



## Metaphor as pedagogy in teacher education



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### H I G H L I G H T S

- Metaphors illuminated students' shifts in understandings of curriculum.
- Metaphors informed instructors when students needed additional support.
- Metaphors allowed instructors to build relationships and honor holistic learning.
- Metaphors were individual, idiosyncratic, relevant, and supportive for students.
- The metaphors led to “quilted understandings” of curriculum.

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### A B S T R A C T

Two teacher educators used metaphors to create spaces for students to express their shifting understandings of curriculum over time. This paper centers upon their reflection and analysis of affordances and limitations of metaphor as a pedagogical strategy for supporting students. Instructors noted a) critical shifts in students' dispositions and understanding over time, b) meaningful insights into students' needs for additional support, c) how powerfully relationships were nurtured with students, d) and the quilted nature of the metaphors created, both across students and over time. Limitations are noted, as well as directions for future research.

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### 1. Introduction

As teacher educators working alongside of students, who are also novice teachers, in their urban classroom contexts during their vulnerable beginning years of teaching, we must support teachers as they strive to find answers to their own questions of practice and to develop themselves personally and professionally (Fisher, 2009). Novice teachers in the induction period have a range of complex learning tasks to engage in as they transition into classroom teachers (Fisher, 2009). This positions them in vulnerable circumstances as, simultaneously, they must develop networks of social, cognitive, and emotional support, find and negotiate resources available for their curriculum, understand and work to navigate expectations from administration and leadership (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Flores & Day, 2006; Flores, 2006; Veenman, 1984; Zeichner & Gore, 1990).

Across the past six years, we have worked alongside Teach For America Corps Members who were learning to teach while they were provisionally-certified teachers in urban classrooms. Across two academic years, we have joined them both as instructional coaches in their classrooms as well as instructors among many of their graduate level courses, allowing us to know them more holistically as learners, teachers, and people. We have found it imperative that we create structures in our Master of Arts in Teaching program that intentionally support the cognitive, social, and emotional development and learning of students (Illeris, 2002). Simultaneously, it has proved important to provide engagements that encourage shifts in conceptual understandings and pedagogy and reflective practices over time.

As teacher educators working alongside students and their young learners in some of the most limiting and anti-democratically based schools in the United States, any tool for joining our students in imagining and building a different paradigm is one we are anxious to employ. We recognize that such an approach to supporting teachers through an interrogation in the metaphors they use related to teaching and learning is likely fruitful internationally as well. In our personal lives and our

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professional endeavors, we have found *the metaphor* to be a means through which we can come to more meaningfully, creatively, and hopefully, consider alternatives. Through this work of exploring the intentional use of metaphor as a pedagogical device with our students who are also novice teachers, we have come to see this as a space in our courses which opened expansive possibilities for local, national, and international education and teacher development.

As part of a several year inquiry into our teaching practices, we have considered the role and use of metaphors as spaces for students to reveal, to themselves and to others, their previously unquestioned positionalities towards their teaching and personal experiences. While in other work we use Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2001; Janks, 1999) to analyze the content of the metaphors novice TFA teachers use as they think about curriculum (Fisher & Lynch, 2015), this manuscript delineates our own lessons as teacher educators, as we worked to understand the affordances and limitations of the use of metaphors as a snapshot of students' understandings which both revealed and at times obfuscated our understanding of the teachers we supported.

In many urban schools (including many of the schools where our students taught), the curriculum is handed to teachers in the form of a script or a specifically delineated pacing guide. In these contexts, our students need to have opportunities to think critically about their beliefs and understandings about learning, teaching, and curriculum in order to create innovative opportunities for relevant, meaningful, and responsive engagements with their students. As classroom teachers who interacted with curriculum and learners daily within these often limiting contexts, the students we worked with already had notions about curriculum, what it offered, how it might be constraining, and how it could be navigated. In the context of this class, students called those stances and perspectives by name, creating metaphors to articulate them, and shared these metaphors with us and with their colleagues in our program, building a complex and interwoven understanding and a multi-perspectival view of curriculum. Through this process, students articulated their own hopes for and struggles with agency and innovation. Elsewhere (Fisher & Lynch, 2015) we have discussed the findings from the content inquiry (See section 2.2 below), in which we analyzed the content of these metaphors of curriculum drafted by students and plotted each of the metaphors to consider and document shifts in teacher thinking about curriculum across time.

This manuscript, however, is a part of a simultaneous teacher-research inquiry (See section 2.3 below) we conducted. As we analyzed the content of the metaphors in the previous study, we engaged in consensus coding, creating an audit trail of the lessons and thinking that the use of metaphors made more and less possible for us as teacher-educators. This audit trail then became the data we analyzed for this inquiry. In this manuscript, we engaged in university-based teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) examining our own instruction and practice with the use of metaphors as a pedagogical tool for the support of teachers. We anticipate that it will contribute to the literature for teacher educators, making evident the complexities, limitations and affordances which accompany the use of metaphor as a pedagogical tool in support of teachers both within and beyond their initial certification. This means that we will not, in this manuscript, analyze the content of the metaphors or specific shifts made by participants (as we do in Fisher & Lynch, 2015), but rather we will focus on the findings about ourselves and our pedagogies which became evident through systematic inquiry into the pedagogical practice of metaphor use within a teacher-education program.

In this paper, we ask the question: What are the affordances and limitations experienced by teacher educators who employ metaphor as a pedagogical tool? Our purpose was to consider, from our

perspective as teacher educators, the ways in which metaphors facilitated some aspects of our instruction of a course centered on curriculum design while limiting others. We begin with a consideration of what metaphors do for and to us, as is suggested in the literature, including the work of international researchers and teacher development theorists. While there is a generous body of research related to the impact of metaphor on learners, we turn our gaze on the experiences we encountered when we carefully analyzed our own engagements as teacher educators employing this pedagogical practice, finding both hopeful and problematic aspects of this approach which was intended to offer space for teachers to critically (re)consider a ubiquitous aspect of each teacher's professional life and development.

### 1.1. *Metaphor in theory and research*

Metaphors hold promise for constructing and mediating understandings through analogy building (Steen, 2007). In other words, metaphors generate and support new meaning making by leveraging familiar, concrete reference points to develop nuanced understandings of novel, challenging, or esoteric constructs. Metaphor creation is innovative thought rooted in both the linguistic and conceptual forms. They are commonly treated as turns of phrases that serve primarily literary and aesthetic purposes. However, the Contemporary Theory of Metaphor (CTM), outlined by Lakoff (1993) suggests that metaphors are not merely linguistic expressions, but rather reflect the conceptual frameworks from which the speaker comes. They reveal the positionality from which we both form and express interpretations of concepts and experiences, regardless of one's native language, culture, nationality. Indeed, metaphors are not only used as linguistic flourishes, but "to invent, organize, and illuminate theoretical constructs" (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005). Fernandes (2008) posited that the main task of the metaphor is to create space for ideas, which are not easily wrapped around language accessible to the thinker/speaker, a construct particularly beneficial to inchoate and emerging ideas and beliefs. In effect, it seems that the very process of comparison and juxtaposition inherent in the creation or consideration of metaphor serves to make the unfamiliar familiar and to disrupt the overly familiar, causing it to become novel once again. In giving a construct a name that belongs to something else, metaphors offer coherence to our experiences by highlighting specific aspects of the nature of the ideas in contrast.

Educational researchers have recently interrogated the possibility of the use of metaphor to consider the thinking and development of pre-service and in-service teachers around the globe. Since metaphors simultaneously reveal, conceal, and reify often-unexamined and naïve stances, the metaphors created by teachers across their professional trajectories are increasingly considered in order to call awareness and often challenge teacher beliefs for the purposes of positioning teachers to align more intentionally their beliefs, language, and action. Such research has been conducted across cultural and linguistic contexts. Uysal, Burcak, Tepetas, and Akman (2014) analyzed the metaphors used by pre-service teachers within courses focused on developing strategies for classroom management. Ergin, Sahin, and Erisen (2013) considered the metaphors used by pre-service teachers in Turkey and found that these teacher candidates used metaphors describing their expectations of and experiences with children that positioned young learners as objects primed for molding and shaping by others, particularly the teachers themselves. Eren and Tekinarlan (2013) found that when they engaged in deconstruction of metaphors used for learning and teaching within the teacher preparation coursework they offered, teacher candidates considered the cognitive and affective implications of the metaphors they

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