



Brain Compatible Strategies

The Paradoxical Intention

The Paradoxical Intention, also known as “The Failure Plan”, is used to look at the worst possible outcome of a situation. According to Gary Phillips, author of Tools for Teaching for Transformation (1999), “Before you try to make things better, you first look intentionally at what would make it worse.” This process allows the teacher and student to uncover subliminal patterns of thinking and acting that contribute to failure. Unconscious patterns (Prosters) can be discovered by changing the frame to purposeful failure.

To use the paradoxical intention process, ask learners to make a list of things that would contribute to the failure of an intention. For example:

- “What are ten things I could do as a teacher to make sure my students **don’t** feel safe or connected?”
- “What are ten things I could do as a teacher to make sure my students **don’t** learn?”
- “If you wanted to fail my class, what are five things you could do?”
- List five things your teacher could do to help you fail

Examples:

If I wanted to fail this class, I could:

1. Daydream, fantasize in class
2. Deny or avoid: don’t ask questions when confused
3. Disrupt class...use attention-getting devices
4. Refuse to do homework or intend to but procrastinate
5. Skip class

Five things my teacher could do to help me fail:

1. Make me feel stupid when I ask a question.
2. Ignore me...”it drives me crazy”
3. Use sarcasm
4. Yell at me; belittle me
5. Continue to use boring lectures with monotone voice...avoid humor at all cost