

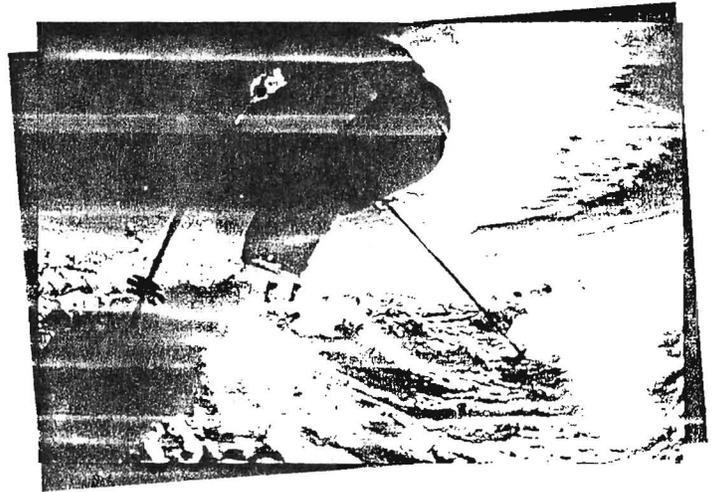
Metaphorically Teaching

The use of imagery in preparing teachers

Imagery, analogies, models, and metaphors as instructional tools continue to fascinate researchers (Carter, 1990; Schön, 1979, 1983; Munby, 1984, 1987; Munby & Russell, 1990; Marshall; 1988, Tobin & Ulerick, 1989), to facilitate instruction, and to pave the way for new insights on teaching and learning. Metaphors have been found to pervade our understanding of knowledge and learning (Aspin, 1984; Miller, 1985), to frame meaning for events and experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Schön, 1983), to communicate effectively beyond literal language (Fainsilber & Ortony, 1987; McCormac, 1986; Paris, 1988), and to achieve intimacy (Cohen & Younger, 1983).

What is a metaphor? From the Greek *metapherein*, meaning to carry across, metaphor is essentially the way in which an event or experience is recast or reframed that adds richness to the vocabulary, the description, and the recollection of that experience (Munby & Russell, 1990, p. 117). As we listen to someone's metaphor, it becomes a type of surrogate event for us, and we vicariously experience their sensations and emotions, "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5).

"Well, I compare it to skiing," was the answer that came from the student teacher when he was asked "What is the biggest change you see in yourself during these first four weeks of teaching?" "This may sound silly, but that's what I keep thinking about. When you first get on skis, you can't control anything: you can't stop, you can't change directions, and you can hardly stand up. You just know you're going to get hurt and probably even die. And, ever getting better seems like an impossible dream. But then, when you do get the skills to ski, you finally understand why everyone else is so excited about skiing. It felt that way when I first experienced a sense that I could control the classes' behavior. By the way I spoke to them and the way I helped them focus, I felt exhilarated!"



"When you first get on skis, you can't control anything... But then, when you do get the skills to ski, you finally understand why everyone else is so excited about skiing. It felt that way when I first (controlled) the classes' behavior. By the way I spoke to them and the way I helped them focus, I felt exhilarated!"

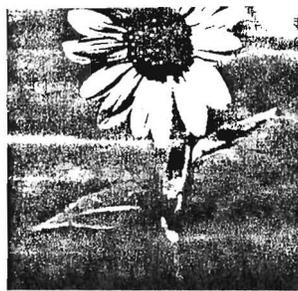
Interpreting metaphors is like solving a puzzle. But, the solution may take a variety of shapes and forms. "If a picture is worth 1,000 words, a metaphor is worth 1,000 pictures!" (Shuell, 1990, p. 102). Though the teacher may have a particular interpretation and meaning in mind when presenting a metaphor for future teachers to deliberate, he or she should be prepared for some unique spins and turns that sometimes conflict with the teacher's point of view. Because metaphors are multidimensional, conflicting interpretations are opportunities for further dialogue and understanding.

A major catalyst for growing metaphors comes from students' participation in creating and interpreting the imagery for themselves. Though it may be suggested by the teacher, a metaphor comes alive for students when they themselves construct its meaning. Plumbing the meanings of metaphors may take several forms for classroom exercises. At times, it may be helpful to offer contextual statements or examples for your students, at other times not. Here are three example assignments:

- "What object would you use to best describe yourself as a teacher? Select your object and bring it (or a likeness of it) to class. We look forward to hearing why you selected your object and what the connections are between it and your image of teaching."

- "In what ways does being a teacher resemble being a gardener? With one or two classmates, develop a listing of conceptual possibilities for the teacher-as-gardener metaphor."

- "Many school districts have a curriculum guide that offers specific and general expectations for your lesson planning. The guide may be presented to you as just that: a guide for your planning if you need it. Or, the guide may be the curriculum you are expected to follow, complete with songs, materials, concepts, and lesson plans detailed by grade level. If we compared planning a lesson or teaching a lesson plan to following a recipe, what perspectives could you offer? How does choosing and following a recipe resemble choosing and following a lesson plan?"



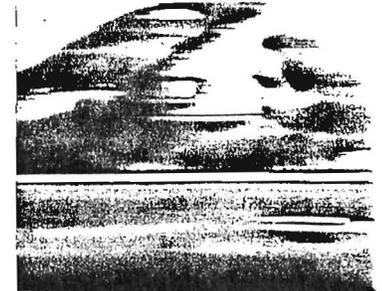
Growing Flowers

- "Well, I was thinking about the pollination aspect. Pollen spreads from flower to flower sometimes by just a little breeze. And so, with a singing activity the enthusiasm or behaviors can spread in the same way. With some flowers or at some times, though, a bee is needed to spread the pollen and this could be comparable to the need for a teacher to step in and give directions."

- "Just as some flowers need more nurturing, especially when they're young and just getting started, so do some games need more attention in the beginning so that they develop properly."

- "We may be seeing the same flower, but it may come in many shades or shapes. This could be compared to doing many different activities with one song."

Student Responses to Metaphor Exercise



Driving Lessons

"Throughout this course, we have talked about teaching children music. We have also experienced activities that you may use with children; you have observed three elementary music teachers teaching children; and some of you have had brief opportunities to lead our class in familiar activities. Now, I would like for you to think of this course as having been a driving lesson. Using that metaphor, what could you say about your personal strengths and limitations based on the 'driving lessons' you have received in this course?"

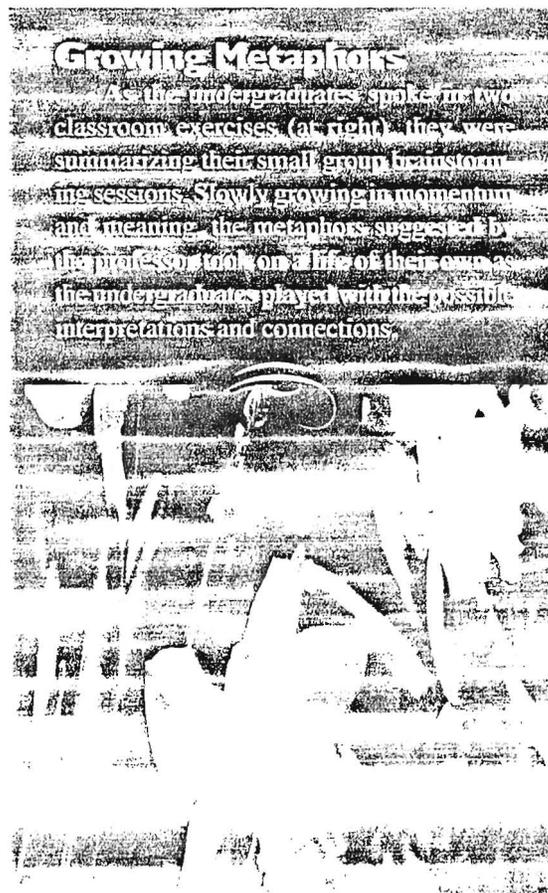
- "Because this course lasts only one semester and we have so much to cover, I understand how difficult it must be to balance learning about the rules of driving and the various components of a car with getting actual driving experience."

- "I sat in the back seat the whole time, and sometimes didn't even pay much attention to your driving: I was looking out the window because all of what I was seeing and experiencing was all so new to me."

- "We learned to drive under simulator conditions, and sometimes, depending on our silly behaviors, almost arcade game conditions. But, when we must drive on our own, we may be driving in rush hour traffic, in heavy snow storms, or on gravel roads. And, our car and its peculiarities may not very closely resemble the car we've been learning on in class."

- "I found out that learning about how a car works is very different from being able to drive. It helps, but it doesn't substitute. Also, because I was absent for two classes in a row, I missed the entire discussion on recognizing and understanding traffic signals (responding to students' behaviors)."

Student Responses to Metaphor Exercises



Metaphor as Thesaurus

In their influential book *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) propose that “human thought processes are largely metaphorical.” The very ways in which we think are often metaphors. It would follow that, depending on our base metaphor, words that match and support that concept come more easily to mind; our metaphor becomes our thesaurus for the language we use and the descriptions we reveal.

For example, consider how the teaching metaphor is manifest in these reprimand statements.

- Teacher as manager: “I expect you to be quiet.”
- Teacher as docent: “I would like you to be quiet, please.”
- Teacher as ‘judge and jury’: “You have broken three of my classroom rules, and I won’t tolerate that kind of behavior in my class.”
- Teacher as gardener: “What went wrong that time, and how do you suggest that we fix it so our activity can continue?”
- Teacher as martyr: “After all I’ve done to plan this lesson and make this an enjoyable time for all of you, I can’t even count on you to cooperate with me on this.”

As teachers we sometimes know the metaphor on which we are basing our words and behaviors, but many times we do not. Yet, our words and actions reveal the metamessages that match the models we use in our roles as teachers. For example, recommending “You must win your students over as soon as possible” implies a sort of inherent competition that requires gaining students’ attention and affection while vying with other teachers or other student interests. Spoken to older students, a statement such as “You are acting like first graders” gives the message that six-year-olds as a group demonstrate classroom behaviors that are inferior to their older counterparts. Conversely, telling grade one students “this is a third-grade skill, so I hope it’s not too hard for you” can communicate that certain things should be learned at certain times, so skills and concepts outside their curriculum should be reserved for older students.

Consider the metaphors and metamessages in these classroom statements:

- “How many of you would consider moving up to high school after one year teaching junior high school?”
- “You don’t go into teaching for the money. You won’t get rich on a teacher’s salary.”
- “Your classroom management will make or break you as a teacher.”

While perhaps common, these types of “orientational metaphors” set up a false and potentially harmful hierarchy of schooling: older equals higher, harder, and better, while younger equals lower, easier, and worse.

Metaphor as Container

Much like using files to organize our papers and using shelves and drawers to organize our closets, metaphors can provide handy containers for sorting and storing our thoughts and ideas. They serve as tidy packages in which we wrap our current observations, but are always there to be reconfigured and rewrapped as the perspective or content changes.

The idea of metaphor as a container also hints at the potential weaknesses of this pedagogical strategy. A container at once consolidates and limits the items to be placed there. Some report that metaphors are useful only when teachers’ abilities to communicate their meanings are highly developed or when their students display the effort or insight to understand them. Cooperating teachers noted that using metaphors to converse about teaching knowledge unnecessarily restricted communication with student teachers: “...student teachers got ‘caught up’ in the language, and the metaphor seemed to ‘arrest’ the thinking and keep it ‘locked into one train of thought.’” (Carter, 1990, p. 113)

Metaphors, to be understood, rely on shared experiences. Although shared experiences may be necessary to understanding someone else’s metaphor, they do not guarantee such understanding. That is why, in preparing and training teachers, asking preservice and inservice teachers to explain their metaphors in words, pictures, objects, and drawings is effective in helping us get a glimpse of their perspectives.

Shared experiences prompt teacher and students to explore common avenues for interpreting, naming, and discussing metaphorical understandings. For example, because driving is something with which nearly all professors and university students have experience, the metaphor becomes a versatile container into which new information and perspectives can be placed:

- “You’ve had plenty of time to study the importance of gas and oil in your car, but now you need time behind the wheel to see what driving feels like.”
- “When we provide undergraduates the opportunity to teach a lesson segment to children with support and constructive feedback, but without a grade, we are helping them learn to negotiate on their own rather than to follow a prescribed road map.”

Teacher as Metaphor

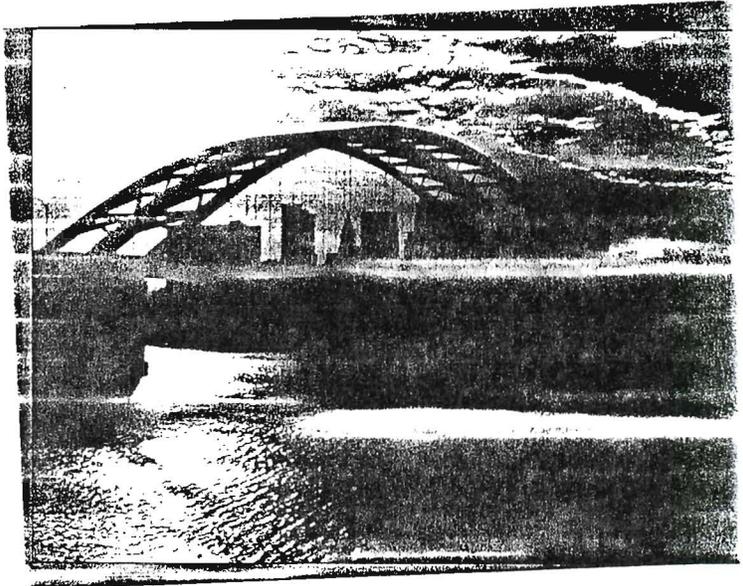
When we adopt a certain metaphor for our teaching identity, we tend to act out that metaphor as we plan for and interact with students. In other words, our image (or metaphor) affects our attitudes, selects our language (word choices), and shapes our actions (behaviors) toward students and schooling.

One of the most traditional yet recently controversial metaphors for education is the school as workplace or factory.

Lending the workplace metaphor to schooling brings with it a 'product orientation' that sees supervisors keeping factory workers in line and constantly checking for quality control of the product. The company knows and sets the standards for what the product should be, and the workers need to learn how to achieve that standard.

Attitudes that can result from the workplace metaphor are: getting down to business, working hard to produce the desired result, and aiming for greater and greater efficiency. But as Marshall (1990) argues, "*working hard* may mean satisfaction to some people but drudgery to others." (p. 96) Evolving from this factory metaphor are such words (and concepts) as homework, seatwork, work habits, "let's get to work," "You come to school to work, not play," and "I expect to see you working on your projects." Contrasting work and play, emphasizing a product orientation rather than a process orientation, and considering classroom rewards (payment) as motivation to work harder and smarter are also attributed to the workplace metaphor (Marshall, 1988, 1990). Although Berliner (1990) argues that the metaphor of the teacher as executive in the classroom fits nicely into contemporary concepts of management that have arisen over the past 50 years, Marshall (1990) proposes that classrooms and students would be better served with a learning-oriented rather than a work-oriented metaphor.

But, searching for the perfect metaphor for teaching and learning may be missing the point. More important than the metaphor that is ultimately accepted and adopted for individuals' images of themselves as teachers is the exercise of exploring the potential meanings of various metaphors and how



Imagine a teacher as "bridge builder..."

those meanings may or may not shape teaching behaviors and choices. Metaphors then become tools for understanding teaching and learning rather than answers for how one should teach or learn.

The following metaphors have been gleaned from educational literature and conversations with colleagues. Consider the implications of adopting any one of the following metaphors for imagining "the teacher we want to be."



Teacher as metaphor: Imagine a teacher as... docent...

master... constant companion... trailboss... judge & jury... intimidator...

pathfinder... compulsive gambler... mother hen... pacesetter... circus

master... entertainer... pilot... factory supervisor... preacher... defender
of territory... midwife... bridge builder... air traffic controller... orchestra

director... guide... ship captain... traffic cop... artisan... paramedic...

coach... supply sergeant... flood control director... tuțor... time keeper...

bird watcher... counselor... surfer... wet nurse... gourmet cook...

banker... sheepherding dog... information giver... mother earth

The Power of Metaphors

In the beautiful Italian film, *Il Postino* (the Postman), Marco is a poor and aimless young man who becomes enthralled by the worldliness and romance of the exiled poet to whom he delivers mail. Once the poet teaches him about poetry and the use of metaphor, Marco experiences a touching awakening. He is gradually able to see the beauty on his tiny island; he writes a poem to woo his beloved; and, most importantly, he begins to see himself differently. When he begins to look for poetry in his life by looking for metaphors, Marco's metaphors become agents for his own metamorphosis.

Use of metaphors in teacher preparation courses can also have an effect on students' perceptions of themselves. The awakenings that occur may seem gradual or they may seem immediately epiphanic. Metaphors may lay dormant, "incubating" until an experience triggers their recollection and "birth," or they may spontaneously permeate a learner's thoughts and speech as new understandings are discovered.

Whether the responses to metaphors are short-term or long-term, the power of metaphors is hardly debatable. Because metaphors allow us to understand and experience one thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 5), they can formulate, communicate, and extend our ways of seeing ourselves as teachers and our students as learners. Metaphors used in courses for teacher preparation offer rich and lasting images that can assist retention, shape behaviors, format language, and enliven discussion.

"As a resource for communicating, they take us beyond the particular, the literal, and the moment-to-moment details of everyday experience. Metaphors enable us to create graphic and figurative illusions that convey meaning and contribute to our sense-making abilities. In short, the metaphors we use paint portraits for others." (Weade & Ernst, 1990, p. 133) Metaphors have the power to change us. And, when we use them in our teaching, the portrait that we paint with metaphors gives vision to us, to our students and, ultimately, to our students' students.

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