

## Encounters in metaphors: Connecting the bridgeheads of teachers' practical knowledge and professional language

Per Lindqvist ([per.lindqvist@lnu.se](mailto:per.lindqvist@lnu.se)) and Ulla Karin Nordänger ([ulla-karin.nordanger@lnu.se](mailto:ulla-karin.nordanger@lnu.se))  
Linneaus University, Department of Education, Psychology and Sports Science, Sweden

### Abstract

The article discusses the possibility of bridging the gap between the personal and contextual practical knowledge of teachers on the one hand and presumptive generic teacher knowledge on the other. Within the framework of two research projects and with the help of several different methods, data concerning the practical knowledge of teachers have been collected. To begin with, data are related to Martin Buber's theories regarding experience as insight. Teachers' will and ability to be present in the classroom, their desire to realise a relationship, is suggested to be a crucial part of their practical knowledge. The article furthermore emphasises the way teachers use metaphors to describe the core of their knowledge. The article discusses how these ways of talking about practice can contribute to professional development. The use of 'living metaphors' highlights such a possibility.

**Keywords:** Metaphors for teaching; teacher professional knowledge; teacher education; experience; professional language

### Introduction

Can the practical knowledge of teachers be expressed verbally, and if so, how? Can it be transferred to new generations of professionals and thus made to cross the continually observed gulf that separates the academic from the professional field? In the years of 2003-2006, we conducted some intense conversations on these topics with 41 teachers. The framework of these conversations consisted of two research projects on the relationship of practical knowledge to the language in use.

The purpose of the article is to demonstrate how it may be possible to bridge the person and context dependent practical knowing of teacher's with presumptive generic teacher knowledge. We want to show what type of experience teachers feel is central to their experience of professional knowledge, illustrate how this experience is articulated and test 'if and how' these ways of talking about experience can be perceived as a professional language and as something that can be used for professional development. In this article we first aim to elucidate the relationship between what has been termed 'experience' and teachers' practical knowledge. With the aid of empirical examples taken from our studies, tied primarily to Buber (1923/1994), we discuss the phenomenon of experience from the vantage point of the overall question: Is 'experience' a uniform concept? We then start with one type of experience – what Buber refers to as insight – and again review our empirical material. The teachers' will and ability to be present and their wish to realise a relation are emphasised as a crucial component of the practical knowledge of teachers.

We then relate the experience-based professional knowledge to the prevalence and development of teachers' professional language. When we review our files, full of interview transcriptions, and when we read narratives full of enthusiasm and passion, packed with professional reflections and examples – and when we realise that we actually understand, that we understand so well that we get

goose pimples – we have to question the notion that teachers lack a professional language (e.g. Lortie, 1975, Swedish Ministry of Education, 2005 OECD, 2005) and that their practical knowledge to a large extent is considered to be tacit (Munby, Russell & Martin, 2002; Polanyi, 1967). Selander (2005) argues that the language of a social profession is elastic and goes beyond definitions and strict classifications. Maybe the supposed lack of a professional language rather points to the fact that something essential is lost in the transposition between these narratives and what is traditionally characterised as a ‘professional language’. Perhaps the most important content is lost in the translation process itself?

In our studies, as in others (see, for instance, Munby & Russell, 1990; Craig, 2005), we can see that teachers who describe the core of their expertise often make use of examples, parables, analogies and metaphors. Therefore, a third aim of this article is to focus on these ways of expressing practice and examine if – and if so, how – such expressions may contribute to a common professional learning. Among other things, we want to highlight the use of ‘living metaphors’ (Pramling, 2006) as one possibility.

## The study

### Empirical foundation

The research product may be likened to a ‘montage’ where several photographs are placed beside each other with the intention to create a composite image (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4). Data from two different research projects has been used. In the first project, which was conducted 2003–2004, we interviewed 25 teachers (T 1-25, primarily subject teachers) with the purpose of collecting so-called life stories focusing on their professional lives (Goodson & Sykes, 2001).

**Table 1: Teachers in project 1**

<b>Years of experience</b>	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40
<b>No. of teachers</b>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>

The second project, taking place 2005-2008, contains different types of conversations with 16 teachers (T 26–41, from all stages) comprising the e-delphi method (Lindqvist & Nordänger, 2007), dialogue seminars (Göranzon, 2006) and discussions regarding video-taped situations in the daily life of teachers, so called stimulated recall (Calderhead, 1981). All conversations have been registered with the help of video, digital sound recording or some other form of ICT (e-mail conversations). In connection with the dialogue seminars, the teachers produced texts that were collected afterwards.

Our ambition was to tie skilful teachers with long work-experience to the project, assuming that the assignment – to express and discuss practical knowledge – could be handled better by a selection of teachers with a considerable number of years of experience. In other studies, it is apparent that experienced professionals/experts are different from novices in precisely this area (Berliner, 2001; Krull, 2005). Experienced teachers make use of more and broader terms when they describe their profession. Compared to novices they speak more easily and more coherently about their practice; they become engaged more quickly and more profoundly and are better at moving from one perspective to another (Krull, Oras & Sisask, 2007).

With this in mind, an invitation for the second project was formulated to compulsory-school teachers and principals were asked to identify teachers 'that are considered by the profession to be skilful', and to give them our letter of invitation. Using that phrase proved to be unfortunate. It eventually became apparent that the teachers who were attracted by the study were repelled by the above formulation. Either they did not perceive themselves as 'skilful', or they felt presumptuous to pose as such. A new invitation was designed and with the help of contacts with principals and colleagues, 16 teachers from the Swedish compulsory school system, teaching pupils from age 7 to 16, all having 12 to 38 years of experience in the teaching profession (Table 1), were recruited. Together they possess 426 years of teacher practice.

**Table 2: Teachers in project 2**

Teaching level	Years of teaching experience
Handicraft (7-16)	20
Intermediate (10-13)	39
Intermediate	33
Intermediate	12
Intermediate	30
Intermediate	19
Intermediate	27
Intermediate	38
Junior (7-10)	30
Junior	30
Junior	15
Junior	32
Pre-school	21
Pre-school	33
Senior (13-16)	13
Senior	34

## Findings and discussions

### Insightful presence as the core of teachers' practical knowledge

It would seem, at least when consulting active teachers, that the most efficient element of formal teacher training is School Based Training, what is traditionally referred to as teaching practice. Teaching students describe this source of *experience* as the key to professional knowledge. Active teachers also argue that the foundation for successful teaching consists of systematised experiences that have been boiled down to a set of professional skills.

However, this concept seems to be misleading at times. The equation does not add up. The amount of experience and the development of the knowledge and skills of the teachers do not always correspond quantitatively with each other. Within research that studies 'expert knowledge' it is often argued that experience and expertise are not the same thing (Berliner, 1987; Horvath &

Sternberg, 1995; Lampert & Clark, 1990). Experience is important, however, as it provides the necessary conditions for teachers to develop expertise. In other words, experience seems to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for expertise and it may be useful to pose the question ‘Does *everything* that we refer to as experience truly describe the same type of phenomenon or experience?’ Maybe it is necessary to have ingested a particular kind of experience to be considered a skilful practitioner?

An analysis on teachers’ knowledge, based on their experiences, can find support from theories of various kinds. In our case the coding process of different types of data in the project has generated theoretical ideas leading to literature on meaning as a product of social interaction and to theories on intersubjectivity. In our analytical attempt to shed light on expressions from the teachers we found support from the writings of the religious philosopher Martin Buber. This does not imply that the work of others, for example Meads (1934) theories on symbolic interactionism or Levinas (1994) writing on the subject as constituted by ethical relationships, is not acknowledged. As we argue in the article, using a specific conceptual framework to elucidate data will on one hand allow us to see things we have not previously been able to see, but on the other it will leave aspects that are not in line with the chosen framework in the shade.

Martin Buber who, in his most important work *I and Thou* discusses the distinction between experience and a state where you feel connected, something he describes as insight.

*IT IS said that man experiences his world. What does that mean? Man travels over the surface of things and experiences them. He extracts knowledge about their constitution from them: he wins an experience from them. He experiences what belongs to the things. But the world is not presented to man by experiences alone. These present him only with a world composed of It and He and She and IT again (Buber, 1923/1994, p. 17)*

Can this something that we continue referring to as ‘experiences’ in fact be two – sometimes closely connected – sometimes qualitatively separate phenomena: experiences and what Buber refers to as insights? In this case the concept of insights, as we understand it, does not refer to a result of a state when the human being sees herself as pursuing coherence (compare Plato’s insight as a particular knowledge ability), but instead to the result of a state when the human being orients herself outward, when she lives and experiences encounters in a different way, what Levinas would call a radical experience (Kemp, 2009). The space in between, when you are a part of different relationships, is the true reality according to Buber. The quality of knowledge is not primarily contributable to the amount of experience it is based on, but on the quality of experiences in between.

*For the real, though certainly swaying and swinging, boundary runs neither between experience and non-experience, nor between what is given and what is not given, nor yet between the World of Being and the World of Value; but cutting indifferently across all these provinces it lies between Thou and It, between the present and the object. (Buber, 1923/1994, pp. 25-26)*

Buber (1923/1994) argues that the human being’s relationship to the world can be divided into two main ways of being in it/approaching it. Our self can be constituted, found and act in two different attitudes/relations beginning with the primary words I-Thou and I-It. In other words, according to Buber the world can be perceived as a thing or as being part of relationships.

Hence the *I* of man is also twofold.

*For the I of the primary word I-Thou is a different I from that of the primary word I-It.*  
(Buber, 1924/1994, pp. 15)

The relationship with which we approach the world is also how we constitute the world. The primary words do not say anything about a reality which could 'exist independently of them, but being spoken they bring about existence' (ibid, p. 15). In the very same way, the subject is formed. There is no 'I taken in itself, but only the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* and the *I* of the primary word *I-It*. When a man says I he refers to one or another of these' (ibid. p. 16). When we speak of ourselves, we speak, at the same time, also about which of these two positions the subject finds herself/himself in, as a spectator or as a participant.

If we turn to the teachers' statements, the key words in the description of their knowledge do not consist of the systematic and reflective professional knowledge that comes out of repeated experience as an I-It spectator, but of insightful presence, a state of uncritical relation. During one sequence in our initial conversations with the teachers, we drew a circle on a blank sheet of paper, put the pencil in the middle of the circle and asked: 'If this entire circle is your work as a teacher, where you perform different types of actions in different situations, what does it look like when you are here, in the middle of the circle, in the middle of your work, in the centre of you knowledge?' We read from the descriptions:

*And it works, you have a sense of it working, there is some rapt look, someone, whose head is most often nonchalantly askew, sits up and looks at you and focuses, focuses on you. And then, there is a devoutly moment, and then, in some way, you have touched upon that delightful way to ... how do you say it? ... not an aha-experience ... That this was something ... what was it? It feels as if something good has brushed, something important, something valuable. But life is like that too, what you get to feel in the best moments, when one connects, is seen and understood ... this flow between the pupils and me. I guess this is why many become teachers – to experience this at some point. (Teacher 1)*

The teachers' descriptions of being in the 'middle' of their work consist of sudden images. In an almost electrical moment, the teacher has touched upon or been enveloped by a feeling of being ... in the centre. To the teachers these situations appear full of meaning and almost magical. These moments seem, in other words, to contain a fundamental meaning for teachers and thus they could also contain a source for learning. However, such experiences occur as offers that can only be received without being combined with strategic planning or conscious reflection.

In these I-Thou meetings when you 'connect' and when the teacher is 'seen and confirmed'. It is often himself or herself the teacher refers to when he or she talks about 'becoming'.

*... that feeling of the magical when you stand in front of a group, or are with a group of young people ... and have something to tell them. And there ... there is that volcano of enthusiasm that I have to fuel it all. In the moment when I stand there and then I know that I ... now I will tell them something. And then ... they listen ... I don't have to say something, I may show them something. And I am there with my presence and can influence ... that is the very palpable force. (Teacher 7)*

In contrast to I-Thou encounters, to meet the world as an It entails a more impersonal and unidirectional relationship between the self and things of material or human aspect. Such I-It relations are called 'discursivity' by Larsson (1892/1997) and 'discursive understanding' by Eneroth (2007). In this condition, knowledge is possible to articulate and to transfer with help of a more precise language. By thinking, reasoning and compiling concepts, the human being can feel

that she understands. This type of understanding appears when thoughts shape connections, systems, explanatory models or paradigms and interpretation patterns.

Both the discursive understanding and insights are irreplaceable and unavoidable parts in the life of human beings and thus also in the work of teachers. Our attitude creates, in qualitatively different ways, the impressions we carry along from our meeting with the world. From the It-world we can bring what we call experiences, experiences that can be transformed to discursive understanding, formulated and made into something that has been 'evidence-based', that is, possible to categorise, measure and systematise. From the Thou-world, however, which consists of being present in relationships, we bring what Buber calls insights. These insights – which cannot be systemised nor easily shared or enforced upon someone – change the entire standpoint furtively. They reconfigure the very base for how we sort and create patterns from our experiences. The insights shed new light on these experiences and do not contribute in any self-evident way to some form of cumulative or consolidated knowledge. It would be more correct to say that they dissolve the well-trying contexts, challenge positions of safety and leave more questions than answers.

*In this chronicle of solid benefits the moments of the Thou appear as strange, lyric and dramatic episodes, seductive and magical, but tearing us away to dangerous extremes, loosening the well-trying context, leaving more questions than satisfaction behind them, shattering security... (Buber, 1924/1994, p. 51)*

For a teacher who has conquered this type of insights the teaching profession appears as more complex and less able to master discursively. Or, as one of the teachers in the study, with twenty years of experience, express:

*In the beginning of my career I thought I was a competent teacher but now I have discovered that it is much more complex. (Teacher 29)*

Landahl (2006) comments on how states of insecurity correlate with the knowledge of teachers when he refers to the primary school inspector Nordlund, who ascertained more than 80 years ago that teachers can never be 'anything but bunglers and amateurs' in their profession (p. 142), and argues that this is perfectly in order. Instead of criticising ignorance, the lack of rock-steady convictions is revalued according to Landahl who furthermore claims that:

*The experience of insecurity and the lack of precise knowledge should not be a cause for too much concern. It is the opposite that should worry people. A teacher who only looks for a professional base for his or her actions will find herself or himself in situations where he or she discovers that there is no such rock-steady foundation (ibid. p. 143).*

In other words, experience can be stored and, at a latter stage, be transformed into discursive knowledge and used to deal with new situations. Insights, on the other hand, can demolish everything that has been built in this arduous way. Like a bolt out of the blue they make reality take on new shapes. To always exist in a state of insight seems impossible, or, if it were possible, positively dangerous. A more feasible and desirable position would be the will to be present, the desire to create a relationship, to aspire to a situation where the pupils always experience that the relationship is there – as a possibility. We see such expressions of will in the teachers' stories. The most decisive element of their competence as teachers seems to be precisely this will to openness, this attempt to meet and see the pupil.

*I have the ambition of having these precious meetings every day. But that isn't always the case. But I mean, they still got the chance. (Teacher 30)*

To accomplish a true encounter, discursive understanding does not suffice; it is not enough to think in parts and concepts. The teachers wants to see, literally realise the pupil, not as a context or connection, but as 'an image of how all parts, elements and aspects fold into each other, weaves into one indissoluble whole' (Eneroth, 2006, p. 4). In our transcriptions, we can see that this is a tall order. Teachers must exert themselves to realise the pupil. You have to 'seek' (Teacher 19), 'dig deeper' (Teacher 24) so that something can be 'laid bare' (Teacher 1) and 'discovered' (Teacher 3). Teachers often describe this as a type of exploratory activity.

*To begin in the pupils own thought. That you have to find where they are.* (Teacher 7)

*When you touch ground – become mutual.* (Teacher 21)

There is no doubt that the exploration of the pupil also entails an encounter. One's own person, one's own body, are the tools with which exploration is conducted. For the teacher to realise the pupil, the pupil must realise the teacher. As a teacher, you have to lay yourself bare and show yourself to the pupil. Expression like 'you lay yourself bare' (Teacher 3), 'you empty yourself' (Teacher 7) and 'you take from yourself' (Teacher 6) are common in the material. Thus, it is very important for a teacher to be seen. You have to be able to 'take the stage' (Teacher 19). According to this logic it is significant for the teachers to catch the eyes of their students. If not there is no encounter and the inner of the students is not within reach. One of the teachers makes comments on this when looking at a sequence of the video, in which she, when her students enter the classroom, shake their hands. In a surprised voice she exclaim:

*You believe that you can see every child and that you can confirm them but all the children are not seeing me.* (Teacher 26)

Most teachers have no problems calling up experiences from insightful meetings. They describe lyrically the moments when a real encounter between teacher and pupil occurred. Such encounters are often perceived through the eyes of the student, in the look of the eyes. In these short moments, when the teacher notices that they have 'captured them' (Teacher 2), when they see 'some rapt look' (Teacher 1), when 'the child's eyes are aglow' (Teacher 11) when they see 'some small star being lit' (Teacher 10) or when the student is 'really on fire' (Teacher 12), this is when the teacher feels truly rewarded in their profession, or as one of the teachers put it: 'then I feel a shiver'. The fear of losing this possibility by losing their sensitivity to the signals of the pupils is prevalent in the material.

*My greatest fear is to miss some child's signals, which I do not see nor feel...* (Teacher 4)

The moments of insightful presence, can be found throughout our material. They are, as we perceive them, imprints of experience that can be connected to the centre of teachers' knowledge (and for most teachers also what triggers work satisfaction), that is, the ability to create a special kind of relationship with the pupils. Fibaeck-Laursen (2004) argues that such abilities have been thought of as coincidental and they have been described as connected to 'the teacher's unique personality and to a particular chemistry which for some reason has appeared between a teacher and a pupil' (ibid., p. 7). In research on effective teaching, where teacher knowledge is referred to as formal knowledge (Fenstermacher, 1994), these abilities have consequently been perceived as uninteresting. In contrast to this view, Fibaeck-Laursen argues that experiences and descriptions of such flows instead concern the centre of pedagogical competency and that we therefore must explore the phenomena and try to understand how it develops. If insightful presence is a core of teachers' practical knowledge it is of high relevance to try to understand how teachers talk about it.

Is there a professional language for this kind of knowledge and can it be used to contribute to professional learning?

### **Metaphors as an expression for practical knowledge**

Can experience-based, practical knowledge be transformed into discursive understanding? Can insights be remade into experiences? Yes, but not in states of relationships, says Buber. To be transferable and comprehensible, insights must be transposed into experiences in the majority of cases.

*I do not experience a man to whom I say Thou (...) Only when I step out of it do I experience him once more. In the act of experience Thou is far away.* (Buber, 1924/1994, p. 22)

The entire thing must be divided, units must be torn apart to form diversity, the melody must again become notes and the poem must be divided into single words, one must 'take out from him the colour of his hair or of his speech or of his goodness' (ibid., p. 21), with the intention of making him an experience but at the same moment he is no longer Thou and you are no longer present, according to Buber. A well defined and precise professional language could thus not contain insights.

Is there then no way of transferring insights in their more original shape, in the shape where the melody is kept intact and where the colour does not need to be separated from the flow of hair? Artists are able to 'freeze' these moments in their creations and images so that an observer from these images can experience the original feeling. Josefson (1991) argues that the strength of art is its ability to create unique examples that relate to similar images of life experiences within us. However, is this true only for music or sculpture and imagery in the shape of artwork, or can insight also be preserved in linguistic images?

If we return to the text and try viewing the teacher's expressions as 'artwork' we soon discover that images appear. Expressions such as 'take the stage', that the pupils are 'really on fire' or that 'the children's eyes are aglow' are attempts at describing one thing as something else. When the teachers are asked to describe what they do they also use metaphors to a great extent. The classroom is described as an 'oasis' (Teacher 23), a 'football ground' (Teacher 31) or a 'greenhouse' (Teacher 25) and the class is depicted as a 'team' (Teacher 31), a 'community' (Teacher 19) or as 'plants' (Teacher 25) and in relation to this the teachers describe themselves and their professional identity as for example a 'coach' (Teacher 31) or a 'gardener' (Teacher 25).

Teachers' frequent use of metaphors when describing their work can be perceived as a substitute for a more precise language use, as a poetic embellishment. However, does this form of expression help us to understand and experience the original feeling despite being outside the immediate context? That metaphors can be used as carriers of practical knowledge has been suggested by many studies. It has been shown that parts of what has been termed the tacit knowledge of professionals, as in the case with the teacher above, can be partly articulated and that metaphors are very useful tools (Calderhead, 1991; Connelly & Clandinin, 1995; Craig, 2005; Munby & Russell, 1990; Munby, 1990). The use of metaphors are not referred to as problematic in these studies, as if the teachers lack the 'proper' terms and instead use other, less precise concepts. Instead of focusing on the absence of more adequate terms (whatever they might be) the focus is instead directed at the presence of metaphors.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that thought processes of the human mind are structured metaphorically to a large extent and that we, by studying the character of the metaphors, can better

understand how they affect and are affected by different actions. This idea originates with Wittgenstein (1967/1997) who argues that people always 'see' something 'as' something, which in turn means that the possibility of understanding a phenomenon is framed by language.

New metaphors have the power to create a new reality, allowing us to discover something new in a world we have not previously been able to discover. When a new metaphor enters the conceptual system that we base our actions on, it will change this system and eventually also the ideas and actions that the system has given rise to. Bäckström (2003) argues that what is unique about metaphorical thinking is that the metaphor creates its own system of association and is thereby not tied to conventions. Instead, it links things and objects that one normally does not link. Thus, it lays bare a routine use of the language through alienation, which suggests that the metaphor itself creates its own laws and rules to some extent.

*Rather than meaning, the metaphor is characterised by the fact that it does something; instead of accounting for thoughts, it creates thoughts. It functions as a destabiliser of meaning.* (Bäckström, 2003, s. 234)

If we return to the teachers descriptions of their work in the classroom and connect them to the video recorded observations, it is clear that the metaphors also result in certain actions *in the classroom* (compare Connelly & Clandinin, 1995). If we for example compare the first lesson of the day in the work that is described with metaphors of 'team-trainer-football ground' (A) with the work that is illustrated with metaphors of 'plants-gardener-green house' (B) the connections between metaphorical descriptions and the actual actions become obvious. In the A-setting the stereo is on playing rock music on a high volume when the class enters the classroom. The first gathering of the group is like a line-up before a game while in the B-setting a candle-light is burning and the class enters quietly accompanied by soothing classical music.

According to the teachers the prerequisite for a link between the metaphorical descriptions and the actions consist of ideals. The teacher's metaphorical descriptions of their work and their practice in classrooms are more consistent if they believe in something and that these ideals are deeply rooted in the teacher as a person. The teachers are talking about 'taking a stand' (L 28) 'staying the course' (L 39) and 'showing who you are' (L 33). They are comparing it to a kind of stubbornness, 'We are very stubborn persons who don't want to give up what we believe in' (L28), saying that it's all about believing in yourself '...that you believe very hard in your ideas, that you send out a kind of certainty of belief' (L 37) and that 'you have to act as if everything is important' (L 33).

The ideals, as the metaphorical descriptions, seem to alter somewhat over the years depending on the teachers work and life but first and most they vary between one teacher and another. During the dialogue seminars the teachers frequently returned to the fact that they have different ideas on their work, sometimes so different that they probably couldn't be able to work as colleagues with the same group of students. What unites them though is that they all have an idea, that they believe in it and that it is communicated and negotiated with their students and their parents.

*I have been listening to everybody here... The goal for all of us is after all very similar. We all have a common denominator but I don't think that we might be able to work in the same team. We shouldn't get on with one another. However we have similar opinions on many things and the goals are similar. But what I want to say is that the goal is clear but the road to it is very different for all of us. We can only be in one way and that is how we are as persons. Don't get me wrong but you can be a poor pedagogue and still reach the goal if you succeed in getting your students and their parents to believe in what you believe in.* (Teacher 33)

## Lost in translation?

The dream of ‘the precise language’ (Göranzon, 2006), the language which makes it possible to define precisely, describe, standardise and systematically transfer knowledge from one generation of professionals to the next, has been nurtured by thinkers for centuries. Even though there are claims that artificial expert systems have been successfully produced (within healthcare for example), people in the professions refuse to use them. It would seem that their understanding of what constitutes professionalism precludes this possibility. The very experience of genuine knowledge assumes that one has left the instructions and the cook books behind and instead relies on experience and what is commonly referred to as instinctive feel (Göranzon, 2006). ‘You wouldn’t happen to have the recipe?’ asks the teacher, hungry for knowledge, in Torgny Lindgren’s novel *Hash* and is met by an incredulous matron:

*‘Recipe?’ said Eva Marklund. ‘A recipe like that wouldn’t be possible. Who would be able to understand it? It could never be written down on paper, there’s a limit to what words can describe!’* (Lindgren, 2002/2004, p. 54).

It follows that the foundation of a vocational training program and the development of teaching knowledge must be that it builds its knowledge based assumptions not only on what Saugstad (2006) calls ‘spectator knowledge’ (cf. discursive understanding and propositional knowledge Fenstermacher, 1994), but also includes epistemological positions where ‘participant knowledge’ is positioned centrally. To dare to truly situate yourself in practice becomes just as important as distancing yourself from it through theoretical reflection. To tell stories, to give birth to, keep alive or resurrect metaphors as expressions of practical knowledge become necessary elements of such an education as well as of professional growth. Shulman (1992) tries to fashion an epistemological alternative and describes three types of teaching knowledge: apart from propositional knowledge he describes what he refers to as case or circumstance knowledge and strategic knowledge. Case knowledge is here described as a part of practical knowledge, that is, it is detailed, specific and embedded. He furthermore argues for the possibility to translate propositional knowledge into practical knowledge through precisely the use of detailed case descriptions. Our introductory questions were ‘Is it possible to approach the matter from the other direction? Is possible to translate practical knowledge into generic knowledge in order to transfer it to colleagues as well as new generations of professionals?’ Perhaps the answer can be found by putting the metaphorical use of language in the professional spotlight. However, in the struggle to uncover professional practical knowledge we must not forget that metaphors also have a dark side. Bäckström argues that the metaphor loses its destabilising function with time and becomes a part of every-day language. Old, institutionalised or ‘dead’ metaphors then become part of a literal language; they lose their restructuring power and instead turn into a part of permanency, becoming tools by which institutions and people ‘think’. An example of this may be metaphors of human development as ‘stair’ or ‘ladder’. A routine use of language ‘hides’ different perspectives on the world in this way. The use of one type of metaphor, for example the teachers descriptions of themselves as ‘gardener’ or ‘trainer’ eventually leads to the description of students as ‘plants’ or ‘teams’. One metaphor may in this way prevent us from seeing aspects that are not in line with the chosen metaphor. The students of the ‘gardener’ are excluded from the possibility to be members in a ‘team’. When focusing on the aspects a metaphor emphasises, it is thus also possible to understand what they hide.

*Since every phenomenon may be described in a variety of different ways, learning how to pay attention to and to discern what is pivotal to a certain practice is of great importance... The art of knowing may be seen as consisting of ‘expanding’ our in one sense very limited capacity... What a society does for its members is to equip them with means of simplification.*

*The enormous potential complexity of the world calls for toolkits, one of them is the language and the ordering point of view that go with the language.* (Pramling, 2006, s. 13)

Because of this, when studying teaching, it is of importance to study how complexity is reduced through the images that are used to describe an experience and what possibilities of understanding a situation that are 'opened up' or 'closed'. Pramling (2006) argues that it is decisive for the teaching potential if the user recognises his or her own description as metaphorical, that is if the metaphor is 'alive'.

*Using metaphors in my view does not imply that the speaker herself considers her way of speaking metaphorical. Whether she does so or not is in itself interesting and [...] a critical issue for her learning and knowing.* (ibid., 2006, s. 16)

In other words, what may constitute a potential for the language game that may lead to (professional) development are the metaphors that are born, kept alive or brought back from the dead. (This is, by the way, true also for scientific research itself, as suggested by Brown, 2003, who shows how scientific research uses metaphors to develop different models of explanation).

The dead metaphors which structure our patterns of acting can only be perceived through revitalisation and discussion. To construct new and living metaphors it is necessary to recognise teachers' stories about and images of practical knowledge as being of great importance. These stories and images must furthermore be viewed as a part of their professional language and the content must not be lost in an academic attempt to translate what cannot be translated. To construct an academic and precise language for teachers can be compared to the impossible project to write down the precise recipe to hash.

'We've come to realise that no one hash is like any other. There are as many types of hash as there are people. At least, we suspect that to be the case. We're still at the beginning of our research.'

'Our modest desire,' said Robert Maser, 'is to carry out a provisional survey.' (Lindgren, 2002/2004, s. 161).

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