

Changing the Meanings that Emerge in Practice, for the Better, through Humour – How I Changed Plagiarism from the Suppository of Good Scholarship to the Condom of Good Scholarship and Lived Happily Ever After

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Abstract

In this paper, using core concepts from personal pedagogy, reflective practice and cognitive theory as a theoretical base, I examine the energising effect of humour and its contribution to my development of new and useful meanings for what was otherwise a tired and tiring practice problem: the teaching of in-text referencing to undergraduate Business students. The major contribution of this paper to theory is that it acknowledges the impact of cognitive depletion on reflective practice and posits the use of humour as a partial remedy to this problem. The paper also contributes to practice by re-inventing the use of metaphor as a reflective practice strategy and, perhaps most importantly, by giving academics permission to bring some much needed, energising irreverence and joy to their work.

Introduction

This paper engages with the conference and journal issue theme “meanings emerging in practice” on two levels. First, it argues as a general principle that finding the humorous edge to practice problems can change the meanings and energy surrounding those problems. Thereby making them potentially more manageable. While this may seem a frivolous practice strategy and one of limited utility, given the extraordinary work pressures facing academics, it is argued in this paper that it is exactly the depleting and constricting nature of contemporary academic work that humour is so uniquely and powerfully suited to remedy. This paper then engages with the conference and journal issue theme on a second and more practical level, by telling the story of my attempts to find a better way to teach in-text referencing and plagiarism avoidance, and the definitive contribution of humour to my resolution of this issue. Specifically this paper relates how my enjoyment of the humorous metaphor in the title of this paper seemed to offer me the energy and the mindset I needed to finalise the in-text referencing decision-tree that I had hitherto had such difficulty capturing on paper. Prior to the injection of humour into my conception of the problem, my attempts to articulate the decision-tree, despite repeated attempts over a protracted period, were unsuccessful.

The opening section of the literature review of this paper is based on the old dictum that the seeds for the resolution of a problem reside first and foremost in the way that the problem is defined. Reflective practice is presented as the pre-eminent mechanism for defining practice problems (and therefore for solving practice problems), given its role in the identification of, and changing of, the meanings that practitioners attribute to practice problems. The literature review continues, making a strong case for academics to engage regularly in reflective practice, while the depleting nature of contemporary academic work is identified as a major barrier to reflective practice. It is important to note that this barrier is largely unaddressed in the literature. Indeed, most strategies for managing the high demands of contemporary academic work do not acknowledge the vulnerable, finite nature of academics as people and their need for renewal at an individual, psychological level. Rather, implicitly academics are constructed as mechanical instruments of their work who merely need inputs such as additional time and/or the removal of structural barriers to function. The literature review concludes by identifying the unique capacity of humour (and the positive emotions that it conjures) to renew both mind and energy at an individual, psychological level, and also to facilitate reflective practice and engagement with meanings emerging in practice.

The remainder of the paper is structured as a three part narrative of my attempts to design an in-text referencing decision-tree. The first component of the story is the prequel, which explains how and why I wanted to design an in-text referencing decision-tree (for use in my teaching). The second instalment recounts one of my thwarted attempts to design the decision-tree, prior to my reframing the problem through the use of humour. This is an episode in which I felt that I had behaved “badly or ‘unprofessionally’”; as Brookfield (1987, p. 99) suggests, these incidents can be particularly fruitful points at which to consider the meanings given to practice problems. In the final episode I recount the advent of the humorous metaphor to describe plagiarism and the subsequent ‘moment’ when I was finally able to record the decision-tree on paper. This is another kind of practice situation – a moment of great “personal satisfaction...[in which a practitioner feels that they have] done a good job” (Brookfield, 1987, p. 98) – that can also be a particularly useful point at which to reflect on the meanings attributed to practice problems. The structure of the paper having been outlined, it is now appropriate to delve into the theoretical framework of the paper in more detail.

Literature Review

A core theme of this paper is that humour has a significant capacity to reframe old problems and give them new meanings, thereby making humour a particularly powerful facilitator of reflective practice. As a prelude to outlining the contribution of humour to reflective practice, it is appropriate to outline the place of ‘meaning’ within reflective practice because, despite the many differing forms of reflective practice (witness the work of Schön [1987], Brookfield [1987] and Tripp [1993], to name but a few), notions of reflective practice are concerned with the underpinning meanings that drive our actions in practice situations. Professional practice is routinely constructed (within reflective practice literature) as a continuous loop process of making sense of the workplace, of taking actions based on those understandings, followed by more sense-making and so

forth (Gioia, 1986, p. 51). Within this cycle “[s]ensemaking *is* meaning construction. It is the process whereby people attempt to construct meaningful explanations for situations and their experiences within those situations” (Gioia, 1986, p. 61; *emphasis in original*).

Let me illustrate the significance of meaning and its capacity to drive actions with a brief scenario.

Imagine that you have just become aware that you are now standing in an unfamiliar room. Behind you, you hear strange noises. You turn in time to see one man plunging a sharp object into another man’s side. You act immediately.

The action that you imagined yourself taking will have been driven by the meanings that you attributed this scenario. For example, some will have assumed that they were witnessing a murder and acted accordingly, while others will have assumed that they were witnessing lifesaving surgery and acted accordingly. Therefore, somewhat paradoxically, to understand our own and others’ actions we need to give our attention to the thoughts and meanings that drive actions, rather than to the actions themselves. The actions are the outward embodiment of these meanings. Therefore, within reflective practice, meaning is privileged over action as an object for reflection (Schön, 1987, 1983). In other words, given the role of meaning in ‘driving’ behaviour we need to focus on the why of our actions rather than the what.

This may all seem self-evident and you may be wondering, “Why all this fuss about meaning? If the scenario situation was a real life situation, a witness would have sufficient information – just from being in the room where the action was taking place – to make a considered decision and act accordingly”. If a murder was witnessed then certain actions would follow and if surgery was witnessed then alternative actions would follow.

The reasons for the fuss about and the focus on meaning reside in the human capacity unintentionally to get the meanings of situations horribly wrong and therefore the actions undertaken in those situations also horribly wrong. You may believe that it would always be easy to discern the difference between the presenting circumstances of a murder as opposed to lifesaving surgery. It was, however, a battle over these exact meanings that lay at the heart of the recent Dr Death scandal that engulfed Queensland Health.

Dr Jayant Patel has since been implicated in the deaths of at least 80 patients during his period as director of surgery at the Bundaberg hospital (Mancuso, 2005). Prior to the media *exposé* of the problem, complaints about Patel were dismissed by senior staff – for example, as evidence of a personality clash between Dr Patel and whistleblower nurse Toni Hoffman (Mancuso, 2005). Eventually Queensland Health stopped regarding Patel as a caring and competent surgeon and Dr Patel is, as a consequence, currently facing legal proceedings (Mancuso, 2005). It took, however, a titanic battle to change those original very positive and entrenched perceptions of Patel. Reflective practice reveals that we cannot trust our assumptions, particularly our automatic assumptions about practice situations. For the focus of reflective practice is not merely the conscious or explicit

meanings that we give to practice problems but also the unconscious or implicit meanings that we give to those problems (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

The importance of ‘meaning’ within reflective practice having been established, it is now appropriate to consider why reflective practice is in itself a worthwhile activity because, however reflective practice is undertaken, the literature is replete with statements of its benefits. Excellence in teaching in universities is attributed at least in part to reflective practice (Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2004). It is the pre-eminent mechanism for the creation of “personal theory” derived from “practitioners” (as opposed to “grand theory” derived from “academic researchers”) as a form of professional knowledge (Tripp, 1998, p. 31). It provides a mechanism for the integration of the self into one’s practice and the accrued benefits of more meaningful work (Ojanen, 1996). Finally, it is capable of generating viable applied solutions to the problems that practitioners face in the workplace that are unlikely to be found in traditional formal bodies of professional knowledge (Cervero, 1990, as cited in Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998, p. 98; Schön, 1983, 1987).

However, despite the accolades heaped upon reflective practice, significant problems exist with the way that it is constructed. In the literature reflective practice seems implicitly to be constructed as an essentially ‘resource neutral’ activity. Most particularly, the difficulty that academics experience in finding the cognitive resources or ‘energy’ for regular, ongoing, reflective practice is largely unacknowledged in these discussions. The consensus is that reflective practice needs to be a regular and intense activity. Remarkably, while the taxing, and at times personally threatening, nature of reflective practice is acknowledged (Brookfield, 1987, pp. 89-90) reflective practice theorists seem strangely silent on the matter of how practitioners go about mustering the mental and emotional energy for this promethean task. The significance of this ‘resource neutral’ construction of reflective practice becomes clearer when the nature of cognitive depletion and the depleting nature of contemporary academic work are understood.

Cognitive resource depletion is a kind of mental incapacity. It can be induced in research participants in laboratory settings quite easily – for example, by asking participants to multitask (Gilbert, 1991, p. 111). More generally, resource depletion occurs because:

...the self [is regarded as having] one limited stock of some resource that resembles energy or strength [which it uses]...for many different tasks including regulating thoughts, controlling emotions, inhibiting impulses, sustaining physical stamina and persisting in the face of frustration. (Scheichel, Volis & Baumeister, 2003, p. 33)

When those resources are depleted, our cognitive functioning is affected deleteriously; we are simply less able to perform effectively higher order tasks such as “active problem solving” (Scheichel, Volis & Baumeister, 2003, p. 33). The case can be made that reflective practice is certainly a form of active problem solving and is therefore dramatically compromised when academics are depleted. Perhaps more illuminating, when depleted, people generally become more open to persuasion – in extreme cases, to the point where we will begin to accept propositions that we are aware are false (Gilbert,

1991, p. 111). In these circumstances the identification and rejection of flawed meanings driving practice – the cornerstone of reflective practice – become very problematic.

A number of factors could be identified as likely culprits for a general depletion of academics in the contemporary work context. They include increased demands on academics in terms of emotional labour (Constani & Gibbs, 2004), claims from university administrators for service delivery to students on a 24/7 basis (Spennemann, 2007, p. 39) and the extensification (extending the hours of work) and intensification (extending the volume of work) (Worrall & Cooper, 2007, p. 131) of academic work.

While many barriers to reflective practice are acknowledged in the literature, the 'resource sensitive' nature of reflective practice itself seems unaddressed. For example, the suggestion that academics simply need "more time" to be able to engage in reflective practice (Kuit, Reay & Freeman, 2001, p. 140) is inadequate as it implies that the extra time will be used working, rather than recovering from work. It overlooks depletion as an issue. Similarly, while calls for the removal of structural barriers to reflective practice (Davis, 2003) are laudable as long-term strategies, this still leaves academics with no immediate strategy for engaging in reflective practice in the prevailing depleting circumstances.

The literature surrounding work induced fatigue and/or depletion offers few answers for academics. Certainly, if opportunities are given to workers within the day to recuperate and/or if sufficient time is available after work to recuperate, then work induced fatigue is a manageable phenomenon (van Veidhoven & Broersen, 2003). Similarly, sleep can assist in recovery from depletion (Baumeister, Heatherton & Tice, 1994, as cited in Baumeister 2003). However, these are strategies for avoiding excessive depletion, not strategies for engaging in reflective practice when already in a state of depletion. Further, the "traditional scholarly inseparability of research work and personal pleasure" (Barcan, 1996, p. 136, as cited in Anderson, 2006, p. 585) makes it unlikely that academics would adopt these strategies. In order to preserve some semblance of a professional identity in the currently managerialist climate, academics pursue their research and other forms of scholarship in what would otherwise be regarded as 'recreation' or recovery time (long service leave, recreational leave, after work hours) despite the resulting "exhaustion and demoralisation" (Anderson, 2006, pp. 586-8).

Possibly the most promising lead within this literature is the finding that the experience of positive emotions (Baumeister, Dale, Dhavale, & Tice, unpublished data, 2002, as cited in Baumeister, 2003) can aid recovery from depletion. Positive emotions include "joy, interest, contentment, and love, [and] share the feature of building the individual's personal resources, ranging from physical resources to intellectual resources to social resources" (Fredrickson, 1998, p. 307). Possibly of more importance to the question of reflective practice, these same emotions also "broaden an individual's momentary thought-action repertoire, encouraging the individual to pursue a wider range of thoughts or actions than is typical" (Fredrickson, 1998, p. 312). Positive emotions therefore not only resource practitioners to engage more effectively in reflective practice but also create the kind of open mindset that is uniquely suited to reflective practice.

It seems reasonable to assume that humour is associated at least with the experience of joy and interest as positive emotions. Certainly humour in instructional situations can actively lower student anxiety (Berk, 1996) and can create greater “attentiveness and interest and...make principles seem less abstract” (Berk, 2002, as cited in Walker, 2005, p. 118). Humour therefore has the potential not only to resource practitioners but also to facilitate an open mindset conducive to reflective practice through its association with positive emotions.

Humour in professional practice is, however, not an over-reported phenomenon in the professional practice literature. Davidson and O'Brien (1997, as cited in Struthers, 1999, p. 1120) suggest that this may be an artefact of professional education processes that focus on “emotional distancing [from clients] and conformity of professional practice”. Humour is certainly characterised by a certain amount of unpredictability and human engagement that may not fit with traditional notions of professional practice.

There is a small amount of literature celebrating the contribution of humour specifically to reflective practice that acknowledges the role of humour in creating new meanings for existing problems. Greenwood and Levin (1998, as cited in Jenkins, 2007, p. 68) acknowledge the capacity of humour to open “up patterns of thought to new possibilities [and to evoke]...tacit knowledge”. Similarly, Jenkins (2007, p. 68) acknowledges the contribution of humour as a stimulus for “deeper thinking [and the appreciation of] different perspectives”.

Similarly, the regenerative qualities of humour within reflective practice are acknowledged by Miller, East, Fitzgerald, Heston and Veenstra (2002, p. 83). They positively regard the experience of humour and diversion as an alternative to more task-oriented approaches to reflective practice and instead actively pursue “*wanderfahring*, a way of enjoying the journey, taking inviting side roads as it were” (p. 83) in their community of practice.

An overview of the theoretical contribution of humour to reflective practice (as a source of new meanings for practice problems and as a remedy for cognitive depletion) having been presented, it is now appropriate to relate these understandings to the story of the development of the decision-tree.

The Prequel

This story begins after I had been living with a needling question for a few years in my role as a course leader for a large undergraduate Business course, *MGT1000 Organisational Behaviour and Management*. That question was, “Is there a better way to teach in-text referencing?”. The primary reasons for my interest in flawed in-text referencing were the burgeoning plagiarism incidence rates evident in the higher education sector (Brimble & Stevenson-Clarke, 2005, p. 36) and the fact that flawed in-text referencing persisted in student scripts despite my adoption of a range of academic literacy and plagiarism minimisation strategies in my teaching. Specific strategies that I adopted to improve in-text referencing included the provision of models of academic

writing incorporating in-text referencing, opportunities to practise in-text referencing, the delivery of the usual homilies on the evils of plagiarism and direction of students to the university website on in-text referencing.

Through reflective discussions with colleagues I came to regard referencing as having two components: a scholarly component (for example, related to the building of an academic case using multiple sources) and a technical component (for example, related to the adoption of correct protocols for recording an in-text reference). While my team and I had made progress in making the hidden rules of scholarly referencing explicit, I had had less success in finding a timely and engaging way to orient students to in-text referencing protocols. In a moment of inspiration, I determined that a decision-tree would be the way to do this, as it would spell out the hierarchy of decisions and responses implicit in in-text referencing. Rather than teaching the minutiae of in-text referencing in all its permutations, I could teach students how to use the tool and generate the responses that they needed as they needed them.

The idea of a decision-tree sat particularly well with me as it dovetailed nicely with one of the instructional design principles of my personal pedagogy: that whatever changes I make to instructional materials these should not 'suck the life force out of the teaching team or the students'. Please note that invoking this 'clause' would not permit me or the teaching team simply to abandon an innovation. If the innovation met additional criteria – that it was going to be equitable for students and add value educationally to the course – then my colleagues and I would simply find a less depleting way to accomplish the same task. Also please note that I have chosen to use the vernacular to describe this principle, as for me personal pedagogy is not about the confirmation of voices that already exist in the literature but rather is about bringing new voices – teachers' voices – to the table (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). A decision-tree would make in-text referencing easier for students by making tacit knowledge about in-text referencing explicit and would make teaching in-text referencing easier for me by making this task smaller and more focused. I just had to teach students how to use the tree instead of teaching them all the details of in-text referencing.

While it may seem that, the decision to design a decision-tree having been made, this story should therefore almost be over. Instead, this is where the story gets really interesting. The decision-tree actually required a considerable incubation time – approximately two years incubation time, in fact. Incubation as a stage within the creative process refers to the period in which one mulls over a problem subconsciously rather than consciously (Kuratko & Hodgetts, 2007, p. 145). The perennial needling of this problem over this period was not a particularly pleasant experience but, I have subsequently realised, completely consistent with processes of reflective practice. In reality, "reflection...includes the acceptance of a problem, the endurance of anxiety caused by a long period of work until you have the knowledge needed and the recapitulation, as well as the re-interpretation of that problem based on new data" (Ojanen, 1993, as cited in Ojanen, 1996, p. 2). Before I acquire a reputation as an in-text referencing tragic, I need to explain that over this two years on perhaps four occasions I sat down for no more than 15 minutes each time and tried to draft this decision-tree with

no luck before I developed the tree on the fifth attempt. This next discussion focuses on my recollection of one of those unsuccessful attempts.

A Moment When I was Least Satisfied in My Work

The moment when I felt least satisfied with my conduct and my work was towards the end of one of those unsuccessful attempts to create the decision-tree. I knew that I was tired, pressed for time and had multiple competing tasks also requiring immediate action – a familiar refrain for most academics, I expect. However, I had what I suspect most academics don't have: a personally defensible way to exit the task and defer it for another day, by simply invoking my “this is sucking the life force out of me at this stage” principle. Previously, I had had for at least 20 years an undiagnosed illness – coeliac disease - that had left me chronically and inexplicably fatigued. Therefore the legitimacy of the need to husband my energy was and remains never far from my thoughts, even though the fatigue is no longer an issue and the illness controlled by a relatively simple dietary regime.

Interestingly enough, the episode unfolded like this:

I am sitting at my desk, trying to develop an in-text referencing decision tree. I have my pencil in hand and have turned a blank A4 page to landscape and start considering where to begin. “Do I start with the number of authors involved?” “Do I start with the form of the quote as direct or paraphrase?” “Do I start by determining when page numbers needed to be included?” I physically refer to the linear list of referencing protocols provided on the library website on a kind of trial and error basis. I keep coming up with a zillion mini-decision-trees rather than a single decision-tree. My plan is to fit this onto one A4 page. It is not happening. I am feeling a little anxious. I thought this would be easier. “I am an insider, I know how to reference. This should not be this hard!” I find myself thinking about the lecture I need to prepare and make photocopies for next week. “This decision-tree is really icing on the cake. I do quite a deal of stuff on the technical and scholarly aspects of referencing already in this course.” I plug on a little longer with no joy. I wonder why I am sitting here wasting my time like this. I am finding it harder to keep trying to order all these unrelated micro instructions. I start to feel resentful towards students. “Why am I working so hard at this? Students need to get a grip and knuckle down and just do it – the way I had to.” I am not completely comfortable with my “Students just need to pull themselves together” rant, but I really have run out of time and this is too hard to do in a few minutes. I will try again later and students need to just get over it!

For me this first vignette is all about the role of depletion in stymieing reflection. The inability to settle into the task strikes me as evidence of a kind of depletion. The persisting awareness of competing tasks and deadlines is consistent with a “task-oriented approach to time” that academics are being forced to adopt as work demands increase (Anderson, 2006, p. 588). In this vignette, as timely completion of the task became a more remote possibility I started to create a new set of meanings about the task that ultimately gave me permission to disengage from it. At the time of disengaging from the task I felt relieved and a little empowered as I was shedding a task in an otherwise over

scheduled semester. However, in reality my single act of “resistance” involved me merely ceasing one task to undertake another immediately; behaviour consistent with Anderson’s (2006, p. 587) construction of academics as “docile workers who have internalised management-imposed cultural norms”.

The general thrust of the accompanying self-talk locked me into a “deficit discourse” about students that conceptualised them as incomplete, inadequate, “under prepared or intellectually deficient” (Lawrence, 2005, p. 245). This discourse gave me permission to disengage from the task as the problem of in-text referencing became the students’ problem, not mine. This is a classic example of what Loughran (2002, p. 35) calls “rationalisation masquerading as reflection”. I can say with confidence that, while this line of thought gave me a way to exit from this task, even at the time of mounting this case I was not comfortable with this reasoning. Attributing a meaning to a work situation is not a process of “*discovering* some existing reality but of *creating* it” (Gioia, 1986, p. 51; *emphasis in original*). In engaging this discourse I then created a workplace that I did not want to inhabit. The relationship with students became competitive – with my time and resources – and therefore adversarial. Students became depersonalised as unrelenting parasites. I was cast in a self-serving victim role. However, despite having engaged with this discourse, ultimately I continued to persist in trying to create the decision-tree. This indicates to me that I did not accept the values underpinning this discourse in the long term. But somehow, paradoxically, I did accept them in the short term.

It struck me as curious how these conceptions had any purchase at all within my practice framework. My original training as a special education teacher should have meant that I was unlikely to adopt this kind of ‘deficit model’ of students – given the ethos in that branch of teaching and my very thorough socialisation into it. I do not mean to ascribe myself any moral superiority that would make me above deficit discourses – instead I was curious why I would pick that rationale for disengaging from the task given its obvious conflict with my espoused framework for practice and the presence of a perfectly serviceable alternative rationale, that the task was sucking the life force out of me. Indeed, I now attribute the brief ascendancy of these meanings to what I would describe in everyday language as flawed judgment as a result of work induced fatigue.

The theory would more correctly describe this as evidence of a truncated judgment process induced by cognitive depletion (Gilbert, 1991), which was itself a result of the extensification and intensification (Worrall & Cooper, 2007, p. 131) of academic work. In short, according to Gilbert (1991) it takes more effort (cognitively) to reject an idea than it takes to accept an idea. The rejection of an idea is a two stage process. In the first stage one initially understands (and therefore automatically accepts) the idea. Please note that judgment of the idea is not suspended until after scrutiny of the idea has occurred; rather acceptance of the idea automatically accompanies understanding the idea in the first stage. In the second stage, scrutiny of the idea occurs, which may ultimately lead to rejection of the idea. However, “when faced with shortages of time, energy, or conclusive evidence...[this second stage is truncated and consequently people] may fail to unaccept the ideas that they involuntarily accept during comprehension” (Gilbert, 1991, p. 116). This is, I believe, in part what happened in my thinking. I colluded with a readily

available deficit discourse (by subjecting it to insufficient scrutiny) to create a quick and easy, 'resource conserving' exit from the task.

Moments When I was Most Satisfied in my Work

The moments when I was most satisfied with my work on the decision-tree included those when I was chortling to myself about a throwaway line that I made in an informal staff meeting about plagiarism:

"Maybe we need a new way to market in-text referencing to students – perhaps as the [I pause for effect] condom of good scholarship, rather than as the [I pause and hear myself say with some surprise and delight]...suppository of good scholarship". As I say this I think I am hilarious, but maybe I just need to get out more!

This final vignette is for me primarily about the role of resourcefulness in facilitating reflection, as it was when I was laughing about my new metaphor that the first iteration of the decision-tree appeared. In other words, while enjoying the joke in the metaphor I had the energy or the insight to start to order and organise the questions embedded in in-text referencing. This was ultimately a deceptively easy process involving just two questions. Question one was, "Are you using your own words in this in-text reference?", to which students could answer, "Yes, I am using my own words" or "No, I am using someone else's words" or "Yes and no; I am using some of my words and some of someone else's words". This was followed by question two: "Are you citing a major theme of the publication in this in-text reference?" The answers to this second question led students to one of the four archetypes of in-text referencing presented in the decision-tree. The decision-tree is accompanied by reference sheets which list exceptions to the rules in terms of sources with what students would refer to as "dodgy authors" such as government publications that lack a clear personal author and "dodgy dates" such as publications with unknown dates.

Having stumbled onto this humorous metaphor, I found that the task of developing a decision-tree somehow suddenly became easy, simple and enjoyable rather than being exhausting, frustrating and overwhelming. I experienced the development of the decision-tree through a veil of positive emotions that I feel had their origin in my altered view of in-text referencing. This is consistent with the "idea experience" or "eureka factor" within the creative process when "the idea or solution the individual is seeking is discovered...often while the person is doing something unrelated to the enterprise" (Kurato & Hodgetts, 2007, pp. 145-146). Suggested strategies for facilitating creativity include "day-dream[ing] or fantasiz[ing] about...[the] project...[working in] a leisurely environment...[and taking] breaks while working" (Kurato & Hodgetts, 2007, p. 146), all of which intuitively seem likely to facilitate the positive emotions that Fredrickson (1998) already identified as important to cognitive renewal. Further recollections of my reflections on the new metaphor illustrate the extent of the shift in my perception of the whole issue:

Even if this metaphor drove other people at the meeting crazy, I think there might be something in it. The metaphor continued, *condoms keep people safe; it's the same deal with in-text referencing.* By safe I mean original source authors are

protected from theft and students are protected from charges of plagiarism. It is utterly ridiculous but it kind of works. This is the first good laugh I have ever had about in-text referencing and it has been a long time coming! I extend the metaphor further by suddenly recalling the experience of creative flow in writing. Writing is about creativity; it is about getting that natural high from unselfconscious periods of intense concentration. I can't believe I had forgotten the experience of creative flow in all my spiels on essay writing to students. All I have talked about is the pain and the perils of academic writing (including in-text referencing) and none of the joys in academic writing. No wonder students had had enough! *You want the joy of physical intimacy, you use a condom; you want the joy of intellectual intimacy, you use in-text referencing.* I don't need to use the metaphor in my actual teaching of students but certainly my teaching can benefit from the insights it has offered me.

I have subsequently couched my teaching of in-text referencing in a context that celebrates the joy and the excitement of the experience of creative flow (Robbins, Millett & Waters-Marsh, 2004) within academic writing. A very rough survey of students after submission of their assignments in MGT1000 Organisational Behaviour and Management indicated that approximately two thirds of the 80 students who were surveyed had experienced creative flow in writing their assignments and enjoyed it. Anecdotally they reported that this experience was not, however, something that they routinely heard about in discussions of academic literacy or plagiarism avoidance. Upon reflection it seems sad and self-defeating that in robbing this area of instruction of joy I had quite possibly also robbed students of the energy that they need to engage with this aspect of academic literacy.

Conclusion

This paper has engaged with the issue of the emergence of meaning in practice on two levels. First, it has identified humour as a hitherto underrated facilitator of reflection and provided a theory-based explanation of its possible efficacy. Second, on a very practical level it has recounted the story of my attempts to develop an in-text referencing decision-tree for use by students, the critical change in my practice occurring as a result of the injection of humour into my reflections on this issue. It remains now to consider the practical implications and conclusions that can be drawn from this discussion.

A major component of the significance of this paper resides in the potential utility of the *products* of reflection for myself and other practitioners. This may occur at a simple instrumental level where for example a teaching tool, such as the idea of a decision-tree, can simply be adopted and adapted by another practitioner. Indeed, other, more traditional and formal bodies of professional knowledge do not tend to provide simple applied solutions for the challenges that practitioners face in the workplace today (Cervero, 1990, as cited in Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998, p. 98; Schön, 1983, 1987). It is worth noting that approximately half of the 80 MGT1000 Organisational Behaviour and Management students surveyed about the utility of the decision-tree said that it was the easiest of the referencing tools available to them, that they had used it in writing their paper and that they felt that they would use it again in the future. While this survey had

its limitations, it has certainly confirmed my intention to continue the decision-tree approach to the teaching of in-text referencing.

Possibly more importantly, it has confirmed my commitment within my personal pedagogy to giving considerable attention to what is ostensibly the least rewarding and most intractable areas of my practice, for these areas can contain the most important lessons about practice meanings and assumptions. In this instance, in large part the lack of reward in this area stemmed from the difficulty that I experienced in changing the format of in-text referencing information from a linear format to a decision-tree format. Paradoxically, instead of seeing my difficulty in designing the decision-tree as evidence of the complex tacit knowledge embedded in referencing, instead of seeing this as an explanation of the difficulty that students experience when learning referencing techniques, instead of seeing this as a politically and pedagogically significant area of practice, I found it easier to neglect this area of practice. This is a lesson for the future.

A further contribution of this paper resides in the potential utility of the *process* of reflection for myself and other practitioners. In concrete terms, the way that other practitioners think about their practice may be changed as a result of exposure to the process of reflection embedded in this story (Brookfield, 1995, pp. 218-219). Thus, others may simply choose to permit humour to have a greater legitimacy within their reflective processes in future. I certainly will. Similarly, new metaphors other than those related to war and criminality are needed to frame the discourse surrounding plagiarism (Hasen & Huppert, 2005). While no mechanism for creating these new metaphors has been forthcoming in the literature, perhaps humour may have a role in changing the underlying assumptions dominating the current discourse surrounding plagiarism.

An allied contribution of this paper is its subtext message about the need for work–life balance for academics. Through its discussion of the experience of ‘depletion’ and ‘resourcefulness’ in the workplace, it affirms the humanity of academics and the need for them to be considered as more than depersonalised instruments of the higher education agenda. Perhaps the most important and paradoxically most easily dismissed contribution of this paper is the case that it makes for the restoration of a little more joy and a little less hard work within the academic workload.

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