# Adventure Guides, Outfitters, Firestarters, and Caregivers: Continuing Educators' Images of Identity

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## Abstract

In a recent study, 65 continuing education instructors each developed, then analyzed metaphors to describe their images of self in their respective contexts of practice. This article details the process developed by Deshler (1990) that was used to lead these educators into creating and critically reflecting on the meanings of their own metaphors, as well as the implications for their continuing reflection about practice. The relationship between metaphors and cognition is examined, and the process of metaphor-making discussed critically, with implications for its use by other educators. The metaphors generated by continuing educators through this process were grouped into four themes: adventure guides, outfitters, firestarters, and

## Résumé

Dans une étude récente, 65 instructeurs de formation continue ont chacun développé et ensuite analysé des métaphores décrivant leurs images de soi dans leur propre contexte d'exercice professionnel. Cet article donne une description détaillée du processus développé par Deshler (1990) et qui a servi pour diriger ces spécialistes à la création et à la réflexion critique des significations de leurs propres métaphores ainsi que les implications des ces métaphores et comment ceux-ci portent atteinte sur ce que font ces spécialistes. Dans cet article, on y examine la relation entre les métaphores et la cognition et, on y discute à fond le processus de création de métaphores ainsi que les implications de l'uilisation de ce processus par d'autres spécialistes. On a groupé en quatre thèmes ces

caregivers. These are analyzed here for insights about continuing educators' understandings of their teaching practice and the nature of the learning process.

métaphores générés par les spécialistes de formation continue par l'intermédiaire de ce processus: guides d'aventure, pourvoyeurs en chasse et pêche, allumeurs et fournisseurs de soins. On les a analysés ici pour voir ce qu'était la compréhension des spécialistes de formation continue sur leur pratique de l'enseignement et la nature du processus d'apprentissage.

## INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades the issue of educator identity(ies) has become prominent in educational literature. The relations between identity, positionality, the nature of knowledge, and what it means to teach are generating much interest amidst educational theorists, particularly those exploring post-structural frames (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998), autobiography (Grumet, 1990; Schubert & Ayers, 1992) and psychoanalytic approaches to educational inquiry (Britzman, 1998; Ellsworth, 1997). Research exploring life narratives of educators is gaining ascendancy as a method of questioning identity and difference constructed within different communities (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Goodson, 1991).

This focus on identity may be linked to what some argue are basic pathologies of our late modern age: hyperactivity, hypercompetitiveness in a global market, hypermaterialism, loneliness, and general numbness (Borgmann, 1992; Saul, 1995). People drawn to adult and continuing education may be searching for greater "meaning" in their lives (Merriam & Heuer, 1996) by asking the great questions: Who am I and what is my purpose in this world? Or, people may be struggling to somehow knit the fragments of their existence into more stable and coherent life histories (West, 1996). Meanwhile, an increased emphasis on accountability and assessment in business, government, and educational institutions focuses learning and teaching on things measurable and transferable.

Amidst these often contradictory energies, educators may well struggle to redefine their vocation and purpose. As diverse knowledges compete for credibility, and technological change and public assertion of authority challenge conventional forms of education, the fundamental role of teacher is in question. Educators have been pressured to position themselves, first, as "facilitators" rather than "experts," and then as "animators" (Boud & Miller, 1996). Now, teachers are surrounded by different images exhorting them to reshape their practice to become not only coaches and mentors, web instructional designers and change agents, but also "critically reflective" (Brookfield, 1995). The continuing education instructor awash in such images is often a part-time teacher depending on unpredictable course enrolments and sometimes without training or "accreditation," membership in a professional association, or other supports for identity as an educator. How do these individuals conceive their teaching roles?

This article explores the metaphoric images developed by a group of continuing education practitioners to describe their practice. These metaphors emerged in an activity that invited these educators to explore who they are, what they do in their practice, and why they do it. The activity was based on a process suggested by Deshler (1990) for creating and examining personal metaphors as a method of critical reflectivity. Educators taking courses in adult and continuing education participated in this process of generating metaphors, which, for many, was apparently a powerful affirmation of personal-professional role identity.

The process is described in this article, accompanied by reflective analysis that may be helpful to others considering using this process in continuing education settings. The metaphors resulting from the activity were analyzed and categorized into four themes: adventure guides, outfitters, firestarters, and caregivers. These provide limited but interesting insights into these continuing educators' sense of their teaching identity, and into their priorities in the teaching-learning process.

## BACKGROUND: METAPHORS AND PROFESSIONALS' CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

The power of metaphor lies in connecting images. Metaphor is Greek for transfer (*meta* means trans, or "across"; *phor* means fer, or "ferry"). Metaphors are embedded in all speech, actions, and the life constructed around them; "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980,

p. 3). Images, the language of metaphors, are rich nodes of sensory-emotional associations. Concise and multi-layered, they convey complexity in succinct yet fluid representations that communicate strong, immediate, and lasting impressions. When an individual discovers an analogy, the specific connections between the images often resonate at intuitive levels inaccessible to the rational consciousness. Paivio (1979) suggested three reasons why metaphors powerfully shape thought. First, metaphors provide a compact representation of the subset of cognitive and perceptual features associated with it, converting large "chunks" of the information from the vehicle to the topic. Second, a metaphor can express facets of experience not easily described. Third, metaphors represent experience in vivid and therefore memorable images.

In cognitive terms, analogical thinking constructs knowledge when the discovery of a metaphorical connection precipitates a transfer of conceptual schemes. In other words, when people create metaphors, they join unlike things together. A primary phenomenon is apprehended with a conceptual scheme borrowed from a secondary field of phenomena. The juxtaposition produced by the contrasting representations not only jolts the individual's expectations but also challenges accustomed ways of seeing, enabling more complete and powerful knowledge. Tarsitani (1996) argued that in the process of metaphor-making, the secondary conceptual scheme is liberated from its original concrete context and becomes almost idealized in a new abstract form. For example, when an educator thinks of teaching practice as gardening, the image of "garden" tends to be abstract and idealized, with only marginal correspondence to material reality. When this idealized image is applied to the primary mental construct, in this example, teaching identity, it too is transformed by the meld. Surprising new connections happen through metaphor, which foreground obscure details and articulate sometimes contradictory vectors of experience. Both the primary and secondary constructs are transformed in the process of metaphorical thinking (Cole, 1990, pp. 5–6). Thus, when people generate metaphors to describe their professional identity, they reformulate their constructs of practice.

Recent research has studied how metaphors are related to teacher thinking. Most studies accept that metaphors uttered by individuals represent tacit beliefs and mental constructs. Earle (1995) and Knowles (1994) presented metaphors as "windows" into teacher thinking, both for researchers exploring teachers' knowledge construction and for reflective teachers seeking personal understanding. Some studies have claimed that

teachers encouraged to generate metaphors representing self-in-practice are able to clarify inconsistencies between their beliefs and their enactment of practice (Briscoe, 1991; Bullough, 1993; Knowles, 1993; Speaker & Madison, 1994; Weinstein, 1994). These studies tend to focus either on facilitating teachers' critical reflection and change through metaphor-generating activities or on documenting naturally occurring changes in teachers' thinking through their representation in metaphors. Comparisons of teachers' metaphors of practice illuminate clearly the diversity of cultural beliefs about what comprises "good teaching," shaped by social-historical-moral differences (Gudmundsdottir & Saabar, 1991).

In an effort to promote transformative learning, Deshler (1990) developed a structured, five-step process to help adult educators analyze their own metaphors of personal practice. During the first and second steps, adult educators create and extend a picture that captures what they believe are the most essential aspects of their practice. In the third step (analysis), the educators take a second hard look at their metaphors. With the help of others, they challenge their visions with searching questions and explore gaps, silences, and implications. In the fourth step, they compare their discoveries about actual self-in-practice to their espoused beliefs, asking: Is this what I want to be? In step five (recreation), educators evaluate and recommit to their own metaphors by asking questions that seriously consider how they might, if they choose, remake their own experience. Deshler argued that metaphors exert forceful unobtrusive influence over people's lives, shaping their meanings and behaviours. The act of creating the metaphor is one of confronting and analyzing beliefs that already govern behaviour. Deshler's work facilitates this critical analysis to help "exorcise the "ghosts" of our socialization so that we can freely choose meanings out of which we want to live our lives" (p. 296).

## Cautions in Working with Metaphors

Morgan (1986) pointed out an important problem: metaphors frame understandings in a distinctive yet partial way, producing one-sided insight. Metaphors foreground certain interpretations and influence the form the description takes, its knowledge claims, and the response of those who attend to it. In other words, the metaphor helps shape and grasp experience, circumscribing it in order for it to be apprehended and "known." But metaphors, like windows, admit light and permit vision through narrow frames. A metaphor often simplifies and freezes reality,

distorting contradiction and complex details to create a coherent image. Every culture embeds a changing repertoire of favoured metaphors reflecting particular aesthetics that are frequently stretched to create peculiar melds. In North American educational writing, images of illness and diagnosis, or of coaching and competition, are presently being supplanted by more fashionable allusions to tapestry, weaving, wholeness, community, and border-crossing that are uncomfortably at odds with increasingly prominent accountability and competency discourses.

For these reasons, metaphors must be interpreted cautiously, and always with careful note of the context and process of metaphoric meaning-making. Both the limitations and distortions of metaphors, as well as their powers of shaping imagination, demand recognition. The metaphor-imagining process is fallible and idiosyncratic. Because metaphors are open to multiple interpretations, they should never be treated as transparent representations symbolizing an individual's sense of self. While heeding these cautions, the assumption maintained in this article is that metaphors provide useful windows into educators' thinking. The study's findings yield partial and provisional insights into the identity of the adult educator as represented by the participating practitioners, and into the process of metaphor-making in constructing this identity.

## The Methods of the Study

Deshler's process of creating and analyzing personal metaphors of practice was introduced to educators taking courses in Adult and Continuing Education offered at the University of Alberta (1993–96). A total of 65 people participated, 48 women and 17 men who were enrolled in four different classes. All were teachers in continuing education, with from 1 to 12 years of varied experience teaching adult learners in Albertan contexts. Although the majority (54) of the participants were of Euro-British origin, the other 11 participants were of diverse backgrounds. Most taught face-to-face courses in institutional settings (university or college), including computer courses, various business and communication skills, second languages, creative writing and other arts programs, career development and life skills, legal issues, and healthcare.

In the study, the specific activity of generating metaphors was preceded with a discussion that explained the rationale and nature of metaphors, and a brainstorming session to help people "shake out" a smorgasbord of pictorial ideas to prompt the imaginative-visioning process. Participants

were given a week to write about a metaphorical image that seemed apt for themselves in practice. They prepared a one-page description of their metaphors, which they shared in small groups. Groups were encouraged to help extend, clarify, and respond to each metaphoric picture through dialogue. After this discussion, individuals re-examined their metaphors, usually in their class journals, reflecting on the metaphoric process and on the meanings about their practice and their identity indicated in their metaphors, and sometimes changing their metaphors.

The data analyzed in this study included the written descriptions of metaphors developed by class participants, and the observations of small-group and whole-class discussions. Using procedures of qualitative data analysis suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), data were analyzed for two purposes: to examine the processes through which these adult educators developed their metaphors of practice, and to identify any thematic patterns that emerged through comparative analysis of the metaphors.

## Four Findings about the Process of Metaphor-making for Educators

Analysis was guided by questions such as: How is knowledge viewed? How is the learning process conceptualized? Is it more fluid or static, more predictable or emergent? How is learning depicted spatially and temporally? What aspects of learning receive emphasis? What sort of mood does the metaphor cast on the learning process? How does material context configure the learning process? How are the educator's and learner's positions portrayed, and what dimensions of power are evident? Who else figures in the learning process? Some of these questions arose from the small-group dialogues; other were suggested by the metaphors themselves. For example, the prominence of setting among many metaphors prompted questions focused on context. The metaphors themselves and the analysis of these images follow in a later section. Four general observations about the actual process of continuing education teachers creating metaphors as an activity of critical reflection are discussed first.

### 1. The metaphor-making process is distinctly unique for each person.

Different people created metaphors to represent their practice in different ways. For some, an immediate picture presented itself, one they felt was startlingly accurate. Others rejected this first picture, casting about for a metaphor that systematically corresponded to every aspect of their practice.

Some found imaginative picture-making unnatural, and produced a metaphor with much difficulty. However, most of the educators said the exercise was liberating, creative, and fun. Some described a thrill of recognition and validation when they "found" a metaphor that resonated with their perception of their practice.

People drew their metaphors from contexts that were often life experiences very different from their work in adult education; a favourite avocational activity (such as cooking, quilting, attending symphony concerts) or a past working environment (such as home construction or pig farming) provided inspiration for many of them. Many instructors come to adult education from other spaces and places, and the emergence of these in metaphors of practice suggests that images internalized from past work experience influence their ventures in adult education. Metaphors also reflected educators' perceptions of their community of practice. For example, an air traffic controller trainer saw himself driving a tour bus full of learners through standardized regulations and procedures. A writing instructor found herself oscillating between three different metaphors derived from objects she owned (a Navajo storyteller doll, a schoolteacher's bell, and her computer). The most complex and detailed metaphors were often generated by those with greater years of experience teaching continuing education. Overall, however, the idiosyncratic process of metaphor development ideally requires that each metaphor be considered carefully within the context of its creator and the process of creation. General patterns such as the four presented in this article should be regarded cautiously.

## 2. Metaphor-making helped educators understand other educators.

Many educators said that the sharing of metaphors helped them gain powerful insights into each other's motives and understanding of the purposes of education, the role of the educator, and the process of learning. The exercise afforded both an appreciation for difference and a tolerance for their own contradictions. Plenary discussions during the study also highlighted sharp contrasts between practitioners' metaphors and the metaphors encountered in current training literature. While their own metaphors tended to be organic or natural, vulnerable, and context-oriented, some of them found training and development literature to be dominated by metaphors of architecture, plumbing, and engineering.

### 3. Metaphor-making provided self-validation.

The main value of the metaphor-making for most of the participants was affirming their unique approach to practice, illuminating certain core beliefs, and synthesizing fragments of meaning into a coherent and communicable teaching identity. As Laura wrote:

> Keeping this metaphor can keep me centered in myself, which may help me in my new work position. [The students] may not like me for it, and that is a difficult thought for me to face because I want others to like me. But I have come to the time in my life where I have to step out of the line of people that I have been so safely in time with. I am not feeling very heroic . . .

Nonetheless, teaching is in some ways, as Brookfield (1995) has written, a heroic endeavour. Perhaps this was why so many of the educators found the metaphor-making activity personally fulfilling. In contexts where teachers must face multiple contradictory demands, core beliefs and ethics can become frayed by doubt and distraction. The teleological pull of a metaphoric picture may create a purposeful direction while reassuring the possibility of a stable and coherent self. Perhaps this affirmation explains why these educators seemed more interested in exploring and extending their metaphor than in challenging it through critical analysis.

### 4. Participants were reluctant to self-reflexively deconstruct their personal metaphors.

Only three educators indicated that they changed their metaphor through the critical reflection activity. Most claimed that the small-group discussion helped them extend, clarify, and strengthen their metaphor, not stand apart from it critically. Observations of the small-group discussions revealed that in response to challenges, participants tended to justify rather than re-think their metaphors, adopting a posture of helping others to understand the picture. The more they talked about the metaphor, the more grounded in it they became.

## Four Images of Adult Educators' Identity

As might be expected, the metaphors generated by these practitioners of continuing education ranged widely, and in some ways, resist categorization. Although general themes can be discerned, each picture embeds multiple meanings. The pictures are also characterized by different

emphases, which may link themes together, or by different details, which change the theme in subtle but significant ways. This is why the analysis offered below does not attempt to provide any quantitative categorization of the different metaphors. However, because certain reoccurring themes offer valuable insights about the practice of continuing educators, these have been represented below as four main categories: adventure guides, outfitters, firestarters, and caregivers. The individual illustrations show many contradictions and distinctions rumbling within these categories; detailed analysis of these complex features could be interminable, and extends beyond the scope of this paper.

Likewise, no attempt has been made to analyze the educators' metaphors within their own particular context and personal history, to trace aspects of gender and culture, or to correlate their metaphors with their subject areas and teaching environments. Although these might offer rich lines of analysis, especially if psychoanalytic frames of desire, positionality, and resistant knowledges were applied to understand teachers' sense of identity and relations with learners (Ellsworth, 1997), the purpose of this article is more simple. Here, the focus is more on the process of metaphor-making that was used, its perceived utility for educators' reflection on practice, and some thematic patterns that emerged in their resulting images.

Overall, the majority of participants adopted a metaphor of self as tour guides of various sorts: safari guide, hiking leader, adventure outfitter / guide, tour bus driver, or historic interpreter. Few metaphors depicted an "artist" actively creating or co-creating with the learner. Instead, the educator was most often depicted as an interpreter or technician, following a recipe or pattern or predetermined series of destinations on a journey. The following four themes are not separate and exclusive, but overlapping and interwoven in various metaphors. Nor do these themes represent all of the metaphors, as some are so unique that they resist generalization in any way.

## *Adult Educator as Adventure Guide*

"Guide" was the most frequently appearing image among educators' metaphors. Learning was often depicted as an adventurous journey, typically a rugged outdoor expedition, climbing mountains or hacking through a jungle, where natural hazards must be avoided through the prudent protection and watchful eye of the guide. Craig saw constant threats, but if learners were to change they had to actually experience the thrill of danger.

> I steer them away from steep cliffs, of falling into crevasses or being caught in an avalanche. They need encouragement on tough parts, but I show them the thrill of the climb. They return to the familiar environment of home a changed person. The clients can teach guides things along the way. The point is *experiencing* aspects unknown to them, not just watching a video on mountain climbing. The educator provides the means for the experience, not the experience itself.

What were the "learning" dangers? In small groups, educators discussed threats of error, failure, anxiety, "getting stuck," or being confused. The implication may be that the teacher should avoid, or rescue learners from, the difficulties of the learning process. Anne focused on the work of the journey and her role as encourager and comforter.

> I came to visualize myself with a group of learners going on a mountain hike. We are a close group, utilizing our combined experiences (of climbing mountains and other pertinent things) and an understanding of each other to embark upon a challenging adventure. This adventure will necessitate mental and physical work but it will also be fun and rewarding. I need to encourage, show how to pace, and help to identify how success can happen for each individual. We can stop to rest along the way. At the top we will be rewarded by an inspiring view and a gaze at where we came from.

While Anne depicted the educator as director of a strenuous journey, Martha's image was more about finding a way. For her, this process was negotiated among the learning community.

> My learners pick where they want to go and I guide them. I work with them to plan the trip and then sometimes I lead the way if it is uncharted waters or they are fearful because I've been there before. Sometimes I just point out the right path and make arrangements to meet them at a certain spot later. Sometimes one of my learners knows the way better than I or knows how to negotiate a particularly rocky path better than I. Then I ask them to take the lead and show me the way so I can learn also. Sometimes we all join hands and walk through the darkness together secure in the knowledge that we will help each other.

The guide was often expert and leader, not co-explorer, who knew the terrain well. Knowledge seemed to be envisioned as pre-existing, shown off to learners in a most excellent adventure. Lorna portrayed herself leading jungle safaris: "I know the path" and learners follow. Neither the learner

nor guide in such images acted upon objects of the environment as active knowledge constructors. Agency seemed restricted to choosing paths and avoiding dangers. One exception to this theme was Rod's metaphor of adult educator as captain coordinating the efforts of many colleagues on a sort of educational *Starship Enterprise,* together boldly going where none has gone before and exploring, though not creating, brave new worlds.

Some tour guide metaphors focused more on the educator's role of welcoming, hosting, and explaining, rather than of protecting and exploring. Grant wrote about visualizing his learners inside a bus looking through the glass windows at the sites he pointed out. His job was keeping them safe and entertained. Lana wrote:

> I am a tour guide in a house with several rooms. My script was learned in advance, but I can answer all questions outside my script . . . My frustration is the finite amount of time for the tour. Groups have great interest in a particular room but must be rushed ahead.

Noella saw herself as the door to her own home; her role was making visitors feel warm and welcome.

> This door is the pathway to new opportunities. My home is enticing, and a warm environment, sense of community, spirit, and lots of interaction. . . . people pass through me and ask me for my guidance. In my home they are the central focus, free to choose the rooms that are their learning experiences.

### *Adult Educator as Outfitter*

As the second most frequently appearing image, the "outfitter" metaphor often overlapped the adventure guide, but cast the educator more as an equipper, a master of provisions, practical details, and itineraries. These descriptions often included a list, sometimes extensively detailed, of items needed by learners and provided by the educator; learning was apparently entwined with tools. Kirsten wrote:

> The outfitter came to me instantly. Nothing else fits me as well as the outfitter. Positioned at a crossroads between civilization and the wilderness I am there to help people complete their journey, to achieve what they have set out to do. I have the tools I can show how to use them. For trekkers I have a compass, rope, and hiking boots. For miners I have shovels, picks, stakes to mark their claim, lanterns. For those trappers or homesteaders who need to go to the city I have

city maps, bus passes, and lists of accommodations and entertainment. Anything anybody might need.

Again, the terrain of learning is fearful and mysterious, a wilderness into which the civilized venture at risk. The educator helps with all the preparations, building confidence and dispensing advice, but does not actually accompany the learner on the journey. The focus of the role was first proving that a difficult goal was attainable, then demonstrating how to do it, and, finally, outfitting the learner with all the necessary tools. The learning process itself seemed ambiguous, something that happened to people after leaving the educator. Kirsten explained, "Each person has to do the work of cultivating themselves. I can help, I can point to the way, I can even cheer them on, but the work needs to be done by the student." Embedded in these images is a view of learning as "journey," an emphasis on preparation for the journey, and an assumption that preparation includes some sort of accumulation of goods like a survival kit of skills or information.

In some metaphors, the educator's role focused totally on dispensing provisions or nourishment. Steve's image of himself as a squirrel in a tree throwing nuts to the ground but "hoarding some" opens questions about how educators view their own knowledge and its value as capital in the learning environment. Jamie saw himself pouring tea at an elegant afternoon party, his description lingering on the beautiful china rather than on the guests, whose faces were indistinct. Lena also envisioned a pleasant sunny environment quite different from the "wilderness" of others' images, and herself as offering something delicious. She wrote:

> I see myself walking among a crowd of people. I am holding a large basket full of fresh, ripe fruit. It is a sunny afternoon and the sky is blue and the sun is shining. It is warm, and I see the people in the crowd casually chatting with each other. It is a calm scene. I offer the fruit, smile. Some take fruit, those who don't, don't disturb me.

The emphasis in each of these pictures is not only on educator as supplier but also on learner as chooser, in control of the decision to accept or not the "fruits" of knowledge. Jason described himself as a water sprinkler "going steadily back and forth." He explained that the drops of information he provides are scattered broadly.

> Like water falling on the ground there is not control over how the information is used. The water can help a plant grow or it can disappear and run off and not appear to be used. In adult learning the

provider can only make the information available but the receiver decides if it is what they are looking for and usable. Each of us should have control over our own life and be responsible for our own actions and decision.

In this image of a conduit, the educator's role is a mechanical piece controlling only the flow and direction of whatever "water" might represent.

## *Adult Educator as Firestarter*

In some images, educators depicted their prominent role as being a catalyst, what Lilly chose to describe as "firestarter." Learning became focused on igniting the learner's motivation to wonder, to seek, to be empowered, to catch the "fire" of curiosity or the desire to know. The educator was the initiator. Cynthia struggled to find a metaphor that did not represent herself "acting upon" people as if they were objects. She finally chose an image of "crystal healer," catalyzing things in herself that naturally reflect and find resonance in those around her.

> I am a catalyst. I thought first of a spark. I get people going, show them things they don't know. Then a picture of a burning match came to mind. I lit the fire of other people by burning the wood of my own experiences. But these were not quite right. Then I saw myself as a battery (my past experiences) to power the starter engine (sharing these experiences) to power the main engine (other people). Then I remembered Buffalo Woman and realized I am crystal, a light and model, not a critic or a judge. Create and re-create our own being, struggle with our own transcendence. Free ourselves first, then others will learn from us.

Her focus on energy flowing is qualitatively different than the journey images of learning, where the educator guides people through known terrain, or supplies material tools and provisions. Both the learner's and the educator's being become fluid and ambivalent. Themes of liberation and creation are evident. Here is Lilly's description of the "firestarter" image of teaching.

> I am rubbing two sticks together, when tinder is brought close it heats up, smokes, and finally flames. Friction making activity—the core. First I realized this metaphor shows the learner as passive objects waiting to be lit up. So, I saw myself squatting and working furiously with two pieces of wood, releasing what is there if I create enough

cognitive and affective friction. Occasionally I fan the flames and enjoy the heat. What if I make fire that can't be contained? I will sometimes get burned.

The fire theme in both Cynthia and Lilly's descriptions invokes passion, both as a destructive force that can burn and hurt, and a constructive force converting fuel into light and heat. Tools are important in these images (sticks and crystal), but terrain is not mentioned. The teaching-learning relation here appears more emancipatory and transformational than in the travelling motif of other metaphors, with teacher as catalyst.

## Adult Educator as Caregiver

The appealing metaphor of teacher as "gardener" has become commonplace in North American views of adult education. This image can be argued to derive from the humanist philosophical foundations of Apps (1973), Brookfield (1986), Knowles (1980), and others who stressed learner-centred instruction in nourishing environments to enhance growth of self-directed, internally motivated adults. This view continues to influence much of adult and continuing education practice today. Predictably, gardening images appeared frequently in the metaphors developed by educators in this study. Some described their gardening work lovingly with careful detail, emphasizing the hands-on holistic responsibility of teachers for creating a nurturing environment. Sharon knelt on the floor to demonstrate to her small group the way she worked the "soil," then planted the seedlings. She wrote:

> I love gardening. The earth must be ready, turned over and old compost mixed with earth to promote growth. The seeds that I plant represent adult learners as they enter class for the first time. Carrots are shy and take a few weeks to appear, radishes come within a week . . . Plants want to grow—they see the sun and reach up to it. Weeds that are people's distractions must be removed. Plants support each other from excessive wind and rain. I use no chemicals or fertilizers. There is much initial work, then they grow alone.

The focus apparently is on what the teacher *does* to the crop. Learning is "growing" and implies that people are underdeveloped seeds at the beginning of the educational process. Within this general logic, educators' metaphors highlighted different issues of practice. Marilyn extended her gardening metaphor to pose questions about timing educational intervention. "Our lives have seasons. When do you plant your garden? Do

you fertilize your lawn in the dead of winter? When is the best time to prune your trees?" Jamal focused on the fragility and beauty of the learning. The flowers were not the "learners" in his image, but the relationship between himself and learners. He wrote:

> Roses, the most beautiful flowers. Each one varied, the scents, color, and leaves distinct. Stem of thorns, the emotions, need to be handled carefully and respectfully. You need to know how to handle each blossom.

Xiu Jie emphasized the "wild" environments of life and learning, and implied a limited role for the educator. For her, the gardener-educator circulated freely among large expanses of crops and wild flowers, watching, watering, encouraging, but otherwise allowing learners to struggle.

> The gardener is in an open field of wild flowers and weeds. There are different species of plants but no enclosure. Natural disasters, hurricanes and earthquakes all come to the fields. There are flowers and vegetables. Each plant is watered according to kind. All grow to their own pace. The gardener moves from place to place, inspiring and encouraging, leaving behind those who must face wind and storms alone.

Some metaphors depicted the educator as an animal tender. Like the gardening images, these also cast the teacher as all-knowing, watchful, and unconditionally caring. Nancy saw herself as a dolphin trainer, where "love and caring, climate and environment are crucial, the relationship between dolphin and trainer important—trust, careful balance of control and power." Garett wrote about tending pigs, and was quite serious in drawing on his farming background for details.

> Play frequently, get to know them, make them comfortable, watch for diarrhea and don't overfeed, then finally move them into pastures where they have more control, they explore and eat weeds making discoveries, but watch for belly ruptures and sprains—they can get hurt while exploring. Finally ship them, they must attain weight and index.

The educator as caregiver appears focused on nurturing: helping people grow fat and healthy in knowledge.

# Discussion:
## Analyzing Metaphoric Portrayals of the Adult Educator

Overall, the metaphors of practice developed by these practitioners emphasized the educator as a nurturing guide to help learners explore or consume something that was already there. Learning was not usually about inventing new knowledge, either by the educator or the learners, in these metaphoric depictions. Most educators also did not view themselves as "artists." Those who saw their role as creative limited their powers to creating something from a pattern specifying dimensions.

The teacher's role was almost always as the *initiator* of the learning process and as its hero, cast at the centre of the metaphor as the controller or *director*—the leader of the expedition, the crafter quilting the coverlet, the cook stirring and flavouring the soup, the builder of the home, or the firestarter. In certain small-group discussions, these themes of control were viewed with concern. Some educators were a bit dismayed to find themselves represented in clearly hierarchical relations to their students, and protested that in fact they approached their practice in an egalitarian spirit as a facilitator of others' learning, not as an expert. Here lies one of the many contradictions of the practice and pressures of teaching. Educators may strive to project a masterful persona to win the credibility that reassures learners and secures their trust, while simultaneously idealizing a "guide by the side" self-image.

One woman's image of teachers/learners as a quilt (discussed in detail later) was different in kind from the others, and sparked group debate about the teacher and learner's relationship to each other and to knowledge. One participant later reflected, "The tour guide did not create the tower of Pisa, the conductor does not view himself as a composer . . . We must not point out sites along the way, but we must be part of the breathing fabric." Such personal insights emerging from class dialogue about teaching practice, sparked by the metaphors, were frequent and likely continued to evolve. Thus, the following analysis in some ways reflects a false fixity, focusing on educators' initial metaphor descriptions, and fails to capture the dynamic quality of these metaphors and people's critical thinking about practice that moves through and sometimes away from this picture.

The educators viewed themselves interacting with people in the learning process mostly in a one-to-one relationship between teacher and learner. The metaphors rarely acknowledged learning unfolding in small-group synergy, or the educators learning in an intersubjective process of exchanging ideas. It seems curious that, in a time when assessment and accountability are central to much adult education programming, none of the metaphors touched on issues of performance outcomes or the educator's role as judge.

Keeping learners safe and comfortable during a hazardous outdoor journey of learning seemed more important. The main challenge was the body of knowledge to be mastered. The motive for the learning journey was the thrill and thirst for adventure. For many, knowledge was inert, transferable, and existing in objects of knowledge that are consumed uncritically. For others, learning and teaching focused on individuals' growth and expansion, following innate contours within naturalized environments. Not one metaphor challenged the structures of these environments, and very few depicted learning as a process of personal transformation or societal change.

The environment for learning occupied an unusually detailed and concrete prominence in these metaphors, possibly indicating its importance to educators when considering their own role. In fact, many educators seemed first to conceptualize themselves in relation to this environment; learners were then added to the picture as a sort of well-hosted audience. In many metaphors, the environment was to be rendered benign, safe for learners. Even in mountain hiking adventure tales, the environment remained static and tame. The tourists were observers, not active interactors with their environment. The risks were easily conquered, more thrilling than threatening. Lorna's description of a "jungle" focused on its luxuriant moist greenery, exotic flora, and steamy odours. She seemed surprised when someone asked: What sorts of animals are in your jungle? Who survives? What's the "law of the jungle?" There were no predators at all in her idealized wilderness.

Metaphors often cast the educator as responsible for creating safety. Educators knew the terrain and were retracing paths already discovered. Learners were one step removed from the excitement of being the explorer or the artist, working with material that had already been uncovered for them.

Emphasis in these educators' metaphors was mostly on the personal and local, with few references to any organizational, societal, or cultural

dynamics affecting the learning relationships and process. Images did not contain references to multiple interests, agendas, and other power issues influencing the learner's role vis-à-vis the educator's position. Little acknowledgment was granted to learning occurring outside the educator's purview of action. Nor did any of the metaphors position the educator (or learners) in resistance to systemic discrimination, limiting categories, or structural oppression. This may reflect the fact that most of the participants in this study enjoyed membership in the dominant culture and class of a reasonably affluent society. Most metaphors reflected conventional values and assumptions about knowledge as progressive, schooling as natural, and teacher-learner binaries as unproblematic.

In almost all images, the educator was positioned distant to learners. Whether this space between teacher and learner was characterized by intimacy (as in caregiver depictions), pragmatism (as in images of selecting and dispensing provisions), hierarchy of responsibility or knowledge, or volatility (as in firestarter images), the metaphors mostly presented teaching identity as essentially autonomous and distinct. The teacher was bound to learners by their desire for the teacher's objects of knowledge, or by the teacher's desire to have his or her knowledge needed. But rarely was the teacher vulnerable to change from engagements with learners or the learning process.

In three cases, however, the metaphors presented alternate teacher-learner relations, compressing the distance and blending the identities in a joint creation of knowledge. Christine wrote:

> I am one small square in a quilt. Why a quilt? . . . It's made of many elements. The quilt is greater than the sum of its parts. One small piece will hardly provide warmth and security on a cold November evening. I am one small aspect of fabric . . . The quilt represents a mosaic of knowledge. I am not a tour guide or constructor of the quilt, but part of the very fabric of the quilt. I am as dependent on the others [students, other instructors, and program administrators] as they are on me, for strength, diversity, warmth, integrity, and the pattern.

Two educators represented themselves and their learners as a pleasant "stew" or "soup", being "spicy," "hot," and "stirred together." In Janine's image, the teacher, learners, and learning environment literally become fluid, melting together into a substance. While the "soup" is still contained in its pot and relies on an outside source for its "heat," it occasionally may generate sufficient power to affect others. Janine wrote:

> We are a pot of soup. When I was born I was just simple broth, with
> not much body substance or taste. Then as I teach, ideas and
> experiences get thrown into the pot. At times the soup gets spicy and
> hot. The soup doesn't boil over often, but when it does it spills on
> someone, and may even cause third degree burns that are deeper and
> never heal.

The theme of consumption pervaded many metaphors. Learners were
often portrayed as consuming knowledge, whether by soaking up
nutrients, tasting culinary masterpieces, buying fruit, or being guided on
tours to consume pretty vistas or adventurous experiences. Learning often
had a distinct and bounded goal. The terminal point was either
predetermined (the view from the top of the mountain, the end of the tour)
or emergent (the taste and texture of the dish prepared by the chef), and
usually represented some pleasant reward. The learning process was often
represented as somewhat universal and standardized. Even in the most
individualized gardening images, learners were cast rather passively as
plants with fairly uniform needs. Few metaphors acknowledged meaning-
making as an active process, as constructing knowledge in highly
idiosyncratic ways.

Most metaphors presented optimistic, hopeful visions of learning, and
positive regard by the educators for their own role working with learners.
However, two participants who were not of the dominant culture and
economic class reflected bleak views that are heart-rending in their
hopelessness. Denise, who had taught local history for many years in
continuing education courses that had been discontinued, wrote, "I am a
dinosaur, sad and extinct. My bones are buried so deep no one will find
them." Kerri, a part-time computer instructor, wrote:

> I am a daisy. Management plucks away the petals, which are my
> knowledge and wisdom. Some days I feel I've lost all my beauty, and
> all that's left is my core. I am glad my petals grow back.

Given the unpredictable and temporary nature of contracts for many
continuing education instructors in cost-recovery programs where courses
(and salaries) may be cancelled when public demand shifts, it is interesting
that there were so few negative metaphors of practice among these
educators. There may be several reasons for the abundance of positive,
forward-looking images. The group environments in which they were
produced tended to be upbeat and social, examining teaching as a
worthwhile vocation. The instructors drawn to these classes were more

likely to be positive about developing their practice, rather than feeling ready to give up. Finally, the metaphors were produced and shared in a credit course where the presence of an evaluating instructor, however much she attempts to enhance a climate of safety, freedom, and trust for learners, always is part of power dynamics influencing learner participation in ways that cannot be fully known.

## CONCLUSION

The objective of the study discussed in this article was to explore the utility of a metaphor-making activity for continuing education teachers, and to examine the results for broad patterns that may illuminate some of the ways these educators think about themselves in action. The purpose of the metaphor activity was to help stimulate critical reflection by these educators on their practice and personal philosophy. Many adult educators who worked through this picture-making and analysis activity said they found the activity a most revealing and creative exploration of their own practice. Dickey (1968) stated that using metaphor is more than a way to understand; it is a way of re-creating the world from its own parts. This study showed that developing a metaphor of professional identity could be an affirming process of imaginatively re-creating oneself through the power of a picture. Sharing this picture with others, and embracing others' pictures in the process, can illustrate and connect differences in a positive way.

One problem with this particular metaphor-making activity was its emphasis on producing a single image. No one experimented with multiple images, and this now appears to be a limitation in the study. Had participants been encouraged to envision different aspects of their practice, or construct metaphors to represent their practice in different contexts or periods of their professional history, a richer base for exploring identity of practice may have been generated. The apparent fixity, stability, and coherence of the teaching pictures that emerged is a function more of the activity frame than a reflection of people's sense of their engagement in the multiple facets of their practice. In this study, the instruction to produce a single picture perhaps forced participants to represent the most essential or obvious elements of their practice, and prevented their exploration of contradictory, complex, and less evident issues of practice. A better approach might be to encourage educators to produce multiple metaphors. These may be juxtaposed and combined in various ways that may

encourage fruitful avenues of reflection and dialogue, and perhaps open alternate possibilities of practice.

Nonetheless, the single metaphoric pictures developed in the activity described in this article presented illuminating and sometimes surprising portraits of continuing educators' view of themselves, of knowledge, of the learning process, and of their relationship to learners. These pictures sometimes contradicted their creators' espoused educational philosophies and practices. But people became attached to their metaphors of role identity and were loath to subject them to the process of self-reflexive critical analysis developed by Deshler (1990). The metaphors appeared to stabilize the sense of self into a single strong, coherent picture. Perhaps the exercise of creating a metaphor preempts more fluid, multiple images of one's identity as an educator. Perhaps the act of generating a personally meaningful image to represent self creates strong resonances and a powerful anchor for the self. The metaphoric image becomes reified as it melds with one's sense of practice to form a new concept of one's identity as an educator. Thus, critical deconstruction of this image, or consideration of alternate images, becomes undesirable or perhaps cognitively difficult. Two questions raised through this study and discussed briefly in this article invite further exploration: (1) What is the relationship between a metaphoric representation and an educator's thinking about practice? (2) Does the activity of generating metaphors of practice ultimately open or foreclose teachers' reflections on their identity?

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