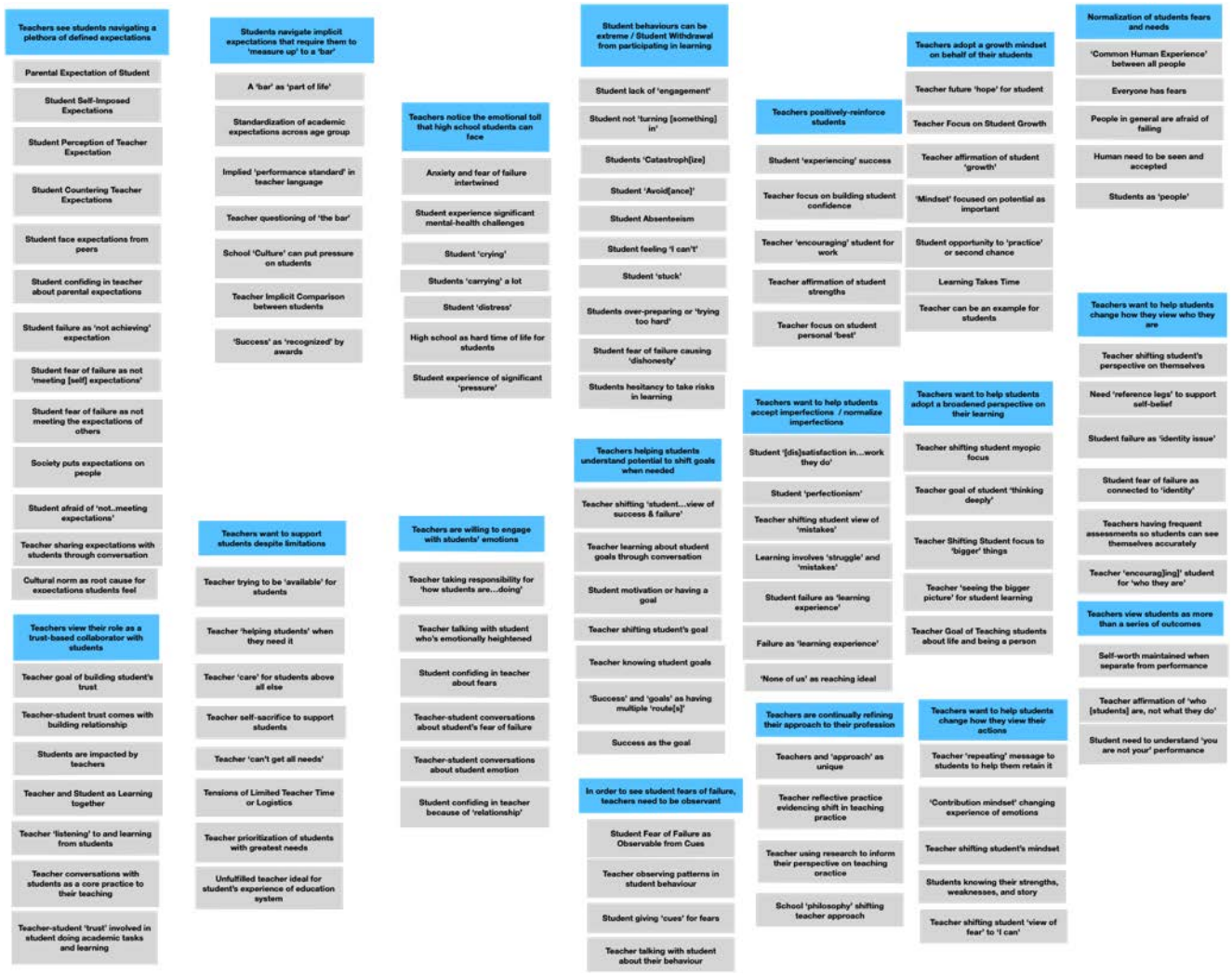
Appendix F.

Theming Process

Figure F.1. Open Codes Used in Code Mapping

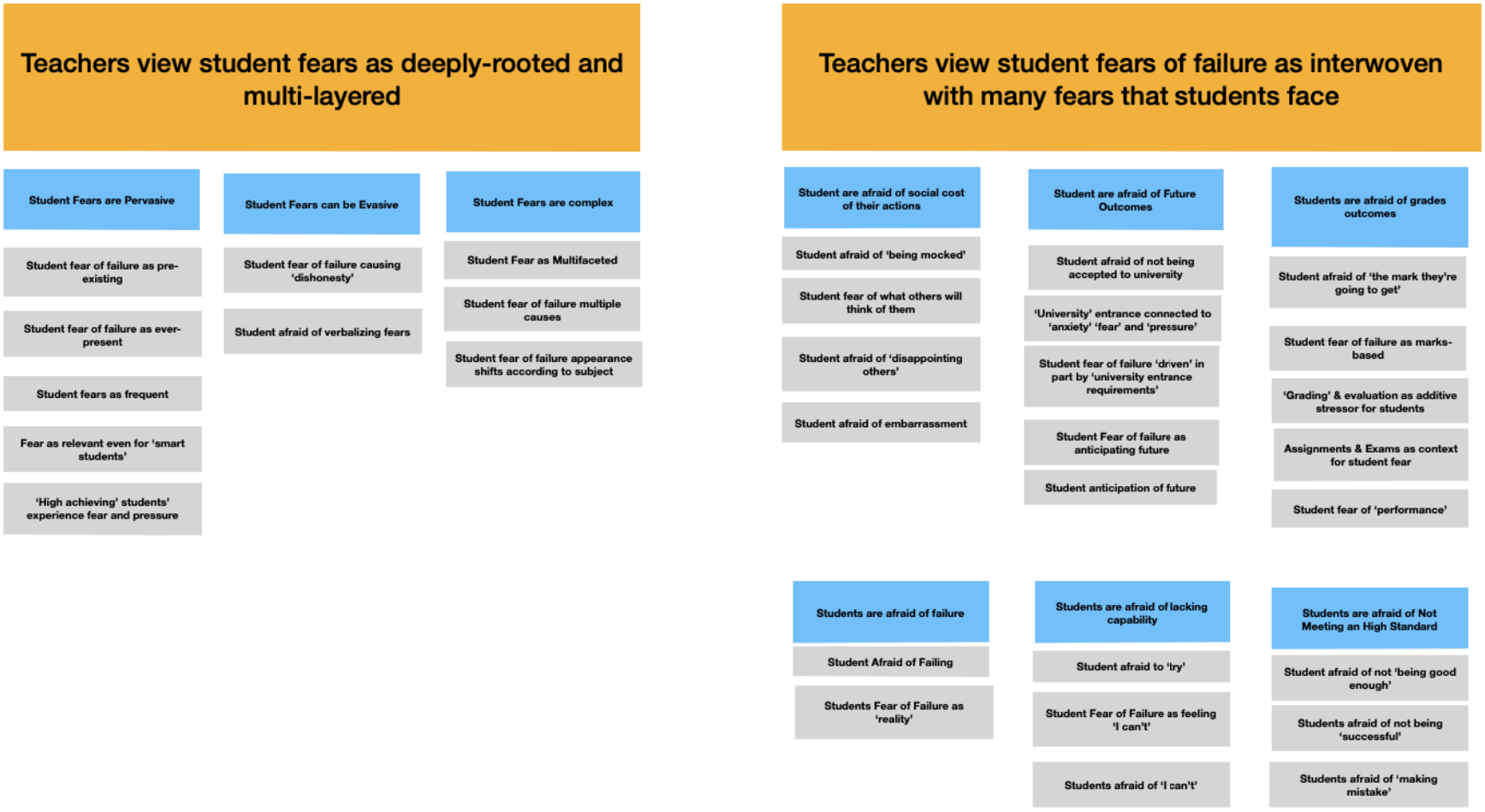

Teacher 'clear communication' of expectations to reduce fear
Teacher 'helping students' when they need it
Teacher 'seeing the bigger picture' for student learning
Teacher awareness of student home-life situation
Teacher can be an example for students
Teacher checking in with each student to learn 'how [they're] doing'
Teacher Fears of failure
Teacher Goal of Teaching students about life and being a person
Teacher observing patterns in student behaviour
Teacher reinforcing student 'responsibility'
Teacher talking with student who's emotionally heightened
Teacher-student conversations about student's fear of failure
Tensions of Limited Teacher Time or Logistics
'Mindset' focused on potential as important
Collaborative planning for student
Teacher focus on student collaboration
Teacher goal of student 'thinking deeply'
Fear as something 'we should push through'
Students afraid of 'making mistake'
Student fear of 'performance'
Student fear of failure as not meeting the expectations of others
Students as 'people'
Teacher questioning of 'the bar'
Curricular Skills
Everyone has fears
Student fear of failure as ever-present
Grades given 'weight' by people
School 'Culture' can put pressure on students
Society puts expectations on people
Student 'stuck'
Student '[dis]satisfaction in…work they do'
Student afraid of 'disappointing others'
Student confiding in teacher because of 'relationship'
Students Fear of Failure as 'genuine'
Student Fear of Failure as feeling 'I can't'
Student fears as frequent
Student home life challenges
Student struggles with 'time management'
Student face expectations from peers
Teacher learning about student goals through conversation
Teacher prioritization of students with greatest needs
Student afraid of 'not..meeting expectations'
Student Fear of failure as anticipating future
Student fear of failure identified through 'interaction' and conversation with teacher
Teacher tension with grading
Teachers having frequent assessments so students can see themselves accurately
Teacher understanding 'why' for student
Teacher future 'hope' for student
Teacher knowing student goals
Teacher knowledge of student history at school
Teacher personal experience shaped their perspective
Teacher sharing their 'failures' as giving 'hope' to students
Teacher shifting student's mindset
Unfulfilled teacher ideal for student's experience of education system
'Common Human Experience' between all people
'Success' and 'goals' as having multiple 'route[s]'
'University' entrance connected to 'anxiety' 'fear' and 'pressure'
Failure as 'learning experience'
Fear of unknown as underlying all fears
High school as hard time of life for students
Student failure as 'identity issue'
Teacher-student 'trust' involved in student doing academic tasks and learning
Teacher shifting 'student…view of success & failure'
Teacher trying to be 'available' for students
Grading is subjective
Student afraid of not 'being good enough'
Student fear of failure as connected to 'identity'
'Success' as 'recognized' by awards
Fear as relevant even for 'smart students'
Teacher empathy with student 'struggle'
Making sure students 'seen,' 'loved' and 'accepted' as priority
Self-worth maintained when separate from performance
Student 'frustration' or dislike of teacher task
Student 'frustration' or dislike of teacher task
Student 'self-advocacy' as a difficult skill they need
Student 'struggle…with academics'
Student Absenteeism
Student afraid of 'the mark they're going to get'
Student experience of significant 'pressure'
Student failure as 'identity issue'
Student failure as 'learning experience'
Student fear of failure as perception-based
Student fear of failure as pre-existing
Student giving 'cues' for fears
Student opportunity to 'practice' or second chance
Student reliance on other's help because of fears
Teacher-student 'connection' varies student to student
Learning Takes Time
Report Cards Prompting Teacher-Student Dialogue
Student afraid of not being accepted to university
Student fear of failure as marks-based
Teacher structuring student approach to task so they can demonstrate learning
Student fear of failure causing 'dishonesty'
Teacher Fears [general]
Student past experiences with assessments having negative emotional impact
Student fear of failure multiple causes
Student fear of what others will think of them
Students knowing their strengths, weaknesses, and story
Student lack of 'engagement'
Student not 'turning [something] in'
Teacher 'encourag]ing]' student for 'who they are'
Teacher addressing 'negative voices' in the class
Teacher asking student 'worse case scenario' to lessen fear
Teacher assessment creation focusing on core competencies
Teacher challenge in shifting student perspective
Teacher contextualizing student performance
Teacher discouraging 'competition' between students
Teacher gaining insight into student from colleagues
Teacher goal of building student's trust
Teacher having to 'label' and 'evaluate' student work as part of their job
Teacher Implicit Comparison between students
Teacher noticing student response to grades
Teacher observing student challenge with academics
Teacher reinforcing student 'agency'
Teacher sharing expectations with students through conversation
Teacher shifting student 'view of fear' to 'I can'
Teacher shifting student view of 'mistakes'
Teacher talking with student about their behaviour
Students need to perceive 'class' environment as 'safe'
Students afraid of not being 'successful'

Figure F.2. Example of Cluster Headings in Process



Note: Cluster headings are in blue, and codes are grey

Figure F.3. Example of themes with clusters and codes



Note: Theme headings are orange, cluster headings are blue, and codes are grey

Figure F.4. Example of Theme Previous to Review

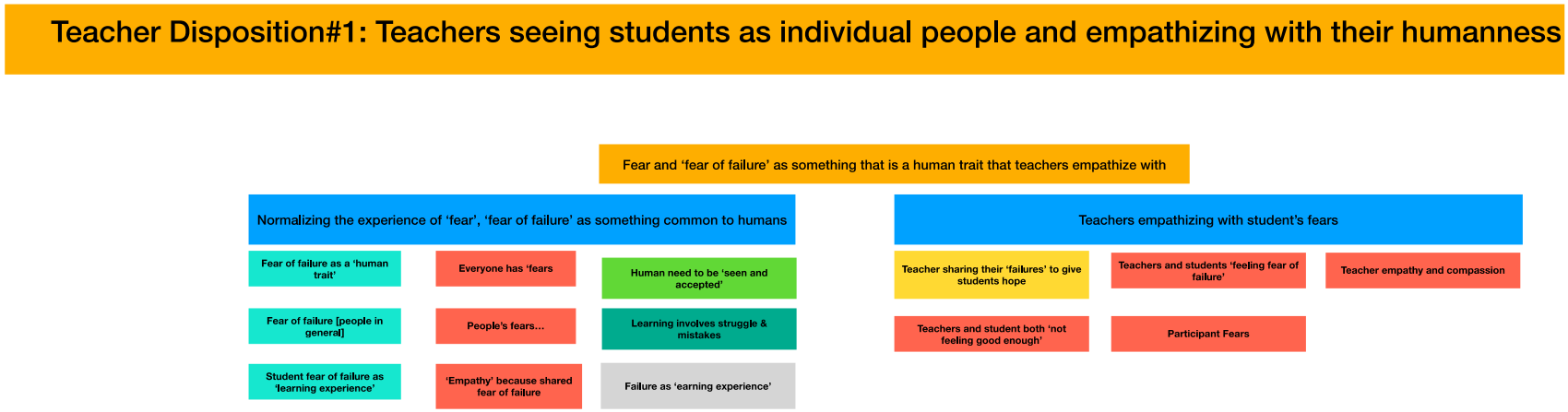


Figure F.5. Example of Theme After Review

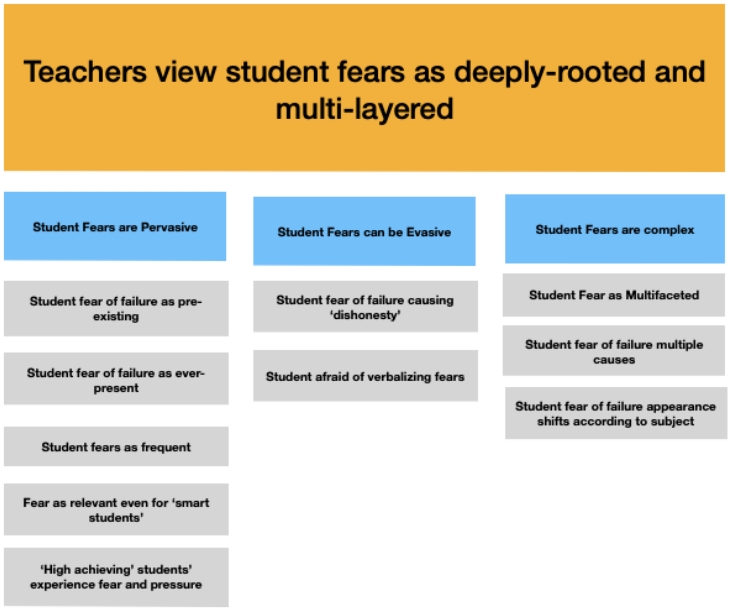
Note: Theme heading is in orange, sub-theme heading is in bright yellow, blue headings are cluster headings and grey is used to represent codes.

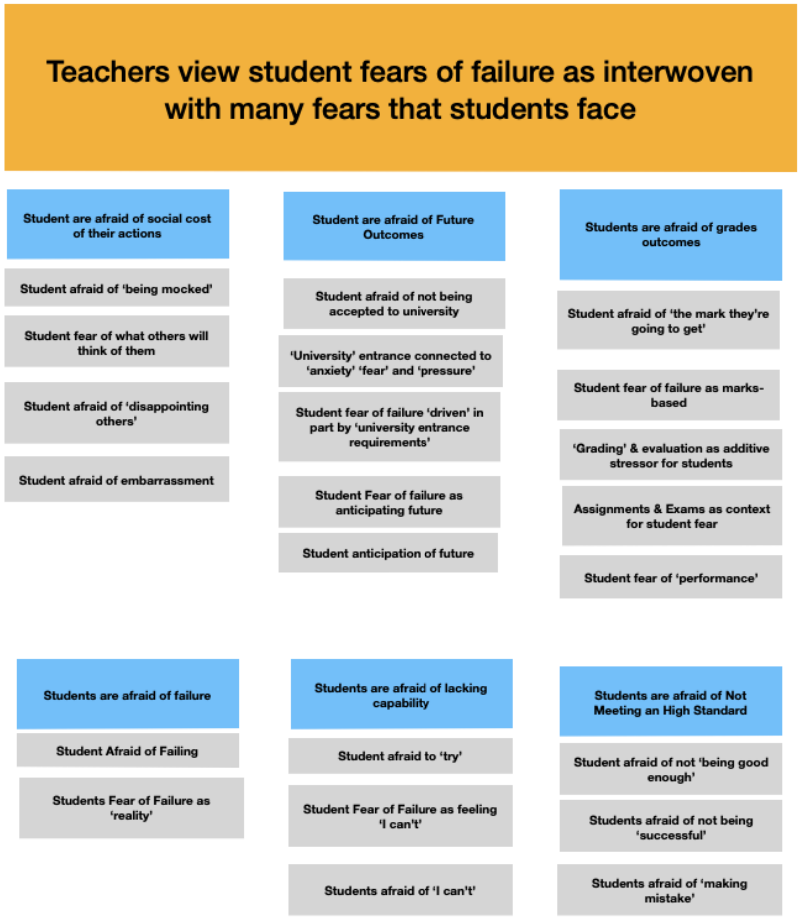
Figure F.5. Example of Theme After Review

Note: Theme heading is in orange, sub-theme heading is in bright yellow, blue headings are cluster headings and grey is used to represent codes.

Figure F.6. Finalized Code Map

The following figures make up the code map that I used to from the themes for this study. The grey rectangles are the codes used, the light blue rectangles are the cluster headings, the light-yellow rectangles are sub-themes and the orange rectangles are theme headings.





Teachers view students' fears as intertwined with a plethora of expectations but see this dynamic as malleable

Teachers recognize that students face a wide variety of expectations from a wide variety of sources

- **Students face their own expectations**
  - Student Self-Imposed Expectations
  - Student '[dis]satisfaction in...work they do'
  - Student 'perfectionism'
  - Student Failure as associated with their expectation of marks
- **Students face the expectations of significant others in their life**
  - Student confiding in teacher about parental expectations
  - Parental Expectation of Student
  - Student face expectations from peers
- **Students face expectations that are ingrained in 'culture' as a whole**
  - Cultural norm as root cause for expectations students feel
  - School 'Culture' can convey expectations to students
  - Society puts expectations on people
  - Student failure as 'not achieving' expectation
- **Students encounter expectations from teachers - whether implicit or explicit**
  - Student Perception of Teacher Expectation
  - Implied 'performance standard' in teacher language
  - Student Countering Teacher Expectations
  - Teacher Implicit Comparison between students
  - Standardization of academic expectations across student age group
  - Teacher 'expectation' for students
- **Students navigate expectations that are valourized**
  - 'Success' as 'recognized' by awards
  - Feedback as positive when criteria met

Teachers view expectations as connected to students' fears, but also the potential for change

- **Student fears are connected to the expectations they experience**
  - Student fear of failure as not meeting the expectations of others
  - Student afraid of 'not..meeting expectations'
  - Student fear of failure as not 'meeting [self] expectations'
- **Teachers recognize transparent communication of expectations could impact fears**
  - Teacher 'clear communication' of expectations to reduce fear
  - Teacher clarifying expectations with students through conversation
  - 'Clarity' needed to lessen fears
  - Fear of unknown as underlying all fears
  - 'Clarity' needed to lessen fears
- **Teachers push back against some types of expectations for students, especially grades**
  - Teacher questioning of 'the bar'
  - Teacher having to 'label' and 'evaluate' student work as part of their job
  - Teacher tension with grading
  - Grading is subjective
  - Grades given 'weight' by people
  - Teachers view 'success' as relative

More than a teaching practice: teachers want to facilitate student's emotional well-being through their dedication to walking with students as they navigate through fear

Teachers are a dedicated collaborator with students

- Teachers view their role as a trust-based collaborator with students
  - Teacher goal of building student's trust
  - Teacher-student trust comes with building relationship
  - Students are impacted by teachers
  - Teacher and Student as Learning together
  - Teacher 'listening' to and learning from students
  - Teacher-student 'trust' involved in student doing academic tasks and learning
  - Student confiding in teacher because of 'relationship'
  - Teacher as 'on [student's] side'
- Teachers want to support students
  - Teacher trying to be 'available' for students
  - Teacher 'helping students' when they need it
  - Teacher 'care' for students above all else
- Teachers face limitations in supporting student needs
  - Teacher prioritization of students with greatest needs
  - Teacher 'can't get all needs'
  - Teacher self-sacrifice to support students
  - Tensions of Limited Teacher Time or Logistics
  - Unfulfilled teacher ideal for student's experience of education system

Teachers are places of safety for students in the emotions they have, including their fears

- Teachers are willing to engage with students' emotions
  - Teacher taking responsibility for 'how students are…doing'
  - Teacher talking with student who's emotionally heightened
  - Student confiding in teacher about fears
  - Teacher-student conversations about student's fear of failure
  - Teacher-student conversations about student emotion
  - Teacher checking in with each student to learn 'how [they're] doing'
- Teachers notice the emotional toll that high school students can face
  - Anxiety and fear of failure intertwined for students
  - Student experience significant mental-health challenges
  - Student 'crying'
  - Students 'carrying' a lot
  - Student 'distress'
  - High school as hard time of life for students
  - Student experience of significant 'pressure'
- Teachers view students' emotional safety as foundational
  - Student feeling 'loved and accepted' no matter what
  - Making sure students 'seen,' 'loved' and 'accepted' as priority
  - Teacher affirmation of student 'safety'
  - Teacher as 'provider' of emotional safety
  - Teacher as responsible to 'create' and emotionally safe class 'atmosphere'
  - Students need to perceive 'class' environment as 'safe'
  - Teacher directly trying to 'reduce [student] fear' and 'anxiety'
- Teachers support students to move through fear
  - Teacher asking student 'worse case scenario' to lessen fear
  - Teacher teaching 'coping strategies' and 'strategies to help' students
  - Student fear as something to 'push through' because action over comes 'fear'

Teachers focus on shifting students' perspectives rather than just addressing any one situation in relation to students' fears

Teachers normalizing fears and the potential for failures

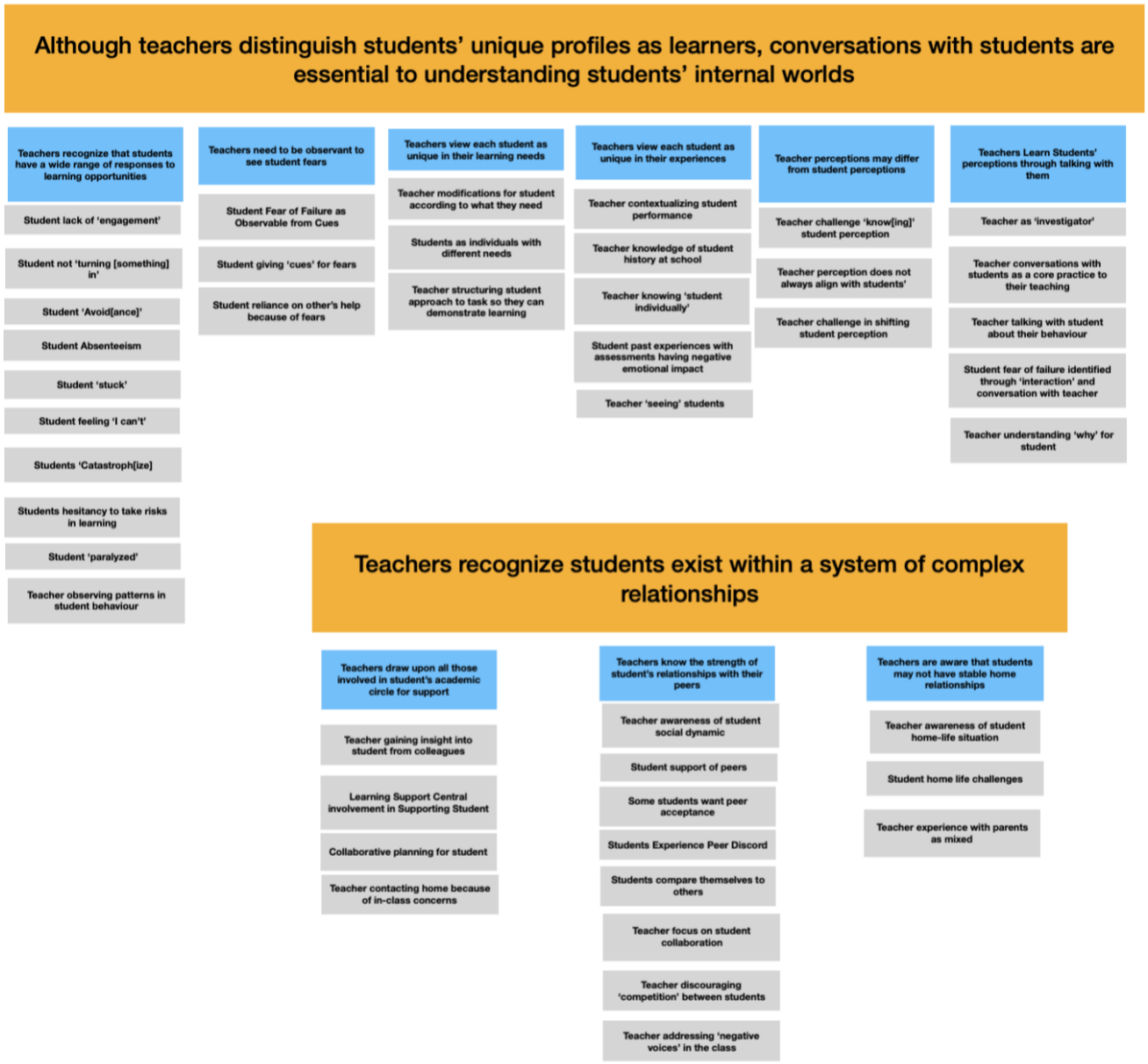
- Teachers relate to student's lives, including their fears
  - Teacher empathy with student emotions
  - Teachers 'empathize' with student experiences
  - Teacher Fears of failure
  - Teacher sharing their 'failures' as giving 'hope' to students
  - Teacher Fears [general]
- Fears and needs exist because of shared humanness
  - 'Common Human Experience' between all people
  - Everyone has fears
  - People in general are afraid of failing
  - Human need to be seen and accepted
  - Students as 'people'
  - People in general fear not being 'good enough'
  - Fear as something people in general 'should push through'
- Teachers want to help students see imperfections as a normal part of learning
  - Teacher shifting student view of 'mistakes'
  - Learning involves 'struggle' and 'mistakes'
  - Student failure as 'learning experience'
  - Failure as 'learning experience'
  - 'None of us' as reaching ideal

Teachers try to shift students' perspective on failure to have a flexible view of themselves as learners

- Student perspective of failure impacts their fear
  - Student fear of failure as perception-based
  - Student 'perception' of failing
  - Student seeing failure as 'temporary' vs. 'permanent'
- Teachers want to help students change how they view who they are
  - Teacher shifting student's perspective on themselves
  - Need 'reference legs' to support self-belief
  - Student failure as 'identity issue'
  - Student fear of failure as connected to 'identity'
  - Students knowing their strengths, weaknesses, and story
  - Student self-esteem & identity connected to grades
  - Teacher 'encourag[ing]' student for 'who they are'
- Teachers learning about and helping shift students goals when needed
  - Teacher learning about student goals through conversation
  - Student motivation or having a goal
  - Teacher shifting student's goal
  - Teacher knowing student goals
  - 'Success' and 'goals' as having multiple 'route[s]'
  - Success as the goal
  - Student goal of 'university' entrance
  - Student Pursuit of Grades
  - Teacher shifting 'student...view of success & failure'
- Teachers want to help students adopt a broadened perspective on their learning
  - Teacher shifting student myopic focus
  - Teacher goal of student 'thinking deeply'
  - Teacher Shifting Student focus to 'bigger' things
  - Teacher 'seeing the bigger picture' for student learning
  - Teacher Goal of Teaching students about life and being a person
  - Teacher using narrative to shift student perspective
- Teachers want to help students change how they view their actions
  - 'Contribution mindset' changing experience of emotions
  - Teacher shifting student's mindset
  - Teacher shifting student 'view of fear' to 'I can'

Teachers can be mirrors of perspectives they want students to have

- Teachers have a growth mindset on behalf of their students
  - Teacher future 'hope' for student
  - Teacher Focus on Student Growth
  - Teacher affirmation of student 'growth'
  - Teachers see 'mindset' focused on potential as important
  - Student opportunity to 'practice' or second chance
  - Teachers think learning takes time
- Teachers are continually refining their approach to their profession- just like they want their students to
  - Teacher reflective practice evidencing shift in teaching practice
  - Teacher using research to inform their perspective on teaching practice
  - Teachers and 'approach' as unique
  - School 'philosophy' shifting teacher approach
  - Teacher can be an example for students
- Teachers view students as more than a series of outcomes
  - Teacher affirmation of 'who [students] are, not what they do'
  - Self-worth maintained when separate from performance
  - Student need to understand 'you are not your' performance
- Teachers positively-reinforce students
  - Student 'experiencing' success
  - Teacher focus on building student confidence
  - Teacher 'encouraging' student for work
  - Teacher affirmation of student strengths
  - Teacher focus on student personal 'best'
- Teachers hold the view of students as capable
  - Teacher asking students questions to help students problem solve for themselves
  - Students as capable of 'hard' things
  - Teacher 'push[ing] students' in their academics
  - Teacher reinforcing student 'responsibility'
  - Teacher reinforcing student 'agency'
  - Student 'self-advocacy' as a difficult skill they need


Although teachers distinguish students' unique profiles as learners, conversations with students are essential to understanding students' internal worlds
Teachers recognize that students have a wide range of responses to learning opportunities
Student lack of 'engagement'
Student not 'turning [something] in'
Student 'Avoid[ance]'
Student Absenteeism
Student 'stuck'
Student feeling 'I can't'
Students 'Catastroph[ize]
Students hesitancy to take risks in learning
Student 'paralyzed'
Teacher observing patterns in student behaviour
Teachers need to be observant to see student fears
Student Fear of Failure as Observable from Cues
Student giving 'cues' for fears
Student reliance on other's help because of fears
Teachers view each student as unique in their learning needs
Teacher modifications for student according to what they need
Students as individuals with different needs
Teacher structuring student approach to task so they can demonstrate learning
Teachers view each student as unique in their experiences
Teacher contextualizing student performance
Teacher knowledge of student history at school
Teacher knowing 'student individually'
Student past experiences with assessments having negative emotional impact
Teacher 'seeing' students
Teacher perceptions may differ from student perceptions
Teacher challenge 'know[ing]' student perception
Teacher perception does not always align with students'
Teacher challenge in shifting student perception
Teachers Learn Students' perceptions through talking with them
Teacher as 'investigator'
Teacher conversations with students as a core practice to their teaching
Teacher talking with student about their behaviour
Student fear of failure identified through 'interaction' and conversation with teacher
Teacher understanding 'why' for student
Teachers recognize students exist within a system of complex relationships
Teachers draw upon all those involved in student's academic circle for support
Teacher gaining insight into student from colleagues
Learning Support Central involvement in Supporting Student
Collaborative planning for student
Teacher contacting home because of in-class concerns
Teachers know the strength of student's relationships with their peers
Teacher awareness of student social dynamic
Student support of peers
Some students want peer acceptance
Students Experience Peer Discord
Students compare themselves to others
Teacher focus on student collaboration
Teacher discouraging 'competition' between students
Teacher addressing 'negative voices' in the class
Teachers are aware that students may not have stable home relationships
Teacher awareness of student home-life situation
Student home life challenges
Teacher experience with parents as mixed

Appendix G.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Table G.1. Findings & Recommendations

Finding	Recommendations
Theme #1: Teachers view Student Fears of Failure as interwoven with many fears that students face	Regular conversations that equip staff on how to respond to student fears, especially the potential for the effects of fears to be cumulative Developing high-school student specific scale or self-assessment for measuring fears of failure in order to gather information on levels of fears of failure students encounter Inclusion of parents in conversations about student fears, encouraging of parent-student dialogue about fear and affirmation of relationship regardless of outcomes, and dialogues between teachers-parents about bigger context for student's learning Facilitating healthy peer relationships through providing opportunities for students to engage with one another with lessened social risk (e.g. ensuring students have at least a few people they feel safe with in a group activity) Targeted support for students that focus on students fears about life after high school through student-friendly workshops Policies surrounding how grades are communicated to students to ensure students feel affirmed as having value as a member of community regardless of grade outcomes Frequent reassurance of students by teachers of security of teacher-student relationship not centering on grade outcomes, especially when teachers give back assessments with grades attached to them Helping students understand potential reasons for insecurity in how they view themselves in relation to student fears, including for high-achieving students
Theme #2: Teachers view students' fears as deeply rooted and multi-layered	More conversations between staff members about what student fears of failure has looked like in their classrooms to help further clarify what these fears mean to staff Discussions with students about how they developed a fear of failure to clarify what this experience means for students and understand student history with fearing failure; adopting a whole-school approach to student fears

	Discussion across teaching staff to ensure all teachers aware of the potential for student avoidance behaviours may be expressions of students' fears. Adopting systems that alert teachers or administrators to these behaviours early on. Ensuring follow-up either by teacher or counselling staff in moments when teachers observe shifts in student posture, student's cheating, and students who are silent in classroom activities, as potential indicators of student fears or fears of failure
Theme #3: Teachers view students' fears as intertwined with a plethora of expectations, but see this dynamic as malleable	
Sub theme #1: Teachers recognize that students face a wide variety of expectations from a wide variety of sources	Conversations with students about their self-expectations and use of self-assessment tools with support to help students reflect on their own expectations Seminars for parents on expectations they have for their children and the ways this could affect their child, especially regarding student fears of failure Teacher inventory of when they praise students as a potential means to implicitly convey expectations; teacher praise of efforts over outcomes
Sub theme #2: Teachers see expectations as connected to students' fears, but also the potential for change.	Re-evaluation of what awards are given and opportunities for students who may not excel academically to be affirmed publicly School-wide assemblies featuring the stories of those who did not attend post-secondary or did not receive acceptance to desired institution Transparency in communication of teacher expectations to students in conversations about behaviour, task descriptions, course outlines, and assessment tools
Theme #4: Teachers focus on shifting students' perspectives rather than just addressing any one situation in relation to students' fears	
Sub theme #1: Teachers normalizing fears and the potential for failures	Discussion amongst educators of whether the potential for failure should and could be removed from the school, or in what contexts it should be normalized

	Provision of opportunities for staff and students to share their own fears and failures with one another as a way to normalize these experiences. Could be in a small-group regular meeting format like in Whittle et al.'s (2020) study with university students
Sub theme #2: Teachers try to shift students' perspective on failure to have a flexible view of themselves as learners	Discussion with students on impact of teachers promoting perspective shift to explore intended and unintended consequences Staff across the school consider adopting the approach of shifting students' perspectives from fixation on failure to seeing failure as part of learning process
Sub theme #3: Teachers can be mirrors of perspectives they want students to have	Administrators observing teachers to ensure growth in student learning is prioritized to situate failures as part of learning across the school Continued frequent affirmation by teachers of student capability and belonging in the school community
Theme #5: More than a teaching practice- Teachers want to facilitate student's emotional well-being through their dedication to walking with students as they navigate through fear	
Sub theme #1: Teachers are dedicated collaborator with students	Administration assessment of class sizes and amount of student needs in each classroom to ensure teachers have capacity to not just address the needs of those at-risk of failing numerically, but also those who may be afraid of failing despite high academic performance Administration prioritization and protection of teacher time to talk with students and to build professional rapport between teacher-student
Sub theme #2: Teachers are places of safety for students in the emotions they have, including their fears	Building in regular opportunities to hear students' perspectives on what makes them feel safe and supported in a classroom environment to ensure their needs are met Professional development on research-driven strategies to build trust with students as an avenue to learn about and address student fears of failure Continued provision of resources and shared professional development for teachers to have the tools they feel make their classrooms safe spaces (e.g. stuffed animals, music, build consistent classroom routines).

Theme #6: Although teachers can distinguish students' unique profiles as learners, conversations with students are essential to understanding their internal worlds	Developing a way for teachers to track consistency of student avoidance behaviours to help identify potential fears of failing that may need intervention Continued dialogue between teachers and others involved in the students' learning journey (e.g. parents, learning support, administrators) to understand students' experiences outside of their classroom that may impact their learning Adding students' fear cues to their individualized education plans to help teachers readily identify what fears may look like for this student Teacher's frequent one-on-one check ins and conversations with students as a means to build trust and remain attuned to moments when the student is afraid, and afraid of failing