THE UNDERSIDE OF THE CARPET CAN SUPERHEROES FAIL?

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[handwritten: brike ears?]

Why do we need libraries? Everything is online!

Libraries are more than just books!

Well, this is not at all intimidating :) *[crossed out]* ~~and being here~~; *[handwritten: Due to many casualties, but I'm meant to be in here w/ you and made's meant to be an expert up here. (Jeremy)]*

you know me and you know I'm not a superhero :) I'm not special. I started as a grade 4 library assistant in the UL, and a grade 2 cataloguing assistant in Judge Business School. I'm no different from any of you. And ... imposter syndrome; not sure of self (don't recognise bio)


So not a great fit with the superhero theme! In popular narratives superheroes seem wonderfully certain of themselves, right to the extent of being happy to use force to back up their beliefs. They're sure of what they're doing and what's right. They believe in themselves, and they succeed.

[handwritten: unshaken belief]
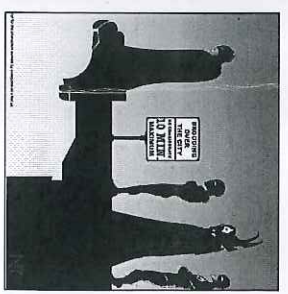
Even when they do have moments of doubt are somehow ~~programmed~~ *[handwritten: contained]*, quickly brought under control, seem to emphasise their authority and their certainty. My moments of doubt mostly just lead to more doubt.

Keynote speakers are similar - not in terms of punching people, but equally sure of themselves, and can confidently see through to the key issues in their profession, synthesise and present them, usually in quite an positive, upbeat, way. Sometimes even Tiggerish in their enthusiasm.

[handwritten: • amazing innovations • insights into state of profession]
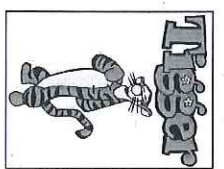
But 2016 didn't give us a lot to be Tiggerish about. Not good year for criticality, for objective information analysis, for fact or investigation - even for experts. Comes on top of a succession of not-good years for the library profession as a whole. Think we have to accept that the idea of public libraries has now been systematically undermined in this country to the point of ... There's little for us to celebrate.

As it happened, not a good year for me professionally either. Dimensions of job shifted as Institutional pressures and priorities changed. Became inadvertently counter-cultural. Institutional approaches can and do change, and you have to decide whether you can still offer something as part of that change. I wasn't, in the end, sure whether I had ~~a good home, and it was a very stressful ~~ *[crossed out]*. I decided to try elsewhere. *[handwritten: ... not shortlisted; then so interested!]*

"I'll just be myself."

Remember that scene in Sherlock where they're in a taxi going to Moriarty's trial and Watson says: "Remember, nobody like a smartarse" - and Sherlock replies "I'll just be myself" (and we all go OMG don't do that!). And he ends up in jail for contempt of court.

I went in and was myself. And you could see the panel backing away. They not only didn't appoint me, they didn't appoint ANYONE. For some reason that makes you feel even worse, I don't know why.

But the most ironic bit was that I failed the failure question by not having a failure to talk about!!

It was definitely an autumn of failure and uncertainty!

So overall - when this invitation arrived, I didn't feel I was in a great position either to be the voice of authority enlightening everyone on how to do it, or be all upbeat about how well we're doing generally in libraries.

That did make me wonder whether I had **anything at all that I could offer you**. And then I remembered something that happened while I was working at the UL, 3 years ago.

STAGE FRIGHT

I admitted to some prospective tour guides that I still get stage fright before every time I stand up in front of students and talk. "If YOU feel like that, it made me believe that I could do it." This made me realise what I could do. I can show that it's OK to get it wrong. I can put something within reach for people who haven't yet tried it or are afraid of failing at it. I can help to make failure, ~~accessible~~ and **4** forgiveable. I can help people to accept – even in the workplace, where it's extremely difficult to be a learner – that ~~mistakes~~ and trying again are a natural part of learning, of professional development.
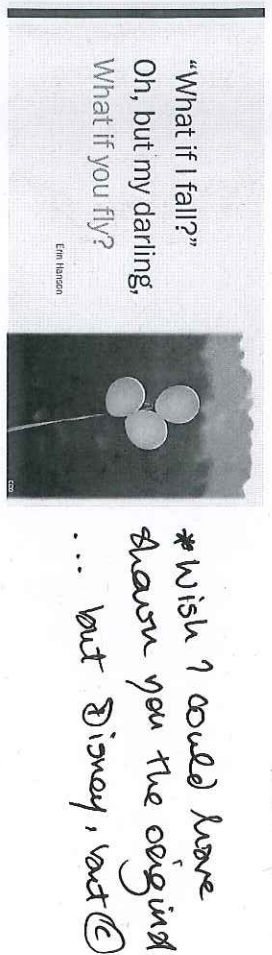
Getting it wrong

The most Tiggerful keynote speakers can often project an incredibly expert persona which can have the effect of **putting a distance** between us and them. ~~That gap between audience and stage can seem impossibly hard to bridge sometimes.~~

Experts, sometimes without knowing it, can dismantle the scaffolds by which they got to their expertise. Soemtimes in modelling an 'inspirational' and aspirational role to us, they simultaneously show what seems to be an unbridgeable gap between where we are and where they are. We never seem to get across the footlights. (it's the same, btw, with some lecturers and some learners: the lecturers model an 'expert' persona that seems light years away from where the students are, and don't manage to show learners the steps that would lead from being a student of ... to being a...).

(cataloguing assistant – "it's quite difficult and it's not for everyone" Screw this posing as an expert stuff)

I don't think I want to model that kind of expertise. I think the most useful thing that I can do is share - with students, with colleagues - the things I get wrong, the uncertainties/insecurities. The times I stumble. The times it all falls apart, and ends up being OK anyway.

I can talk to students about all the things I did wrong during my own postgraduate study, so they're aware of them and can avoid them. I can talk to my colleagues about unplanned stuff that happens in my classes and workshops, where you have to recalibrate on the fly and adapt around an unexpected set of learning needs or events.

"What if I fall?"
Oh, but my darling,
What if you fly?

Erin Hanson

* Wish I could have drawn you the original ... but Disney, so :(

~ lesson plans

I can help people to see that it's not only about the extremes – falling, flying – but about what happens in between. The work. The practices. Because most of the time you're not either falling OR flying, you're just kind of half floating and half kind of awkwardly stumbling along? Isn't that how it works, really, for most of us, most of the time? Some of the time soaring, some of the time earthbound? It isn't either/or. **Not going full-on Tigger doesn't mean you have to be extreme Eeyore.**

This idea of being between the extremes, looking at the little everyday actions, motions, the small stitches that go to make up the big tapestry of our practice, is where my title comes from - Willa Cather wanting not to follow the normal conventions of fiction, which is all about the 'selected highlights'! The exciting stuff, the cliffhangers, the plot twists. "My Antonia ... is just the other side of the rug, the pattern that is not supposed to count in a story. In it there is no love affair, no courtship, no marrige, no broken heart, no struggle for success .... I just used [my material] in the way I thought absolutely true".

LOOKING AT LEARNING

ALL DEPENDS ON HOW WE LOOK AT FAILURE :D

100% good feedback . 25 ticks in the 'Very good' column; one in the 'Satisfactory' - meant that I'd failed the whole thing. It was years before I realized I was doing this :)

It was years after I started teaching IL workshops that I realised a pattern in my own behaviour and thinking – if I hadn't got superlative feedback, or all 'Good' rather than 'Acceptable' I felt I had failed. I could have had 99% positive, but it would still be a failure. How bonkers is that, seriously?

A person, a profession isn't defined by the high points, the successes, but by all of the work: the everyday stuff - the making, how we do what we do. And also by what doesn't work as well as what does; the things we get wrong as well as what we get right. Everything that goes into our practice - not the selected highlights.

It might not be time for jubilation; but what feels like a time of diminishment or eclipse forces us to really look at our values and think hard about what we want and don't want, and what we're capable of doing. We start to question our assumptions, and we get returned whether we like it or not to be face to face with the basics of who we are, and how we got to where we are.

I want to invite you to think differently about failure and uncertainty. In general, we have a conception of certainty as a good thing and chaos as a bad one. Knowing what you're doing is generally seen as a good thing :) When things do go wrong, we generally try to get away from them as quickly as possible, separate ourselves from them, put some distance between us and the failure. Move on. Get ourselves onto solid ground again.

But when we look at how learning works, how research evolves, how innovative thinking develops— all these things actually depend on that period of uncertainty, on putting things together in a range of different ways until you find the one that rings the bell ... A lot of it is about NOT being too certain, not closing down your research outcomes in advance by predicting where your explorations will take you. Not actually knowing precisely what you're doing or where you're going.

Rather than thinking about uncertainty or wrongness or failure as something to avoid at all costs, maybe let's think about them as *necessary,* unavoidable, even *useful* aspects of learning, of doing, of our professional everyday practice.

So let's turn over the carpet – together.

: So

When I was young I totally believed that if you could do something at all it was because you were **innately able** to do it. Angst! Frustration. If you had to put in practice, you probably weren't cut out for doing it.

INTERACTIVE BIT >> how many of you have ever felt like this? or still do? {Roomful of perfectionists?}

Closely related – I believe – to imposter syndrome, which I think a lot of us will recognise}

I think I carried the traces of this belief unconsciously for a long time, right into adulthood. I didn't recognise what was going on in my thought patterns, until I took up ballet at the age of 30. (As you do.)

Learning something when there's no possibility you can make a career out of it is incredibly enlightening, as is the whole process of learning as an adult. Same frustrations that you can't do stuff, but with a lot more intellectual understanding behind them. In time I came to understand some important things about dancing and about learning:

- there isn't an absolute ideal – there's no perfect arabesque, independent of the dancer performing it. The shape is different for every dancer. So all you *can* do is strive to be the best dancer that you can be, and make the most perfect steps that you can.

- I learned that falling is good :D there's a lot of falling before you start being able to balance.

- But the flip side of that is that all the falling, all the wobbling, the "getting it wrong" is necessary for you to learn how it feels to get it right. Every time you fall you've become a better dancer.

- Finally, I learned that when you do manage to hold a balance … it's not how I thought it would be : it's not effortless!

~~Just like how learning isn't innate. You don't achieve it and then get to stop trying, or stop working.~~ When a dancer is in arabesque on pointe, she's always losing her balance. If you look really closely at her ankle, she'll be wobbling slightly off-balance then gaining it again. All the time. You don't hit a balance and then go away and read a book. You have to be right there, concentrating on it, working at it.

We can transfer all **of this into how learning – that is, deep transformative learning – works in any environment, in every domain. Including the academic domain.**

Many students come to university believing that learning works a certain way – and that they've cracked it. They've put in the hard work, they've got the A levels, they've succeeded. And now they can relax: they can just keep doing what they know how to do.

That can make the transition to university incredibly hard, and incredibly emotionally challenging. If the system in which you've succeeded has been exam-driven, and if those exams have depended on recall – remembering facts or dates or viewpoints, and regurgitating them on command – Underneath this kind of success in learning is a belief that knowledge is already ordered and structured; that it's been classified, and you just have to remember what category stuff is in. And allied to this is often a belief in right answers.

Like my childhood belief that ability must be innate – it's no good if you have to practice and learn it – it's a very simple, absolutist perception.

But at university you don't acquire knowledge; you construct it. You don't simply recall information; you have to weigh it, sift it, consider the extent of its validity in a given context. And you do all that in the developing context of a particular discipline, which is a specific set of values and perceptions that govern how you see the world. There's no inherent order that governs the relationship between ideas. Deep learning means creating your own order, your own pattern, your own set of relationships - within the framework of your discipline's thinking.

How difficult is that?!

So we need to be really aware and careful when we support learners of the relationship with information that we model

Learners often come to us looking for the *right* information. How many times have you tried to explain to a student at the inquiry desk that there isn't one article out there that has the answer waiting for them? The

right paper that will give them the right answer to their assignment question. We need to help them move their thinking on to a more complex, contingent approach without slapping them down: it's a **development of their former position, not a rejection of it.**

When you believe you're dealing with finding the right answers, you're thinking in a particular way about learning, about research, about knowledge – that it converges on that one single right answer, and your task is to **find** it.

As William Badke has pointed out, there are no answer sheets in Western higher education:

I was recently explaining to a student ... that a research paper assignment asked her to begin with a research question and use evidence to discover the answer to the question. She responded, 'But surely the professor will give me an answer sheet .... so I will know what the answer is supposed to be.' I had to explain to her that there would be no answer sheet. If she asked the professor what the answer to her research question was supposed to be, the professor would not give her one. She was expected to find the answer herself, even though there were several possible answers and the topic was very controversial. (2003, pp.10-11)

So at university you not only have to change how you learn, and what success looks like (2001), and how it's rewarded (usually with lower marks than you expect) – you also have to undo your existing perception of how knowledge itself works.

And I believe that that "something" that you lose is the comfort, the security, of absolute certainty. Encountering new information that challenges what we know - that is what we believe to be true - can be unwelcome; more than that, it can mess with our identity.

But I think what you exchange it for is a kind of liberation from the idea of 'getting it right first time', of 'no second chances' – of no possibility of gaining and then applying insight?

And I believe that we have a really important part to play in helping students make that shift from a simple, absolutist conception of learning to a more complex, contingent idea that includes a fair degree of uncertainty and openness.

> "You have learnt something. That always feels at first as if you had lost something."
>
> G.B.Shaw, Major Barbara

FAILURE AND RESEARCH

It's the same only more so when it comes to doing research.

Research involves iteration - doing the lit search systematically, piloting your questionnaire, re-running your experiments, generating loads of datasets of which you'll only use one. If you build in iteration, you're

[handwritten notes: "adopt a standpoint", "13/4", "If a things worth doing, it's worth doing badly", "data collist"]

building in chances to "fail" – that is, to look at your research from various angles, arrange it in various ways, until the the pattern starts to emerge. **You don't get to jump straight to the final, neat, coherent pattern**: it takes all the iteration, all the previous efforts, to get you there.
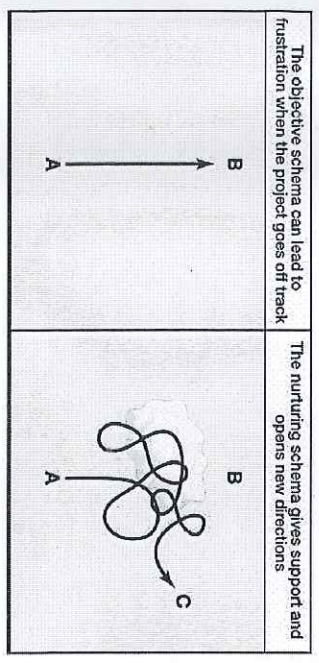
It's a messy, liminal process and often students think they're getting it wrong.

So here I think again the most important thing we can do to support researchers is to help them understand what they're *doing* with information and with knowledge – what it is that scientific method is trying to achieve.

Stuart Firestein TED Talk – how we think science, or research, works, and what it's for. Not to achieve certainty!

"Scientists, Firestein continued, are not putting puzzles together. That implies there's actually going to be a final puzzle fitting together perfectly. They're also not peeling an onion of knowledge, working toward some core truth hidden by layers of undiscovered reality. Scientists aren't even examining the tip of the iceberg, believing some massive truth lies below. All of those models are wrong".

~~Cos rather than trying to SOLVE or PROVE anything,~~ they're doing the equivalent of looking for a black cat in a pitch dark room – where there might not actually be a cat. Science is just farting around in the dark.

A scientist called Uri Alon has actually created a diagram that tries to show how we think about research.

The objective schema can lead to frustration when the project goes off track	The nurturing schema gives support and opens new directions
B ← A (A → B)	A ... → C (B)

Alon argues that when we start out as researchers we tend to project a concept of research as a linear movement from A to B - and that this can have a really detrimental effect on us as well as on our research.

[In the first schema:] for those that hold this schema, any deviation from the path (experiments that don't work, students that become depressed, etc.) is intolerable. Deviation causes stress because of the cognitive dissonance between reality and the mental schema ....

Because the whole point is that you will deviate. Research is a dialogue, and your views may change. Your question will almost certainly change - it may evolve, or it may go waaaay off to left field and kind of leave you hopping after it desperately, wondering what you've dong wrong. (You've done nothing wrong!

Research is MESSY.

[In the second schema] things move off course, and the path meanders and loops back. Experiments stop working, all assumptions seem wrong, and nothing makes sense. The researcher has entered a phase linked with negative emotions that may be called "the cloud."..... In this second schema, the meandering of research is seen as an integral part of our craft, rather than a nuisance. The mentors' task is to support students through the cloud that seems to guard the entry into the unknown. And, with this schema, we have more space to see that problem C exists and may be more worthwhile than continuing to plod toward B.

In this "farting around in the dark" too rigid, too absolute a perception of what you're doing doesn't sustain you – it can actually impede you;

As Pat Thomson started off by thinking of her PhD as a jigsaw:

I just had to put all the little pieces together. At some point I had one of those aha moments when I realized that a jigsaw was a very unhelpful metaphor – a jigsaw has an original somewhere, it is about producing a predetermined image, and it already has a set of relationships and a defined set of edges.

Being around learning, knowledge, research - which is what we all are - has nothing to do with copying an original, or absorbing facts without understanding the notions of contextuality or validity – the many potential ways in which they can be applied and interpreted. In every case – even that of a first year undergrad – it's about constructing an understanding of those relationships for oneself. That's a first year ask, and it's no wonder that we need several goes at it; we might arrange the parts in several different orders before we find one that works for us. {ref back to Ramsden} And with each time you rearrange them you get to know them better as the pattern – *your* own particular pattern - emerges.

What I believe we're here to do is to help students to adjust their thinking to getting lost, losing their way, undergoing disruptive change in their understanding of their subject ... which has a profound impact on their identity. As you become more closely engaged with discipline thinking – "thinking like a biologist" – you get closer to that ragged edge of knowledge and you start to realise that you're not here as a researcher to SOLVE anything, to PROVE anything. You're only here to clarify a tiny corner of a huge unknown.

Barbara Lovitts argues that "Creative intelligence is the ability to formulate good problems". Much of the time what I'm doing in classes is inviting research students to consider that research may not be entirely - or indeed chiefly - about affirming, but about querying. It's less about finding answers, let alone right answers, and more about *framing incisive questions*: problem-setting, not just problem-solving. And that can lead you in a multitude of different possible directions, into Alon's dark cloud. And there's no-one to tell you when you've found "the right one" – if there is a right one.

FAILURE AND THE WORKPLACE
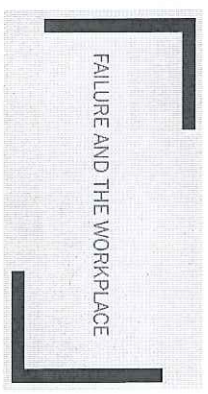
And again! It's the same with being a teaching librarian, or any kind of librarian. Except ... this time the context is different. Very little room now for getting it right, about knowing what you're doing. Research - 'learner' is not a good label to carry in the workplace.

different from the one you said you were heading for. The way we construe professionalism is about getting it right, about knowing what you're doing. Research - 'learner' is not a good label to carry in the workplace.

Need to remember not to be led astray by an idea of professionalism as 'getting it right first time'. This is a belief that I think lies under the surface for a lot of us, and it needs to be dragged out into the light and really looked at. When I worked at JBS I found a book (just one) that I really liked, which said that in business you **should reward failure and question success and penalise inaction**. The reason for this is that 'success' - not getting things spectacularly wrong - is inherently conservative: it's about doing things in the agreed way.

counter-culture

The big word in business is INNOVATION, and to be innovative you inherently have to do things a different way. Necessarily. Back in the day, the case people always quoted was Lotus - huge success with a 'different' product; company grew massively; management tried to replicate the success by DOING ALL THE SAME THINGS. It didn't work. Because they were *doing all the same things*. Innovation - like research -

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depends on looking at things squintly, going against the grain, doing things differently. That is what innovation means: newness.

Not failing, all ticking over, all fitting together neatly and in order - means that you're doing it conventionally. Like the JBS book said: reward failure, because failure means that someone's trying. They're not content to accept the status quo; they're innovating, learning, researching, testing, understanding - and failing. Necessarily.

Just like with dancing, falling over shows you're trying. You're learning.

This is why interviewers will always find a way to ask you a question about a time you got something wrong and what you learned from it. They don't want to hear about you doing everything right and conventionally; they want to know that you can experience failure *and take something from it.* Learn something.

So once again, we're back at this idea that you shouldn't divorce yourself from your failures. You don't have to parade them (like, you don't have to go on stage and talk about them for an hour ...) but instead of thinking about them as elements to separate yourself from and leave behind, like shedding a skin, maybe think about them as the **fossil traces** left in you by your past experience: **part of your core.**

[Project planning: build in failure/contingency. Build in iteration and piloting!]

Handwritten: * Counter cultural
* Learning organisation that thinks iteratively as well as supporting Log in ethics.

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EMBRACING THE 'OW FACTOR'
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Handwritten: Get it wrong so you can start getting it righter.   530

Handwritten: 100%   Wha?

But there is a way to make it easier on yourself – a lot easier. **And that's to really look at what you've done,** systematically. Step away from the hurt feelings as best you can, the temptation to reject everything on the grounds that you didn't get 100% good feedback, and start looking at what you actually did; what actually happened – and what other people did as well, cos it's not all about you in the end of the day.

here's how you could go about doing that:

Handwritten: info can be unwelcome

The USER Method of Instructional Design
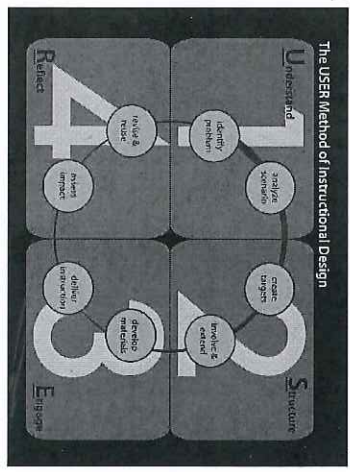
This is what we all say we do
But because in reflective practice as in dance, you learn much more by looking at what goes wrong, here's

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The ARGH Method of Instructional Resign
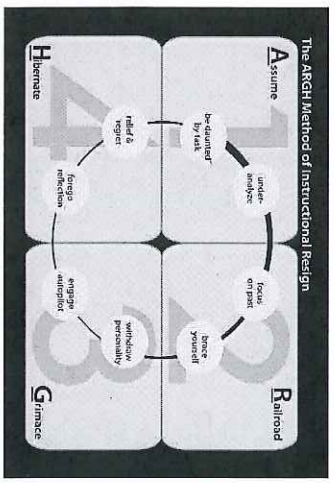
This is reflective practice - not just for teaching librarians, or for librarians, but for all. The ARGH model is us not looking, going la la la, fingers in ears. Looking - and stepping outside our "Ewww it's me" factor = sifting, **seeing the good as well as the bad.**

Point of peer review - MUST **show what you've written well,** not just what the reviewer things doesn't work so well. Show where it works so the writer has an example of what has worked well – and can understand why.

Ow factor and community – others helping you to really look.

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"... facts are like cows.
If you stare them in the face
hard enough, they generally
run away."
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Forcing ourselves to see and acknowledge what's good even if we did it? Why so hard?

I think it's hard because we have to admit things are more complex and less absolute. If it's either/or - 100% or fail - in some ways there's a great comfort in that because you know where you stand.

identity crisis at university - second year getting firsts - couldn't cope. Cos I knew who I was, and I knew I wasn't smart. Took me several years and a lot of Prozac to acclimatise to losing that certainty.

Handwritten right: How you start to connect the two sides of the carpet - the smiling everyday iterative practice and the hidden successes, the pattern. Can see how one bit of true; the relationship

Handwritten: If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to raise? really productive

Handwritten: Forcing ourselves to look at what didn't go well is hard. But actually seeing - and believing - what went well is stil harder.

[to audience] So don't be too certain that you know your limits; or too quick to dismiss yourself because you "could never do something". It just means you can't do it *at the moment*. The hardest thing might not be the doing – it might be accepting yourself as some who can do it.

When I started ballet it was inconceivable that I would ever dance on pointe, let alone stand on one leg in arabesque, never mind pirouette
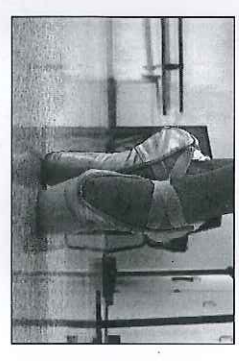
Dancing is the most fun in the world - in retrospect, not while youre doing it! While you're doing it IT'S HARD! Remember what I said about balance, about the dancer's ankle? It's supposed to look effortless. Yes, LOOK.

And in the same way, this act of embracing uncertainty – forcing yourself to look at your practice; steeling yourself to unpick the good bits from the bad bits, and thinking about how to make the bad bits better – that is hard. **And what's harder is knowing that you'll always be doing it.** Because you don't strive, strive, strive, then achieve and then stop. You keep striving, just like you keep maintaining a balance by always working at it.

In the same way, **Nobody gets to be "a good teacher"** (M. Bond). You don't make it to that plateau and then stop. You'll ALWAYS lose your balance. And regain it - even if you fall on your ass first.

There's no way to get away from that. And Brookfield reckons you probably shouldn't try:

"Teaching is in many ways the educational equivalent of white-water rafting ... If we are fortunate enough to negotiate rapids successfully, we feel a sense of self-confident exhilaration. If we capsize we start downstream with our self-confidence shaken, awash in self-doubt. These are the days we vow to quit at the end of the semester. **All teachers regularly capsize**, and all teachers worth their salt regularly ask themselves whether they have made the right career choice.... Indeed, **being aware that we regularly face inherently irresolvable dilemmas in our teaching, and that we hurt from these, is an important indicator that we are critically alert."**

That sensibility, that pain, doesn't mean you should stop teaching. It means you care about your teaching, and it keeps you from falling into what actually IS bad teaching – a lack of integrity that means you don't care whether your learners are getting anywhere, care where and how they're making connections, see yourself as part of a learning community with them. That failure of integrity comes from not looking – from withdrawing your attention, your care, your interest; withdrawing yourself. (ARGH model) It comes from distancing yourself from failure, refusing to look at what happened, refusing to iterate.

KEEPING THE BALANCE
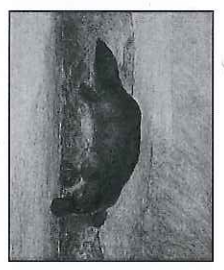
That's all heavy stuff. Have a platypus :)

I've talked a lot in praise of uncertainty, about the need to build in time for failure and iteration, about how we should see things differently. Please, don't think I can just do this :D It takes more than just **declaring** that you should take up a position of openness, iteration, complexity, to actually **enact or perform** it in practice. (theories espoused vs. theories in use - Ramsden, Argyris)

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Vanda Broughton on Linnaeus and the platypus: — why I loved cataloguing: safety, cert anity, DEFINITION
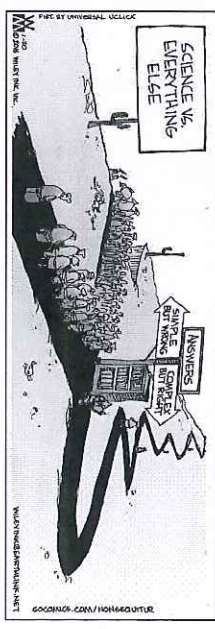
"... profound puzzlement was felt in 1797 by the first Europeans to observe the duck-billed platypus, which couldn't be accommodated anywhere in the existing zoological classifications. It was considered variously to be related to the mole, the beaver and the turtle, and to be a bird, amphibian, reptile or mammal .... eventually *the taxonomies had to be reconstructed to accommodate it.* (Broughton, 2004)

Patterning is what makes us human. Making meaning, seeing things alike and recognising their likeness, categorising, seeing relationships between things – these are all functions of our patterning urge, and have a lot to do with (a) why we're still here as a species, and (b) how we've got to where we have in terms of our own development.

But we can go too far with categorising, with thinking in absolutist terms. That urge to place something in a category and say "Now you're defined – now I know you, how you'll behave, react, develop" ... that unfortunately lends itself to some rather bad forms of human thinking. And one of them is the tendency I talked about a while ago – the idea that things must be either or or, a simple opposition: that there can't be a halfway house; if you haven't succeeded 100%, you've failed.

Binary oppositions are related to buzzwords, because they appear to capture something profound in easily digestible terms. "If you're with us you're against us"; "If you're not part of the solution you're part of the problem" If you don't fall you'll fly ... Truth is rarely so conveniently bite-sized.

This is an insidious, subconscious, but insistent pattern in our thinking, and it's incredibly bad for us.

SCIENCE VS. EVERYTHING ELSE

SIMPLE BUT WRONG

COMPLEX BUT RIGHT

ANSWERS

GOCOMICS.COM/NONSEQUITUR

I love this cartoon. It sums up so much of what I feel about right answers and how comforting they are - how simple, how absolute.

[60 mins]

But it's still a binary opposition! Science vs. everything else. Everything else is WRONG. And if science is "farting around in the dark", as we talked about earlier, then I'd amend it to say; "complex but valid within a given context and under the stipulated conditions" :)

which I think demonstrates quite well just why people have a preference for simplicity!

• Binary oppositions ...

But the fact that even a graphic that's trying to draw attention to the validity, the necessity for appreciating complexity, for not swilling the solution that's simple and bite-sized and too good to be true, for exercising information literacy ... even this takes the form of a simplistic binary opposition.

We love them so much. We should know better; we should be able to see what a con this either/or thinking is.

But it pervades our lives, our society, it seems to underlie our consciousness. Gender continuum - people get hugely confused because we need to know which sex someone is before we know how to relate to them. Jack Monroe - I want to use the pronoun they have chosen and I find it SO HARD. Just like when I talk to dogs, I discovered it seems to be hugely important to me to know how to greet that dog. Is it "Hey boy" or "Hey girl"? It's like Only Fools and Horses - "What is it, Del?" "It's a little baby, Rodney" - "it's a dog, Emma" ... you don't need to know which sex it is to make a fuss of it and throw a stick ... but binary oppositions are identity. They allow us to believe we have things nailed – we know what that is, we've categorised it. Through defining, we feel like we've achieved stability and order, that we have a meaningful understanding of the world.

Binary oppositions are the air we breathe. And they're incredibly dangerous, because they always give an over-simplified, and a normative, view of the world. They are what enabled sexism, what enabled slavery.

Because this simplistic view of the world, as well as saving us from sabre-toothed tigers, allows people to do two really diabolical mental manoeuvres. It allows you to say "that's not like me". Different sex, skin colour, class, customs, religion ... that person is different from me. And so they are Other. And once you've defined something or some one as Other, that in turn allows you to stop seeing them as people at all. That absolutist thinking is part of what made 2016 such a rotten year.

So what do we do? If binary thinking is ingrained in us anyway? The hard part is not really the thinking beyond it – that's a matter of choosing to say "it may be more complex than that". The hard part is catching yourself in the either/or thinking to start with.

Keeping it open against institutional pressures (e.g. KPIs) and also own thought patterns!

- be aware of your own thought patterns
- be reflective - USER not ARGH - give time to the everyday things, the making
- community: mentor and share failure; peer observe teaching; positive purpose of peer reviewing.

[STRAIGHT ON]

"ought to be able to solve this? I can't read this all by myself. But 'Apparent bravery, humility, proactivity is actually a kind of arrogance; a blind spot. It takes a village to raise a child. It takes a community to make a practitioner.

>> community of practice - you have one. Use it. Do professional reading. Find opportunities to step back and look at how you do what you do – together. And look at who you are and what you can do well – and maybe also what, at the moment, you don't do so well ... because if you really look at it and think it's worth the time, you may end up doing it extremely well.

And then standing here next year ;)

INTERVIEW 2 - snakes and ladders

SNAKES & LADDERS
use experience – your 'fossil trenches'

But what you end up thinking is ... that's 5, maybe 6 people shortlisted, all of whom on paper could do that job. None of us had what you were looking for? That's not a candidate fail. That's a panel, or a job description fail. There's a mismatch there between the job that was described and the kind of person with the kind of qualifications who applied for it.

So it's quite a knock back to be comprehensively dismissed like that. But in the end, I do still believe it's better to be yourself and comprehensively not fit, than it is to do what I spent a great deal of my early working life doing, which is saying "I'll be whatever you're looking for". That's another of those things that looks like humility, that looks like a positive - like you're being willing, flexible, a team player ... but actually you're shapeshifting. You're like a liquid that takes on whatever shape container it gets poured into. But our experience - the layers of who we are - shapes us all differently - and goes on shaping us as we bump along with the balloon tied on our tail. And that's our strength.

Along with all this embracing of uncertainty and building in failure and stuff goes one final relinquishment, if you like. I hinted at it a few minutes ago. It's readjusting our idea of what ACHIEVEMENT looks like.

Because we normally do see it as reaching a plateau, a point where we can stop and rest without slipping back.

pattern completed, gone over

Perfection, permanence, no longer striving; balance achieved. It's so tempting. But it's not possible ... and it's not even the best ideal to aim for. We can only think in terms of moving towards – not of arriving.

Having to give up this absolute ideal - of having achieved, no longer needing to work or strive - is hard. It protects us, even though we never reach it. It lets us think that we can work like crazy then get somewhere and stop. leave it at that; reach journey's end. But that kind of start-stop frenzy then flop isn't a great way of doing things. It doesn't work.

You never arrive; you only ever move thus.

But the plateau conception is an either... competing one, and you have to keep working at a... failing back into that, too?

A plateau conception is not about 'having achieved it', but about ongoingly achieving, keeping the balance actively, being vigilant, having commitment, having love

But even walking is always a controlled falling forward. No ideal state, but constant moving towards.

With this kind of thinking, you probably won't get to pose as an expert who can do things right, who seems qualitatively different and better and unreachable. But you probably won't want to either.

Because in the end I do think that what matters if you have some measure of success, or luck, is not showing off your success. It's not about speaking from the heights, or even about sharing what you can see from them. It's about helping other people carve out their own way to get there – their own way. It's the

teachers, the mentors, who I think are the real superheroes. Who pass up the chance to plume themselves on their expertise, the distance they've come, from where you are – and instead NARROW THAT DISTANCE and show you the stages they passed through, the things they got wrong, that didn't go to plan – the steps by which you can get from where you are to where they are. Or beyond! Because they also see that where they are is not important in itself; it's just an illustration of one way to approach the work. (~~If you read~~ ~~Where Donald, she is magnificent on this.~~) *And they will want you to surpass them.*

This view of failure is so **liberating for organisations** and for individuals, both. Not about expunging but about embracing our "faultiness", our fallibility, our flaws. It's basically about being **compassionate**, towards ourselves as well as towards colleagues.
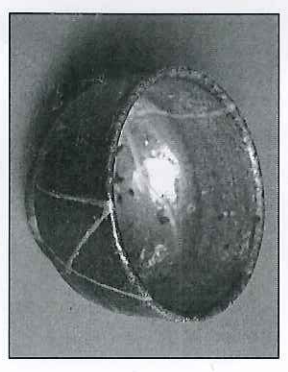
Compassion isn't born out of perfection but out of a recognition of our own imperfections. Like kintsukuroi. The cracks in the china can be both beautiful and meaningful: "Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in" (Anthem)

- So: can superheroes fail?

Failure is not only unavoidable, it's imperative. If a superhero can't fail, then don't be a superhero. Be *And* something better. Be faulty. Be kind. Be a mentor. Share your failures. Be compassionate. Be yourself. *K.* Be a librarian.

Let me introduce my very last metaphor.

As a philosophy, it treats breakage & repair as part of the history of the object, rather than something to disguise.