If the jacket fits: A metaphor for teacher professional learning and development

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Jackets are proposed as way one to conceptualise professional development.
- Eighteen lead teachers co-constructed 11 metaphors for professional development.
- Ten metaphors denoted connections between teachers and PD that could disadvantageous.
- Co-construction, positioning, humour and time assisted the metaphor development.
- The metaphors assisted lead teacher to conceptualise their relationship with PD.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to assist lead teachers to define, analyse, and refine their relationship with professional learning and development through the metaphor of a jacket. Metaphor analysis was used to study 18 lead teachers' from six New Zealand schools co-constructed written metaphors. One major finding was the significant number of metaphors that conceptualised a disadvantageous relationship between teachers and their professional learning and development. An implication of that finding is the need to make explicit and address possible negative dispositions teachers may hold toward their professional learning and development.

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Things do not pass for what they are, but for what they seem. Most things are judged by their jackets. - Baltasar Gracian Y Morales

1. Introduction and purpose

Consider for a moment that the relationship between yourself and your professional learning and development (PLD) was a jacket. What jacket would it be and how would you wear it? Would it be a Strait Jacket because you tend to feel confined and restricted by PLD? Perhaps it is more like an Emperor's Jacket because the effects on your practice are invisible. Or do you see your PLD as an Ole Favourite Jacket that you can tailor to meet your needs and expectations. Your choice and style of jacket could be influenced by

such things as your previous experiences of PLD, your personal and professional orientations to and capabilities with the content, your beliefs dispositions and subjectivities, your career stage or objectives, and your home and school responsibilities. You may choose a different jacket when participating in PLD workshops, when reporting back to others on the merits of the PLD, when applying PLD principles to practice, when being observed teaching, or when analysing student achievement data. The jacket you select could reflect the level to which you engage with the PLD, and so provide an indicator of the potential effectiveness and sustainability of the PLD, and ultimately the impact the PLD can have on increasing your students' achievement.

A jacket is a common article of clothing that is extensively recognised and easily visualised. Jackets come in many designs and have a wide variety of uses. They can be worn casually or formally, straight off the rack, or be customised by the wearer. The use of a common article of clothing, such as a jacket, can enable teachers to access, interpret, and communicate how they wear their PLD. The humorous and non-threatening introduction of the jacket

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metaphor can allow potentially emotive or problematic issues such as negative dispositions toward the PLD or toward changing classroom practice, to be addressed. These discussions reach to the heart of developing a safe environment where teachers feel confident about contributing ideas, airing concerns, seeking understanding, reconciling differences, and collaborating.

In this article we discuss the use of the jacket metaphor within statistics PLD. We argue that the use of the metaphor provided lead teachers with a tool to reflect on and understand teachers' general perceptions of PLD and to accentuate and accelerate their own engagement with their statistics PLD. We begin by reviewing literature regarding the constructs of effective PLD. Next we explore the use of metaphor in research and in particular in pre-service and in-service mathematics teacher education. Methods of data collection and analysis are then explained. The findings from the study are described and discussed. We conclude by considering the implications and possible next steps of this research.

2. Effective professional learning and development

Teacher professional learning and development is about "teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students' growth" (Avalos, 2011, p. 10). Ultimately all PLD should result in improved and valued educational outcomes for students (Anthony, Hunter, & Thompson, 2014; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Timperley, Parr, & Bertanees, 2009; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). Four core principles that underpin effective PLD involve providing opportunities for teachers to develop adaptive expertise, having an understanding of how teachers learn, the development of teacher and teaching communities, and locating the PLD within organisations with adaptive capacity that support and align with the PLD (Avalos, 2011; Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010; Borko, Koellner, & Jacobs, 2014; Edwards, 2012; Timperley, 2011a; Timperley et al., 2009).

The first principle of effective PLD calls for teachers to develop adaptive expertise. Teachers with adaptive expertise are specialists in retrieving, organising, utilising, and reconsidering their professional knowledge and beliefs. They respond effectually to students' challenges and needs, they accurately measure and feed back on the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and they know when and from whom to request help (Timperley, 2011a). Borko et al. (2014) contended that when teachers adapt the PLD to their own contexts, whilst maintaining the integrity of the PLD's objectives and strategies, the likelihood of sustained positive outcomes from the PLD are increased.

The second principle is the need for those leading the PLD to provide opportunities for teachers to learn through drawing on their existing knowledge and experiences, identifying how new ideas or theories may work in practice, and taking control of their own learning through meta-cognitive and self-regulatory processes (Borko et al., 2014; Timperley, 2011a). It is important that teacher learning is situated within the cognitive and emotive practice of teaching (Borko et al., 2010). The capacity for, and willingness of, teacher change requires teachers to individually and collectively make connections between their existing cognition, beliefs, and knowledge and the nature of altered, reinforced, or improved practice (Avalos, 2011; Edwards, 2012).

The importance of the social contexts in which the PLD occurs is the third principle of effective PLD. Teachers need occasions within and beyond their classrooms and schools to socially and collegially construct individual and shared knowledge and expertise (Edwards, 2012; Timperley et al., 2009). Shared knowledge and expertise offers teachers opportunities to examine their practice through many sets of eyes and ears, in essence "I tell my story for me and you hear it for you" (Miller, East, Fitzgerald, Heston, & Veenstra, 2002, p. 82). Vadeboncoeur and Torres (2003) summarised these first three principles as what teachers need most:

> the time and opportunity to share their experiences, concerns and ideas with colleagues, to reflect on and study their practices systematically, to examine the theories and beliefs underlying their practice, to explore new methods and strategies, and to rethink their theoretical frameworks in the light of other frameworks. (p. 97)

However, if school leaders and policies do not support and promote the first three principles of adaptive expertise, teachers as learners, and social contexts then it becomes very difficult for new or improved knowledge and practices to influence student achievement at a whole school level. At best, teachers' practices tend to remain enactments of the PLD expectations rather than deliberate changes to improve practice and student outcomes (Timperley et al., 2009).

This article describes a metaphorical approach used in the context of statistics PLD that we believe was aligned with the first three principles of effective PLD. Lead teachers had opportunities to consider the relationships between teachers in general and PLD, to contextualise the PLD to their own environments, to learn about themselves as learners and have autonomy as learners (Avalos, 2011; Borko et al., 2014; Edwards, 2012; Timperley, 2011a).

Having considered the principles of effective PLD within this study it is also important to review the constructs and processes of metaphor that contributed to this study. In the following section we review the use of metaphor in research and in particular in pre-service and in-service teacher education.

3. On metaphors

Metaphors are a cognitive, linguistic, and experiential conceptual process commonly used in thinking and communication (East, 2009; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Noyes, 2006). They are so much part of our language that they profoundly influence the ways we perceive, think, and act, which in turn affect the metaphors we use (Bruner, 1990; Green, 1971). Our conceptualizations, our actions, and consequently, our language, are "metaphorically structured" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5). Santa Ana (1999) contended that the more common place metaphors become, and the more straightforward they seem, and the more powerful they can become in how we think. Martínez, Sauleda, and Huber (2001) posited that metaphors "constitute an essential mechanism of the mind" (p. 965). As such, many of the conceptual processes through which we filter, interpret, understand, and frame our world are based on metaphors (East, 2003; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Noyes, 2006). Metaphor usage is "a ubiquitous feature of our thinking and our discourse, and the basis of the conceptual systems by means of which we understand and act within our worlds (Taylor, 1984, p. 5).

A metaphor "consists of the projection of one schema (the source domain of the metaphor) onto another schema (the target domain of the metaphor) to which the meaning is conveyed" (Levin & Wagner, 2006, p. 237). The source is the domain through which the target is being metaphorically explained or conveyed and the target is the domain that we try to explain or understand (Armstrong, 2008). Sources tend to be more concrete while targets are more abstract. By bringing the knowledge of the source domain to the target domain one concept becomes related to the other and metaphors give us two ideas for one (Kovecses, 2002; Lakoff, 1994). King (2001) explored the example of "jazz improvisation" as the source domain and "conceptually oriented mathematics teaching" as the target domain when examining teachers' orientation toward