Five Metaphors for Educators

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Abstract

Briefly explores the use of metaphors to improve understanding, the role of metaphors in education, and five metaphors related to the roles, responsibilities and relationships of teachers: teachers as parents, gardeners, prophets, pearl oysters and physicians.

Metaphors do not fully explain and are not completely reliable, their explanatory power and ability to organize information and illuminate understandings. Metaphors help name and extend the meanings of things, but can become so much a part of our language and thinking that we are often and when we are, we often do not think very deeply about their implications. An example is the following metaphors for ideas: food (half-baked, meaty), light (insightful, brilliant, illuminating), people (lives, immature, clever), plants (fruitful, seed, branches), products (produce, generate, work), commodities (buy, market, value), resources (waste, use, pool), money (rich, bankrupt, treasure), cutting tool (incisive, sharp, cuts-to-the-heart) and fashion (trend, dated, vogue) (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

Using metaphorical concepts, such as the teacher as coach, conductor, manager, or counselor, has been a common and useful practice in the education and development of teachers. As educators teach ideas, all of the above metaphors for ideas can be extended to include them. The use of metaphors to improve understanding, the role of metaphors in education, and five metaphors related to the roles, responsibilities and relationships of teachers: parents, gardeners, pearl oysters and physicians, will be briefly explored.

Metaphor

The metaphor is considered by such notables as Quintilian, the great first century rhetorician, as "the commonest and by far the most beautiful" of the figures of speech (Cited in McArthur, 1992, p. 653). The metaphor is a rhetorical device said to have originated with Aristotle in the 4th century BC (McArthur, 19). Used the term metaphor in two senses. The first sense refers to all figures of speech that use association, comparison and resemblance. In the second sense, comparison is implied by an identification of the two things compared. The broader meaning of metaphor is used in this paper, as in Aristotle's and by Simpson below.

Metaphor is a process of comparing and identifying one thing with another. Then, as we see what things have in common, we see the general meaning that this is a tool of intelligence. We also see what things have in common, the general meaning that thinking in metaphors. The metaphor is a tool of intelligence. (Cited in Hatcher, 1987, p. 80)

Weavers in Theology and Literature, "If narrative is the way we construct our sense of identity, metaphor is how we think, especially in areas in which our knowledge of the unknown by comparison with the known" (Cited in McArthur, 1992, p. 654). Some argue that "the human conceptual structure is metaphorically structured and defined" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 6). Language, as a vehicle to convey form and meaning to reality, constantly utilizes metaphorical concepts, such as the teacher as coach, conductor, manager, or counselor, has been a common and useful practice in the education and development of teachers. As educators teach ideas, all of the above metaphors for ideas can be extended to include them. The use of metaphors to improve understanding, the role of metaphors in education, and five metaphors related to the roles, responsibilities and relationships of teachers: parents, gardeners, pearl oysters and physicians, will be briefly explored.

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Weaver, p. 248-9)
rs depend on finding a certain amount of similarity when comparing dissimilar things. It consists of tenor, the thing, vehicle, the thing to which i
and, and meaning, the understanding resulting from comparing the things. Metaphors can shed light on our understanding and conception of each r
the four main functions of a metaphor are to give concreteness, clarify the unknown, express the subjective, and assist thought (Weaver, 1967

rs and Education

c principles of instruction are to go from the known to the unknown and to go from the concrete to the abstract. Metaphors do that by using conc
ce to explain abstract principles. A known, visible, or physical reality will be used to help describe an unknown, invisible, or spiritual reality. Ofte
vocabulary and comprehension require the use of comparisons to move a person from an understanding of one concept to an understanding of an

:constructivism views knowledge as a personal construct, an interpretive process to make sense in terms of prior knowledge. Teachers make sens
es based on what is known and what is believed. Teachers construct images and models of teaching based upon their prior knowledge and expe

rs can help construct or reconstruct images of these categories and make sense of what happens in educational endeavors. Educators reflect on w
as they teach (Schon, 1983). It is possible to develop the reflections, images and practices of a teacher by using metaphors. Metaphors can chan
what happens in classrooms by helping teachers make sense of their roles and responsibilities as they reflect on their practice to better improve t
This reflection occurs within the context of their conceptualized roles of the teacher. What educators believe about teaching, students and educa
tion view of events in the classroom, their reflections, their sense of what to do and their evaluation of what is right and wrong. These beliefs are

v teachers have spent years as students observing and participating in activities with teachers. Through these experiences they have developed in
d models of what teachers are. As students become teachers, they begin to reconstruct this knowledge based upon their new experiences from the
tive of teachers. This may result in conflict, discrepancies and, hopefully, new and improved knowledge and practice. Often new teachers are ope
ralized beliefs, images or metaphors that may negatively affect their teaching. Two such common metaphors are "teacher as friend" and "teach
atorian." Many new teachers must learn through painful experience that these approaches generally do not work.

l teaching metaphors do not exist in isolation. They are found within a context or a dominant metaphor about what teaching students in educat
; metaphors operate under a more overriding myth or metaphor about schooling, such as the school as work place.

Adherence to the myth of the school-as-work-place is evident in the management of schools within the traditional culture. Teachers manage so a
maintain control of student thinking and behavior. Rather than placing responsibility for behavior and learning on the student, teachers arrange s
so that they cannot interact with one another and assign tasks that keep students busily engaged in activities of the teacher's choosing. Keeping b
task completion are regarded as desirable and often are rewarded in the evaluation procedures that are implemented in the traditional culture. Just
control is emphasized in the sense that employers and shop stewards control employees, teachers control students in traditional classrooms. Man
is seen as the first consideration, and initiate into the culture are seen exposed to the conventional wisdom of gaining control in the first few day:
(Tobin, 1990, p. 6)

er as authoritarian boss model is an extension of the school as a work place metaphor. If a teacher were to use the school as learning place meta
to the school as work place metaphor, one would expect the classroom and teaching to be arranged to facilitate learning as opposed to facilitat
ution. The organizational design and allocation of resources in the school would be different as would the relationship between the teacher and w
metaphors. Some teachers see their role as a manager, dictator or drill sergeant which puts the teacher in the active role and the students in t
ole as with the teacher as a dispenser of knowledge.

es the language used to describe our belief and behavior is what we wish for or the ideal we hope to achieve, not of the real experience. The teac
herself as a facilitator or a guide but may act as a director or dispenser. The teacher operating under the metaphor of entertainer will behave diff
ter operating under the metaphor of captain of the ship. A teacher may for one day or period operate using one metaphor and for another day e
other. When the classes are uncooperative or unresponsive and must be directed and controlled, teachers often take the role of demanding c
isciplinarian and task master. When the classes are more ideal, teachers can operate under more ideal metaphors.

teaching is such a complex activity, teachers may find themselves operating under several metaphors at once. One teacher conceptualized her ro
s a saintly facilitator, a comedian, and a miser (Tobin, 1990). The saintly facilitator role applied only to the ideal class, which is what she though
should be like. When she actually taught, she was in the role of comedian, entertaining the class. When that was not successful, she became a mi
and effort.

tool and teaching metaphors are mixed or are not congruent, one can expect problems. Teachers who deviate too noticeably from that dominate r
The classroom or school is like an extended family. The rules, virtues, integrity of the family can be considered. The change of metaphor can dramatically influence one's beliefs and practices. An example is given by Tobin (1990) of a teacher who reconceptualized her role to that of social director in which she would invite the students to be a party of learning, rather than trying to manage or dictate the role of student. Students in the metaphor of teacher-as-social-director can choose to come or not come, but if they do not come, they should not disrupt the climate in the learning and should be courteous to their host. By changing the metaphor the teacher was able to eliminate student defiance almost overnight. The teacher was able to construct a vision of what teaching and learning could be like, to envision herself and her students in it to develop a commitment to changing according to that metaphor. She then could reconstruct images of what happens to her as she applies this new classroom.

A construction of their knowledge and their world view is important in the change process. Teachers often feel discomfort when they find themselves according to metaphors that are not complementary to their personal world view and epistemology. By changing one or the other they may find congruence and satisfaction with their teaching. Finding a practice and belief that are not only consistent with one another, but that are effective, is tantamount to the task of the teacher.

Indicates three cognitive requisites for teacher change: "the construction and personalization of a commitment to change; the creation of a vision of what teaching and learning environments could be like and the personalization of that vision; and reflection." (Tobin, 1990, p. 24). Tobin goes on to state that and tools of reflection exist as constructions of the mind. When we reflect on practice, we are reflecting on re-constructed images of what we learned from our classroom experience. In this case the process of reflection involves the assignment of language to components of dynamic images we constructed in the process of reflection. However, we can go beyond the assignment of language to images during reflection. Reflecting on the epistemological, philosophical, and social metaphors with which we taught in our practice also can be beneficial. (1990, pg. 25).

Can reflect upon their own dominate metaphors, build a vision of what teaching should be like, develop a commitment to that vision and begin to apply their vision they will further reflect on it in their new practice and will go through this change process in an ongoing basis. Conflicts can arise if we are reflecting on their practice and begin changing aspects of their teaching while leaving other aspects intact. For instance, one may practice the metaphor of discovery and student involved learning, yet have assessments that emphasize content centered book responses, or teachers may use different metaphors in their teaching, such as when a teacher acts on one level as a technician but on another level as a social service provider. Of the metaphor as a teaching device, is further described.

To exercising our faculty of discernment, we are also extracting the meaning for ourselves instead of having the meaning imposed on us. The metaphorical process is indirect and objective in that the teacher who employs it is a step removed from the analogical teaching device. In effect, if we are to obtain meaning, we must exercise our volition and examine the tenor and the vehicle for ourselves. When we apprehend the meaning on our own, we feel as if we have been told what to think, though we may be grateful to the one who has been creative enough to conceive the equation which richer understanding. (Hatcher, 1987, p. 80-81)

The most important value of the metaphorical process is its function in human development. Without it man would not be able to transcend the plaen for a moment, because in this life abstract thought is impossible without the use of analogy. (Hatcher, 1987, p. 81)

Can explain the inward realities with outward examples, hidden meanings or visible allusions, and spiritual matters with material comparisons.

Teachers as Parents

A metaphor we can look to for ideas on how educators might better teach is that of teacher as parent. The roles and responsibilities of parents have been to teachers for many years. The legal principle of in loco parentis, in the place of the parents, was the guiding idea of the role of teachers—the students, with the same rights, responsibilities and authority, while they are in the schools. This principle and metaphor are gradually being as the courts grant more rights to the students.

Children have obligations to their parents and parents have certain rights and responsibilities to their children, teachers and students each have certain, rights and responsibilities. The classroom or school is like an extended family. The rules, virtues, integrity of the family can be considered.
the individuals and the group are both important.

The teacher of the classroom must educate students according to the rules and virtues of the school. The rights, obligations and perogatives of teachers in a school and classroom must be considered. Like parents with their children, teachers must develop students' knowledge and character. Both parents and authority figures.

Parents as teachers or teachers as parents, as both comparisons shed insight on each other. There are differences, so like all comparisons we must be cognizant of the limitations. Some differences involve differing levels and kinds of responsibility, concern, attention, emotional attachment and roles. Briefly, differences involve the depth, nature, quantity and quality of the contact—teachers relate to a classroom of students for a limited time with limited responsibilities, while parents have full-time responsibilities for one of those students. A teacher with a class would be like a single parent with thirty siblings. The settings and conditions differ, so the expectations also should differ.

**Teachers as Gardeners**

A metaphor for teachers to consider is that of the teacher as gardener. It is a transcultural metaphor. This metaphor's powerful imagery, simplicity, broad appeal and elegance make it a very useful tool. Almost everyone has had some experience with plants, even those living in frozen desert.

Most people understand the relationship between plants, water and sun, and the role that a gardener plays. Many people have personally worked hard to care for the plants they love. The teacher is like a gardener in that both plant seeds, water them, fertilize them and care for them so that they may grow to maturity and bear fruit.

Teachers are like young plants. Knowledge is to children as rain is to plants. In the same manner, the image of the loving gardener tending young plants gives inspiration for teachers to take on the challenging and vitally important task of educating their students. For example, each different plant has different requirements to grow well. Some need special care and some are hardy. Others may need transplanting, support, lots of sun and water. The gardener must supply the right conditions for healthy growth and development. Teachers often try to give enough sun, water and nutrients for the average plant, but some plants may need grafting, transplanting, thinning, support or other intervention to help them bear good fruit.

**Teachers as Prophets**

Prominent historians (e.g., Toynbee, 1948) and philosophers (e.g., Jaspers, 1962) regard the founders of the world religions, such as Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad, as the preeminent teachers of humanity. These prophets are like teachers in several ways—people are like children in a school and prophets are teachers. How are teachers similar to prophets? How can the role of the prophet be used to shed light on the role of the teacher?

Prophets, by their lives and their words change the people and the world. They are considered perfect mirrors in which people can see the reflection of God. This physical world can also reflect a heavenly kingdom if people follow the prophet and arrange it properly. Arranging it properly is given by the prophets in their lives, teachings and laws. Prophets give the law, bring knowledge and spirit from a higher source and teach their students? Some aspects of the prophet's role.

Teachers relate to students as prophets related to humankind? What can be learned from the way the prophets have taught their students? Some aspects of the teachers' roles.

Passer as prophet metaphor can be extended. If the teacher is like a prophet and the prophet is like a sun, how is the teacher like the sun? The relationship between the sun and this physical world might help better understand the relationship between teacher and student. For example, the sun (teacher) is vital because it can only affect the world to the degree the sun shines on it and according to the capacity of the object receiving the sun's rays. A plant will respond to the outpourings of the sun than a mineral, and plants will vary from one another. Metaphorical images such as vanguards and day-springs, comparing the physical care of children to their spiritual care could also be employed.

What can be gained from exploring the techniques and methods of the prophets in their role as educators of humanity can be seen, but the metaphor of the school teacher can be also used to better understand the less concrete and less familiar role of the prophet. Like parent

As with analogies, a form of metaphor, it is important to know the limitations of such comparisons, and not to carry them too far. The transitive property works for some operations, but not for others.
s as Pearl Oysters

are as pearls, teachers and education as the pearl oyster. As with all metaphors, an appreciation of it depends upon some understanding of at least two concepts being compared. Most people have some rudimentary idea about how plants develop and can easily make some use of the analogy of child development. The development of pearls is less understood and used.

understand the relationship between the child and education, we need some understanding of the relationship between the pearl and the oyster. The process of creating an pearl is the result of some irritant, like a grain of sand, getting inside the shell of an oyster. The oyster then secretes calcium to encapsulate the irritant so that irritation. The shell protects the meaty part of the oyster and the pearl and allows the transformation process to occur. The process of creating an pearl is like the metaphorical process is an educational tool which can help pr

s as Physicians

provide unlimited development (Hatcher, 1987, p. 2).

conclusion

The purpose of physical reality. Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing.


