

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Using Metaphors to Uncover the Selves in my Practice

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This study describes how one teacher educator used metaphor as a self-study tool over an eight-year period. Several methods of eliciting metaphors are discussed and the effects of multiple metaphors on the educator's perspectives on practice are highlighted. The interplay among the metaphors and their meaning is described and used to provide additional insights. The work demonstrates how long-term use of metaphors can be a way to step back from practice, take a new look at the meaning of the particulars of practice, and reframe events of practice. Potential avenues for improvement of practice emerged from these interpretations, and the effects of these changes and possible future efforts are discussed.

Keywords: metaphor; intentional practice; projection; teacher educator; reframing; experience

Personal, professional, and institutional changes influence my teaching and my thinking about how I teach. Simply being aware of these changes does not, however, help me understand their influence on my practice. That consideration is a cyclical and career-long endeavor (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 834), and I need a variety of approaches to maintain consistent inquiry. Here I consider the purposeful use of metaphors and the role that process has played in helping me to understand my teaching over the last eight years. I have identified metaphors through a number of projection techniques. Sometimes I have actively sought a metaphor and sometimes I became aware of one through happenstance, but in all cases it was the extended, focused work with the metaphors that led to better understanding. I discovered that metaphors were often foreshadowed in my writing or thinking before I became consciously aware of them. This focused work reflected the cyclical nature of the relationship between metaphors and actions and the uncertainty about the causal relationship between metaphors and actions (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

Context

I teach in a Midwestern USA public university where the traditional focus has been teacher education. Teacher education still plays a role on campus, but it is no longer the major focus. The state has historically been fairly homogeneous, but an influx of new populations is changing that. Our students, for the most part, have come from small rural towns that have not yet felt the impact of change.

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When this study began in 1999, I was a part-time instructor in the first professional education sequence course, a survey course in child development. In this course, students are second-year university students with a wide range of major and minor subjects. Most are interested in, but have not yet been accepted into, the teacher education program. In 2003, I began a tenure-track position teaching child development and continued teaching the survey course. In 2006, I began teaching a child development course specifically focused on young children. Students in this course are in their third-year of university and have been admitted to teacher education, majoring or minoring in early childhood education.

Theoretical Framework

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) suggest that ‘metaphor is pervasive in everyday language and thought . . . a matter of central concern, perhaps the key to giving an adequate account of understanding’ (p. ix). They describe an experiential approach, suggesting that everyday experience and understanding of experience comes through the metaphors of our language. On this premise, understanding metaphors helps us make better sense of events or concepts in our experience and may lead to proactive use of these conceptual frameworks (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). They point out that metaphors allow an understanding of experience different from objective reality because metaphors contextualize concepts and their relationships rather than defining them in isolation. Metaphors call attention to prototypes, relationships, and the range of applicability rather than focusing on a fixed set of necessary and sufficient conditions. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) look closely at systemic metaphors, such as ‘argument is struggle’ or ‘time is money,’ that undergird our thinking as a culture, while still leaving room for personal metaphors as well.

Cook-Sather (2003) identifies systemic metaphors in teaching and education but, like Lakoff and Johnson (2003), acknowledges creative or imaginative individual metaphors within systemic metaphors that are ‘capable of giving us new understanding of our experience’ (p. 139). These idiosyncratic metaphors are uniquely ours, thereby providing tools for understanding our particular circumstances. Looking at our teaching through such metaphors can allow ‘imaginative expression to personal practical knowledge making it possible for a person to explore hidden intellectual avenues contained in a metaphor’s frame’ (Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997, p. 671).

Just as metaphors and their implications used seriously and critically provide suggestions for improvement of education (Cook-Sather, 2003), individual metaphors, used in the same manner, provide a tool for in-depth examination of practice (Cook-Sather, 2003; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Miller, East, Fitzgerald, Heston, & Veenstra, 2002). Deliberate examination of current or past practices through metaphor can foreground new perspectives and new insights on practice. The literature reports use of metaphor with preservice teachers (e.g., Connelly, Clandinin & He, 1997; Dooley, 1998; Hagstrom et al., 2000; Noyes, 2006; Russell & Hrycenko, 2006; Tobin, 1990), by experienced teachers (Munby & Russell, 1990), and by teacher education faculty (Funmi, 2005; Miller et al., 2002). Review of the literature identified no reports of the use of metaphors over extended periods.

Methodology

This study considers critical use of a variety of metaphors that helped me better understand my practice. I examined, interpreted, and reinterpreted the metaphors that I used when writing about my teaching and specific classroom events. Based on colleague feedback,

I revisited, revised, and enhanced my understanding of particular instructional events as well as the significance and meaning of the metaphors. Rewriting and sharing those writings with peers refined, and continues to refine, my conception of my actions as a teacher educator.

I gathered information about my practice in my teaching journal and in notes from discussions in our self-study group, work with individual colleagues, and *ad hoc* discussions with peers and students. Institutional Teaching Evaluations (ITE) provided additional student perspectives. A variety of projective techniques were used to generate the metaphors.

The Period of the Soil Metaphor

The study began in 1999 when, as an adjunct instructor, I identified 'soil' as my teaching metaphor, and this soil metaphor carried into the beginning of my tenure-track position. I discovered the soil metaphor using the following sentence completion exercise: Given this stimulus, 'When I am teaching at my best, I am like ___' (Palmer, 1998, p. 148), I filled in the blank with the word 'soil'. I pictured myself as a teacher who received students (seeds) and nurtured them into whatever kind of plant they might become (Miller et al., 2002).

My teaching journal comments about the soil metaphor reveal my thinking at that time. 'The soil metaphor tends to obscure my agency and authority in the classroom' (Teaching Journal, 7 Nov. 2000). Although I recognized my agency and authority, I did not actively use it. My attempts at lecturing had been uncomfortable and boring for me, and I was certain that my students felt the same way (East & Meyer-Mork, 2008). Consequently, I sought to develop a classroom where I was more comfortable and students seldom, if ever, fell asleep. I started organizing each class session around a problem that they could discuss in small groups. While the students conferred with one another, I stood at the side of the room and observed without comment to avoid being intrusive. I would answer student queries, but for the majority of the class the students worked while I literally watched from the sidelines.

Additional excerpts from my teaching journals captured my perspectives on practice and, in particular, my thoughts about course planning:

So if the soil metaphor is the one [for me], then perhaps creating the syllabus is tilling the soil; opening it up so there is the possibility of seeds sprouting. This still holds in its passivity because I am the soil, not the tiller. I keep getting stuck!! I am not the tiller and I don't choose the seeds/students. Being soil, I am again only the medium in which the seeds may sprout (Teaching Journal, 23 August 2000).

I struggled with the metaphor because I clearly was more active than soil. I designed the course and made choices about what students would read and do for the course. Despite this disconnect, I continued to use the soil metaphor to think about how I taught.

Where I saw myself as active in my planning, my behavior in the classroom was soil-like. I even used that metaphor to justify my thinking and behavior as reasonable and theoretically sound:

I can't choose the seed, I can't till myself, I can't even choose what I am made up of because things just fall on me and become incorporated. I can only be what I am and allow people to take what they need. I am many things and people take from that selection what suits their needs. This aligns with the idea of individual experience and schema (Teaching Journal, 23 August 2000).

Such excerpts demonstrate how a metaphor can both reveal and mask aspects of practice. My approach meant that my classroom was not open to student input. I was cordial to

students but, like soil, I did little to invite their feedback on classroom processes and their effects on their learning. The passive teaching metaphor kept many issues of my teaching buried.

Students reacted in several ways. They tried their best to make me behave like a ‘real’ teacher. They started asking many questions. In response, I began answering student questions with a question of my own, claiming to want clarification. Students interpreted my questions as an indication that they were wrong. Eventually, my questions led to long stretches of silence. I became an expert at wait time, but perhaps for the wrong reasons. In addition, students sometimes accused me of not teaching because I depended on small group work for learning rather than providing information.

Students were sometimes frustrated because they were unsure of how this unexpected classroom environment worked. They were not inclined to believe my soil-based exhortations that all I expected was that their thinking grow! On occasion, student frustration erupted in anger. I, unlike soil, responded defensively. Despite that response, I continued to claim the passivity represented by the metaphor to avoid dealing directly with issues of practice, ‘I can’t choose the seed, I can’t till myself, I can’t even choose what I am made up of because things just fall on me and become incorporated’ (Teaching Journal, 23 August 2000).

The soil metaphor also captured my approach to grading. Like soil, I attempted to accept, without evaluation, the seeds (students) in the course. I graded student work as required, based on some accepting, tacit assessment of individual growth. I had a global sense of the content or skills students needed, but no clear, explicit standards. Students had no tangible way of knowing what was important.

Students responded positively when this grading approach led to favorable results for them, as it often did. Those few students whom I judged as showing insufficient growth thought the grading to be subjective and unfair. At times I felt that students took advantage of this method by doing the minimum, rather than their personal best. Students with whom I connected seemed to thrive and learn in these circumstances. Feedback from that set of students allowed me to label my teaching as successful.

On the ITE forms, students generally commented positively on the class. For example:

I think she brought our class together fairly well and got us into some good discussions. I also really feel like I have learned a lot of important concepts; [and] you can tell that she really has a passion for teaching. Really mainly concerned with whether her students get the material. I also really enjoyed the open atmosphere she created in the classroom.

A few students requested more explanation about assignments: ‘My learning in the course would have improved if the instructor had clearly explained what she expected from assignments.’ However, the majority were satisfied with the teaching and their learning. Student ratings were at 97% for effective or highly effective teaching, and at 91% for satisfactory or highly satisfactory learning (ITE, 2000).

The Transition from Soil to Weaver

During the period of the soil metaphor, I was involved in collaborative self-study groups (East & Fitzgerald, 2006). At one meeting I shared what I was preparing for a presentation on course assignments and my colleagues made a variety of suggestions. I was most surprised when they pointed out that I did not address the self who designed and presented the assignment (M. Heston, personal communication, 10 April 2006). I was in a self-study group of teacher educators! How could I have developed an approach that ignored the self? That comment opened a new avenue for thinking about my practice. Schön (1995) noted that disruptions are

critical to our learning because recognizing the surprising event or idea can lead us to seek explanations and restructure our thinking. My colleagues provided that surprise.

In April 2006, I discovered that my metaphor had changed (Hamilton & Pinnegar, in press). The change was revealed when I presented the notion of metaphor as a stimulus in a colleague's class. While students drew their metaphors, I drew mine. To my surprise, a weaver, not soil, appeared. Subconsciously, my metaphor had evolved to reflect a change in my practice, but it became a useful tool only when I became aware of it. 'We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor' (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 158).

I believe that having a colleague-observer in my classroom for a semester contributed significantly to the change in my metaphor. Our exchanges from that period support this conjecture. Her presence and comments on my teaching encouraged me to become a more active presence in the classroom:

I feel the effect of her presence most strongly when I am planning. The fact that she is there has pushed me to consider more intentionally the threads of the course and how to keep pulling them along as we move forward. Previously, I would have planned what we were going to do but would have let the questions about how things fit together emerge from the students, thus making those connections a fairly haphazard event. I have a sense, at least, that they are really getting more as I pull the threads along (Teaching Journal, 28 January 2004).

Written before I was conscious of the weaver metaphor, this entry demonstrates that the new metaphor was already shaping my thinking.

Once I became aware of the weaver metaphor in Spring 2006, I recognized its presence in my planning. As I designed activities, I began to consider what student responses might follow, rather than just adopting a wait-and-see approach. For each of the possibilities identified, I deliberately planned how I would respond to ensure that students' responses were more interwoven with the lesson content. Unlike my role under the soil metaphor, I now came into the classroom prepared to be active, as a weaver.

With the new metaphor clearly in mind, I spent my classroom time moving back and forth among groups. When I thought about class, I actually pictured myself weaving students and content together:

As a weaver I am much more actively present in the classroom and that reflects how I am approaching my practice. I think of the students as the loom in some ways, for it is together that we create the cloth of the class. I wanted to see them as more active than the loom but considered that in actuality the loom is fairly active in the weaving of the cloth in response to the action of the weaver. This seems to fit both how I am thinking about and behaving in my practice at this point (Teaching Journal, 28 March 2006).

Being deliberately active during class was a significant change in my practice.

The following field notes from my colleague/observer captured one interaction with students at the beginning of what I describe as my weaving period. As she observed me working with a small group who were trying to represent their understanding of physical development in a drawing, she recorded the following: 'Student says 'Bikes – wheels go round and round,' but what else?' Reading this, I recalled that the students appeared stuck and I intervened in a way I never would have intervened during the soil period. Her notes continue:

K [Katheryn] approaches and says, 'Don't be frustrated; keep thinking. How else could you use the bike as a metaphor? What are the parts of a bike?' Silence, and then a student ventures, 'Well there is the frame that holds it all together.' K responds, 'Great, that is exactly the kind of thinking that will take you forward. I think you have a start now.' K moves off, returning

shortly. K looks at what they have done and asks, 'What steers this?' After their answer, K suggests bike parts that they have not yet used. K ends with, 'If you are going to use a metaphor, use it thoughtfully. Are you getting excited?' It appears they are because as K walks away students talk animatedly: 'The pedals could be ...' 'The seat could relate to the reflexive motor phase,' and 'We could use the handle bars to represent grasping.' (D. Deemer, personal communication, 27 March 2006)

My colleague noted, 'In discussing with K, she self-assesses, saying, "I really believe they can do it. They can make as much sense of this as I do"' (D. Deemer, personal communication, 27 March 2006). Later, she sent me a brief email message: 'I think it is your ability to build relationships with and among your students that helps you to think deeply about/around an object of thought' (D. Deemer, personal communication, 18 November 2007). Her descriptions captured how the weaver metaphor changed my intentions and interactions in the classroom, as I moved from standing by the wall to being an active agent. This change also invited my students to become more active. As well, I changed my approach to grading and started exploring the use of rubrics:

I made a sincere and continued effort to explicitly and repeatedly tell students how what I was asking them to do connected to the larger structure of the class and their future as educators. I was giving them a skeletal structure where they could hang things rather than assuming that they would make that connection without my help (Teaching Journal, 5 October 2006).

By constructing course objectives connected to the rubrics, I was able to use grading as another way to weave students and content together, while also interweaving the course with their teacher education program.

The students continued to remark on my interest in them and their learning: 'Really knows what she is doing and gains the respect of all her students'; 'She is very much a people person'; 'I have enjoyed my time in this class.' Despite my introduction of rubrics, students still made comments like, 'I have no clue what my grade will be because of her grading system.' Though lower than the soil period, evaluations were respectable: 89% for effective or highly effective teaching and 92% for satisfactory or highly satisfactory learning (ITE, Spring 2006).

In Spring 2006, my teaching assignment changed, as I moved from the survey course required for all teaching majors to a course serving only early childhood majors or minors. I attempted to use what I had learned about my practice with this new set of students, but the transition was not an easy one and the fall semester was difficult (32% for satisfactory or highly satisfactory teaching, and 34% for satisfactory or highly satisfactory learning (ITE, Spring 2006). The difficulty of the transition and the dramatic decline in ratings pushed me to look for ways to think differently about my practice.

Metaphors from the Sand Tray

In May 2006, I participated in a workshop for student counselors and volunteered as a subject to do a sand tray. This projection technique created by Lowenfeld (1950) was originally designed to allow children to express ideas or experiences that they were not able to express verbally. Now it is commonly used with people of all ages. Kottman, an internationally known play therapist who regularly uses sand trays in her practice and teaches the use of sand tray internationally, described the process: 'Sand trays bring into awareness that which we are not aware of. It is a way of taking self and the world from abstract to concrete, so that we become more aware of it' (T. Kottman, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

‘Doing a sand tray’ meant entering a room containing hundreds of figures and objects and selecting any item that attracted or repelled me. I then arranged them in a tray of black sand. After I arranged the objects, student counselors asked questions prompting me to explain the arrangement. A brief explanation of the figures, the names I gave them, and their placement in the tray helps to understand my interpretation. In the center was a white curved bridge. At one end of the bridge stood the solitary Egyptian Cat Goddess, and behind her was a stack of skeletons. At the opposite end of the bridge stood Earth Mother surrounded by many small, plastic people. Creepy Satyr Fairy stood in the center of the bridge facing neither of the other figures.

As I discussed the tray, I identified the Satyr as the academy and its constraints. I explained how, from my perspective, the Satyr kept the Cat Goddess and the Earth Mother from working together. Kottman commented that focusing my discussion on my work suggested that issues of practice were at the time foremost in my mind (T. Kottman, personal communication, 21 January 2008).

After the discussion, I was encouraged to manipulate the figures. One of the counselors asked, ‘Would you like to remove the Satyr?’ Surprised and delighted, I removed it. Further questioning led me to place the Cat Goddess next to the Earth Mother. In the sand, these moves were easy, but it has taken time to begin to understand the implications of these moves in practice.

Before the sand tray, I recognized the nurturing Earth Mother in my practice. Her characteristics related to those of rich soil. Both were accepting and nurtured, taking no real responsibility for how the recipient used the nurturing. The Earth Mother, arms wide open, received anyone who approached. Countenance serene, she non-judgmentally and lovingly accepted all who came to her ample body. Like the soil metaphor, I was to learn that framing my practice with this image meant avoiding parts of it. What happens when you move beyond welcoming and actually begin the give and take of the student-teacher relationship? I also did not see the dark underbelly of encouraging student overdependence because of my non-judgmental acceptance or the contradiction between the Earth Mother I pictured and the institutional demands of the teacher in the university classroom. I held an overly simplistic and one-sided conception of the Earth Mother, seeing nurturance as only beneficial.

The figure of the Cat Goddess in the sand tray at first surprised me. Narrow and stiff, she was poised to point out errors ruthlessly, with little concern for the effect of her actions. She was stern, fierce and not at all like me! With stiff and narrow arms unopened at her side, she was everything the Earth Mother was not – judgmental, standard driven, unwelcoming. I polarized her as the opposite of the Earth Mother. As I explained her presence, I also realized that she was a part of me, but a part I was reluctant to own or explicitly name, one easily hidden or ignored when I avoided attending to self in my practice.

I had the least to say about the Satyr during the experience. I found him the least palatable and gladly removed him. That action, however, simply allowed me to continue behaving as though I did not work in an institution where there were expectations and standards that affected my students and myself. I continue to struggle with what I see as the constraints of the institution embodied in the Satyr, but I do not explore this here. Still the sand tray and its metaphors gave me tools and language to begin confronting my oversimplifications while also revealing hidden aspects of my practice.

Even after the sand tray, as I worked on syllabuses in Fall 2006, I hypothesized that my primary inclination when devising assignments was to nurture students by crafting assignments that encouraged their understanding of content. Thus I surmised that if the

Earth Mother were the only force operating in my practice, class would be a satisfactory experience for all. I concluded that the academy/Satyr's demands (upholding standards, judging student work, assigning grades) and the Cat Goddess' insistence for students' academic gains disrupted nurturance. Naively, I determined that these non-Earth Mother parts were the source of many of my practical teaching difficulties from the previous semester. As I intentionally used these metaphors to frame my practice, I began to realize that my emphasis on the Earth Mother resulted in unintended effects in my practice. The ideas and language of the sand tray metaphors moved that understanding forward.

Though aware of the Cat Goddess, I did not acknowledge her and presented myself as Earth Mother. This was simplistic, but seemed to be a view accepted by students as their comments attest: 'She is a very nice person. Loved having her as a teacher. She worked with us and, if the load was too heavy, she compromised. Easy to get along with. Communicated with us very well; 'She looks at students and their grades individually and knows how hard or not hard they are trying.' Others commented on attitude and support: 'Always in a good mood'; 'Flexible, she wants student to do well in this class so she will do anything she can to help'; or 'Really positive attitude, willing to help us in any way she can' (ITE, Fall 2007). The comments capture how the Earth Mother affected my classroom.

Such expectations left students at a loss when the Cat Goddess appeared and made demands, as of course she would. I began to consider the downturn in ratings on the ITE when I switched courses and connected the early childhood students' discomfort with the Cat Goddess to the emerging pattern of more requests for explanations about assignments and course content (ITE, Fall 2007). My awareness of the Cat Goddess and Earth Mother did little to alleviate the issues around grading and communicating assessment to students. In an effort to communicate standards more clearly, I used models from *Understanding by design* (McTighe & Wiggins, 1998) to create more comprehensive rubrics, but my students found those rubrics overwhelming. As one student told me: 'When I read the word "nuanced", I just stopped reading and hoped for the best' (Personal communication, Fall 2006). Students were equally confused by the use of weighted categories in grading. Despite attempts to explain the system and its rationale, students continued to make comments such as 'I do not understand the grading scale.' (ITE, Fall 2007).

At the same time, students continued to comment positively on my presence in class: 'I have very much enjoyed this class and appreciated the opportunity to take it. I learned a great deal not only about child development and observation, but about learning and my own patterns of thinking and classroom behavior.' Another commented: 'The instructor's main strengths are her ability to teach constructively, her flexibility and her caring.' More than a few, however, reported frustration with the course: 'Her strengths are confusing students'; or 'Not explaining or teaching like a real teacher does. She expects us to teach ourselves, which is pretty hard when she doesn't tell us the correct way things need to be done.' The semester's scores were 52% for effective or highly effective teaching and 58% for satisfactory or highly satisfactory learning (ITE, Fall 2007). These ratings showed improvement, but were still far from my earlier evaluations. I continued working with the metaphors to explore why this might be so.

In Spring 2007, I attempted to create a syllabus using Bain's (2004) Model of Promising Syllabus and, in doing so, found my planning process to be more visible. I was shocked to see myself behaving as the consummate Cat Goddess. Listening attentively as I planned assignments, I heard myself saying: 'They need to learn this; they ought to know this; this will be good for their learning.' The metaphors forced me to recognize that I was

creating assignments based not on nurturance but on standards. Semesters before I had written the following:

I have attempted to structure assignments that require direct, personal connection with the content. It is clear to me that in order to have any impact on student thinking, my courses must engage students (Weimer, 2002; Wiggins, 1990). Conditions that stimulate successful work are more important than close analysis of student texts (Dewey cited in Fishman & McCarthy, 2002, pp. 65, 283). My preparation for this class has included a lot of time thinking about the content important for the students to learn. What do students need to do with that information to solidify their learning? (Teaching Journal, 17 November 2004)

Until I developed the sand tray metaphors, I could not hear the Cat Goddess in these texts, even though she spoke clearly. That voice had apparently been part of my practice for some time, but I needed the sand tray to hear it. My inability to hear that voice before becoming consciously aware of the metaphor demonstrates why I needed, and continue to need, specific tools for thinking about my practice.

I continued to observe my practice through the sand tray metaphors and noted that the Earth Mother appeared primarily in the classroom. Earth Mother liked students, wanted to take care of them, and even wanted them to like her. This observation, coupled with recognizing the Cat Goddess in my planning and seeing her appearances in the classroom forced me to acknowledge that each played a distinct role in my practice. I knew I needed to work to use both facets effectively in my classroom.

Because study of practice is ongoing, so too is applying what I learn from metaphors to improve my practice. From this study, I have identified the need to involve students more explicitly in understanding how the embodiment of the Earth Mother and the Cat Goddess affect what transpires in my classroom. What would it take for students to appreciate the Cat Goddess as much as they seem to appreciate the Earth Mother? Is it possible? As a goal, I am determined to share these findings with my students in future classes.

Conclusion

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) propose that metaphors are not simply communication tools, but structures that affect how we think about and interpret our experiences, which in turn affect the metaphors we use. Cook-Sather (2003) explores how metaphors function systemically in education. Within these metaphorical frameworks, there is a space for idiosyncratic and personal metaphors that capture our individual contexts. Miller et al. (2002) suggest exploration of individual metaphors as a useful tool for educators wishing to examine their personal practice. The literature contains many references to using such an approach with teacher education students, a few instances of using it with in-service teachers, and a very small number using it with teacher educators, but all report on the use of a single metaphor over a limited time. This study adds to that research by considering how metaphors used intentionally over an extended period of time influenced the practice of one teacher educator.

Self-study through metaphors allowed me to look at my practice more closely and uncover information that had been hidden. Metaphors worked because they provided a space slightly removed from practice, a space that made considering practical actions and their meaning possible in a way that thinking directly about my practice did not. Using metaphors within that space, I was able to consider 'prototypes, relationships, and the range of applicability' (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 125) and apply what I had learned to my practice. I became more aware of my tendency to allow pieces of my practice to remain hidden and realized that care alone was insufficient for learning. I came to recognize the

limitations of my planning and changed my perceptions about classroom agency. As a result, I was able to see my practice more clearly.

Several features of the process are noteworthy. More was learned because the study was conducted over a span of eight years. Had I stopped with the soil metaphor, my understanding of my practice would be quite different. Becoming aware of, and allowing for, changes and the emergence of metaphors was important. Consideration of a metaphor included not only what was represented but also who and what were not represented. Finally, sharing findings with colleagues helped to refine understanding and application to practice.

Working with metaphors increased my awareness of how responsible I was for the outcomes of practice, quite a change from my soil metaphor days! The study disrupted my complacency and lessened my tendency to resort to simplistic explanations for events in my practice. Through self-study with metaphors, I developed a more complex perspective that led to specific changes in my practice.

Metaphors provided a way to step back, taking a new look at the meaning of events. I was able to confront the realities of practice rather than blocking aspects that I chose to ignore. In some cases, as with the weaver and Cat Goddess metaphors, the examination led to important reframing of my practice. Metaphors also suggested directions to improve practice. Other teacher educators may reap similar benefits if they choose to use metaphors purposefully over time for self-study.

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