

FailSpace: The Five Facets of Failure interviews

PURPOSE TRANSCRIPT

Rupert ([00:04](#)):

Last year we had some funding to do some work with young people in Stoke. It was a year-long project and it was really our aim that the young people we worked with would then participate in the other theatre projects or things like that, beyond the end of the project. But we didn't really factor that into our funding. And we had some tight deadlines and now we're under the next project and I dunno what's happening there. And that's not what we wanted when we started. And I think that this was a failure on our part, but nobody really noticed or asked. And because we've completed the project, it went well. I mean, we've reported on it, it's closed and now we're working elsewhere. But I think it can feel disjointed.

Arthur ([01:06](#)):

We do this thing in the shop, been going a while now, it's called Create Night. And it was basically about what I was saying earlier about trying to break down barriers between fine artists and crafters. So you would end up with people who had just come as a knitter, suddenly doing amazing sculptures out of wood. And somebody who came as a conceptual artist thinking, oh, how can I engage with this woodworker to make stuff that's really abstract and that kind of thing. And I didn't think that, and that didn't happen. I don't think anybody from the fine arts side got anything out of it or allowed themselves to get anything out of it. The artists were failing, I think. They were being taken down by being compared with somebody who's just writing a poem or doing a bit of crochet, or something like that. And I think that's a failure on their part, but it's also a kind of a failure on how we designed the interaction. Maybe talking about, I think, maybe we could have shared more clearly why it's important to learn from each other.

Chris ([02:35](#)):

So listen, they were saying all these things and they were not sticking to it. And I get cross when people do that. I don't mind if they said, we are going to run a project. We are going to take some of your ideas and we are going to do lots of fantastic things. Lots of people will come along and we'll pay a few artists. That would be great. I would go, yes, lovely, do that. See you later. But what they said was, we want to grow their local arts organisation, which is a number of people, including me. We want to have local artists. We want you to lead the project and tell us what you want us to do. They were saying, we are here to support you to do your thing. But that's not what happened. And I

think that's the problem. It's not that they did anything wrong, but they didn't do what they said they were going to do.

Greg ([03:42](#)):

But sometimes these big headline, good news stories, hide things too. Like weather has been such massive investment in Gateshead quays, and there are some brilliant organisations there. And yet Gateshead is still one of the areas with the lowest arts participation because the focus was on artform excellence, brilliant visual art, brilliant music, whatever, not in how to move a community on. There were very specific challenges with those communities, but the interventions that were being made were all very artform specific. And somehow if you did great art, people would come. And I suppose Gateshead's experience really shows that that's not the case. Policy failed repeatedly. It was just to keep pushing money at those same organisations and say to them, but you must widen participation and that just didn't work.

Jeremy ([05:06](#)):

I think the kinds of failure that I would say are more positive is saying, well, you said you were gonna get 150 people and you've got a hundred, but actually all of those one hundred people really enjoyed it, you know, missed your targets, but actually does that really matter? Because that's a target you set yourself anyway. You know, that kind of thing. I think that stuff is what we often talk about when we talk about failure.

Kayo ([05:45](#)):

Well, it's always somebody else's fault. It's always like people are not participating because they're too ignorant or tired or they have mental health problems or confidence problems. It's never because there is something wrong with what's being offered. This for me is just a very clear, very clear example of failure. Like for instance, there was this project I worked on last year. The stats for the participation of young people in this project were really disappointing. I mean, they are not out of line with other major projects in the UK but engaging with young people was a key aim of the company. It was really clear that the stats were disappointing in that project and others because it's offering an approach to culture, which does not match the way culture is defined by a lot of young people today. And it does not match it because the people offering these cultural activities are people of a certain age who just have an entirely different view of what culture is. Like gaming culture... if gaming is important for young people today, perhaps we need to do something around that. Those approaches need to be taken more seriously or else it's just reinforcing those old hierarchies.

Laurie ([07:10](#)):

I know this probably isn't what I'm supposed to say, but I think actually my community feels pretty negatively about the arts just now. We don't want another kind of art washing project. We just want the dog poo cleared up or we want our bins collected. We don't want our area to smell like piss anymore. I just don't really see what the point of it is.