

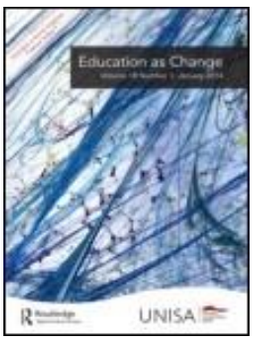
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Using metaphors to gain insight into South African student teachers' initial and developing conceptions of 'being a teacher'

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Abstract

Metaphors are a useful way of accessing students' conceptions of teaching and tracking how their conceptions shift over time. This article analyses metaphors for 'being a teacher' written by a group of South African student teachers at the beginning and end of their first year of study. The metaphors depict teachers' interactions with learners and reveal how students recognise a specialised knowledge base for teaching and their understanding of learner diversity. One third of students constructed initial metaphors that emphasised teaching as nurturing, an endeavour they associate with particular personality traits but without a specialised knowledge base. We analyse how student teachers' initial and subsequent metaphors reflect significant shifts in their conception of 'being a teacher' and we briefly explore how students account for these shifts. Revisiting their initial assumptions about teaching within a programme that offers a coherent conception of teaching enabled student teachers to better understand the goals of initial teacher education.

Keywords: conceptions of teaching, content knowledge, initial teacher education, learner diversity, learning to teach, metaphor, pedagogical knowledge, South African education, teacher knowledge

Introduction

When student teachers are questioned directly about their initial understanding of 'being a teacher', they often provide jargon-laden responses that make it difficult to access their underlying assumptions about teaching. An alternative way of accessing people's tacit understandings of a concept, according to cognitive metaphor theory, is through the rationales they provide for choosing and justifying a metaphor they construct. We compare the initial metaphors constructed by a cohort of student teachers at the beginning of their first year of a four-year Bachelor of Education degree to metaphors they constructed eight months later having engaged with coursework and practicum observations that prompted them to explore teaching as a complex, cognitive practice. This study arose from our concern that their experiences within the South African schooling system may have contributed to prospective teachers entering initial teacher education programmes with conceptions of teaching that could potentially undermine their professional development.

The priorities of initial teacher education programmes

The Norms and Standards for Educators policy (Department of Education [DoE] 2000) governed teaching and teacher education during the time when most current student teachers were learners at school. This policy specified seven roles expected of educators. Although the roles included being a

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subject specialist and a mediator of learning, they also indicated that an educator should be a designer of materials, an administrator, a researcher, an assessor and a provider of pastoral care to learners. At the time, Morrow (2007:99) argued that without clarity on the core nature of teachers' work, classroom teachers would find themselves overwhelmed as they strive to meet a multitude of expectations which no individual teacher could possibly fulfil. A fundamental goal of initial teacher education should be that prospective teachers formulate 'a strong and properly grounded conception of teaching' that enables them to distinguish between the core responsibilities associated with their work as teachers and the extraneous demands placed upon them that are not directly related to enabling learning (Morrow 2007:84).

A conception of teaching as 'a complex activity that is premised on the acquisition, integration and application of different kinds of knowledge' is advanced by the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ), the legislative framework now governing teacher education (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2012:10). This policy distinguishes between educators (which includes all those who work within the broad education system) and teachers (whose core responsibility is classroom teaching in a school) (DHET 2012:8). The MRTEQ requires that initial teacher education programmes place 'renewed emphasis on what is to be learnt and how it is to be learnt' (DHET 2012:10, emphasis in the original). The policy sets up expectations that newly qualified teachers possess sound subject knowledge, and know how to teach their subject/s in accordance with subject demands and learner needs (DHET 2012:56). The policy also stipulates that another priority for initial teacher education in South Africa is that student teachers are systematically sensitised to understand issues around learner diversity in terms of social and historical inequalities. This is essential from a social justice perspective considering inequalities arising from the legacy of apartheid, and the continued marginalisation of children with barriers to learning in many South African classrooms. In order to develop a teaching practice that is both conceptually strong and responsive to the diverse learning needs of children, it is essential that student teachers recognise the importance of the courses aimed at developing their content and pedagogical knowledge and that students learn to work productively with the diverse learning needs of children in different contexts. We are concerned that aspects of student teachers' initial conceptions of being a teacher may lead them to perceive these crucial parts of their initial teacher education programme as inconsequential (Calderhead & Robson 1991; Feiman-Nemser 2001; Joram & Gabriele 1998). It is thus important that students' initial conceptions of teaching are not left unexposed and unexamined.

Apprenticeships of observation within the South African context

Interacting with their own teachers over 12 years of schooling provides prospective teachers with an 'apprenticeship of observation' that is thought to be highly influential in shaping their initial conceptions of being a teacher (Lortie 1975). It is widely recognised that student teachers (even those who are taught by highly proficient teachers) tend to underestimate the complexities and knowledge associated with teaching because the professional knowledge and reasoning informing teaching action is largely invisible to observers (Berliner 1994; Darling-Hammond 2006; Hammerness et al. 2005; Joram & Gabriele 1998). The initial conceptions that student teachers form during their apprenticeship of observation serve as filters for making sense of their teacher education programmes (Bullough 1991; Feiman-Nemser 2001).

The majority of student teachers entering initial teacher education programmes in the second decade of the twenty-first century began their schooling when the vast majority of South African classrooms were dominated by teacher talk and low levels of learner participation; rote learning; a lack of meaningful questioning; an absence of engaging learning activities; little meaningful interaction between learners; and an absence of extended reading/writing tasks (Taylor & Vinjevold 1999). There is still overwhelming evidence that South African teachers generally have poor conceptual understanding of the subjects they teach and that, in general, the quality of teaching and learning has not improved (Taylor, van der Berg & Mabogoane 2013). Schooling in South Africa is widely described as being in a 'state of crisis' (Fleisch 2008). Critical challenges include inequalities that have persisted from the legacy of apartheid and the 'poor content and conceptual knowledge found amongst teachers' (DHET 2012:6). The outcomes-based education curriculum, which was implemented during the time most students were attending school, was widely criticised for undervaluing content knowledge by specifying outcomes that were largely disconnected from the bodies of knowledge to be understood (Allais 2010; Shalem 2010). Furthermore, many student teachers entering teacher education had some of their schooling disrupted by prolonged and widespread teacher strikes. During these times, community members were lauded in the media for volunteering to 'teach' classes affected by the strike action, reinforcing a perception that one does not necessarily need any specialised professional knowledge or skills in order to teach effectively (Jansen 2010). Our concern is that for many South African student teachers it is not merely that their teachers' pedagogical knowledge was invisible during their apprenticeships of observation; it is reasonable to assume that for many of them the teachers' content knowledge was somewhat obscured too.

Literature on conceptions of teaching

While there have been many international studies into different conceptions of teaching (e.g., Nieto 2003; Palmer 2007), little is known about the initial conceptions of teaching that prospective teachers construct within the South African context and how resilient they are. South African-based research investigating the beliefs, motivations and perceptions of student teachers has largely focused on their reasons for entering teaching (e.g., Wolhuter et al. 2012) and their experiences of their teacher education and teaching practicum sessions (e.g., Kiggundu & Nayimuli 2009; Marais & Meier 2004; Ngidi & Sibaya 2003; Schoeman & Mabunda 2012). A previous study (Rusznyak 2009) showed how a nearly-qualified student teacher who held onto a narrow conception of teaching struggled to teach effectively. However, this study was limited to an in-depth analysis of one student teacher and did not indicate the extent to which students' initial conceptions are generally resilient within the South African context.

Feiman-Nemser (1983:157) asserted that student teachers' initial conceptions of teaching are tenacious because 'informal influences [from students' apprenticeships of observation] are too strong, the time [of initial teacher education] is too short' to adequately challenge students' misconceptions about teaching. Subsequent studies investigating pre-service teachers' shifting conceptions of teaching have variously confirmed or challenged Feiman-Nemser's assertion. Entwistle, Skinner and Entwistle (2000) found that British student teachers in their study held firmly onto their initial conceptions of good teaching, although students were better able to articulate thoughts after completing their initial teacher education programme. In contrast, other studies (e.g., Joram & Gabriele 1998; Wood 2000) show significant shifts in the conceptions students hold. Wood, for example, shows how 50% of student teachers in his study who initially regarded teaching as imparting knowledge came, over time, to understand teaching as changing how learners understand phenomena.

While interviews, surveys and questionnaires have been used in research to try to access deep-seated beliefs about being a teacher (e.g., Bramald, Hardman & Leat 1995; Chong, Low & Goh 2011; Weber & Mitchell 1996), the use of metaphor has been recognised as a powerful pedagogical tool that teacher educators can

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use to assist prospective teachers in exposing and reconsidering their values, beliefs and philosophies about teaching and learning (Bullough 1991; Saban, Kocbeker & Saban 2007).

Metaphor theory

Metaphors have long been an object of interest and analysis by scholars, with various iterations of metaphor theory. Traditionally seen as a literary device that 'creates a poetic effect through language that brings together ideas and images in unexpected conjunction' (Cameron 2003:2), metaphors are now acknowledged as having cognitive, social and affective dimensions. Subsequent to Black's interactionist theory of metaphor (Walton & Lloyd 2011), Lakoff and Johnson (1980) advanced a cognitive theory of metaphor in which they suggested the use of metaphors as a means of accessing how people understand complex concepts through the way one mental domain is conceptualised in terms of another. The use of metaphor therefore plays a central role in enabling abstract thinking and exposing tacit assumptions (Lakoff 1993). Discourse perspectives on metaphor add to our understanding the fact that metaphor selection and use reflects the 'joint influence' of 'personal, linguistic, cognitive, affective and social, variables' (Gibbs & Cameron 2008:67). We find a discursive/ emergentist theory of metaphor as described by Cameron and Deignan (2006) compelling for our work with student teachers' conceptions of being a teacher. It affords us the possibility of engaging with the cognitive domain because in order to construct an analogy (such as a metaphor or simile) a person is required to describe the properties, characteristics or nature of an abstract concept (like what it means to 'be a teacher') in terms of the properties, characteristics or nature of something more familiar (a metaphorical item). The choice of borrowed image and the grounds upon which comparisons are drawn reveal something of how the person understands the concept. The construction of metaphorical analogies is thus a useful way of condensing what student teachers regard as the most salient aspects of being a teacher at the beginning of their formal studies. Also, because metaphors work in discursive context (Gibbs & Cameron 2008), we can engage with aspects of the South African experience that affect students' choice of metaphor, and what they find most noteworthy about being a teacher. We find Cameron and Deignan's (2006:686) idea of a 'metaphoreme' particularly useful. Metaphoremes extend the idea of a metaphor beyond a discrete unit or entity, and signal 'bundles' of 'multi-word expressions'. This is relevant to our analysis, as we engage not just with the metaphorical item but with the rationale for selecting particular metaphors.

Metaphors pervade language use, and reflect and shape how we think about teaching, learning and education (Botha 2009). We thus find many fruitful analyses of metaphors in education, including facilitating an understanding of the different conceptions that expert and novice teachers hold about teaching and learning (e.g., Martìnez, Sauleda & Huber, 2001; Patchen & Crawford 2011). Some studies (e.g., Arnon & Reichel 2007; Saban et al. 2007) compare the metaphors held by student teachers in school-based apprenticeship programmes to those enrolled on university-based teacher education courses.

Several studies (e.g., Chen 2003; Lin, Shein & Yang 2012; Saban, Kocbeker & Saban 2006) have identified how pre-service, newly qualified and experienced teachers depict themselves metaphorically as artists, healers, leaders and those who impart knowledge. While some of their studies include a category acknowledging a pastoral role (e.g., Saban et al. [2006] category of 'Teacher as archetype of spirit' and Lin et al.'s [2012] category of 'Teacher as nurturer'), these focus on the organisation of a caring and productive learning environment. While none of these particular studies contains categories that put the main emphasis on teachers as care-giving, Nieto (2003) argues that an affective dimension of teachers' work is often what 'keeps them going' through difficult times. A review of these studies shows that while there are commonalities between metaphor studies conducted with student teachers in various countries, the nuances within particular contexts make it inappropriate to impose the classification systems from one context to another. In the section that follows, we describe the context of our study, the metaphoremes that we collected and how we analysed them.

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Context of the study and data collection

The participants in this study were first-year Bachelor of Education students enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2011. Of the cohort of 273 first-year student teachers who wrote both initial and subsequent metaphors for teaching, 130 gave their informed consent for the use of their metaphors in this study, in accordance with the institutional ethics clearance obtained for this study. While 75% of participants in this study enrolled to become Sen/FET (grades 7–12) teachers, 25% enrolled to specialise in teaching the Inter/Sen phases (grades 4–9). The diversity of the student group participating in this study is illustrated by the following indicators. Male students made up 33% of the sample group; 67% of participants were female. The sample included students who had attended schools in various contexts: 32% of participants had attended public township schools; 26% had attended public suburban schools; 19% had attended schools located in rural areas; and 23% had attended private schools affiliated to a religion. The curriculum of the Bachelor of Education degree offered by our institution has been designed around the acquisition of the knowledge bases that underpin teaching (such as content knowledge, both general and content-specific pedagogical knowledge, educational theory). There is a particular course in the first-year curriculum, which has been called 'Becoming a teacher', that prompts students to access and analyse their assumptions about teaching, and learn about the ways in which the knowledge bases of teaching inform their developing practice. The course is theoretically informed by Shulman's (1987) model of pedagogical reasoning and action, and research into the knowledge bases that inform teaching (Darling-Hammond 2006; Grossman 1990; Shulman 1987).

During their first week of the 'Becoming a teacher' course, students were asked to discuss and write up their personal histories of schooling, in particular their thoughts on what had promoted and constrained their learning at school, what they thought made a teacher effective and what qualities they thought would help them develop into effective teachers. In their second tutorial, they were then asked to think of a metaphorical occupation that could best be compared to 'being a teacher' and provide a rationale for their choice. Students were asked to write their metaphor in terms of another occupation (not an inanimate object) to prompt them to describe being a teacher in terms of interaction with others. The following framing sentence was provided to students: 'Being a teacher is like being a ... [metaphorical item] ... because ... [rationale for comparison]'. The students' written responses to this task provide the first dataset for this study.

Over the course of their first year of study, students were introduced to the knowledge bases of teaching and they analysed different artefacts of teaching to explore how teachers draw on content and pedagogical knowledge to enable learning in ways that extend beyond a common-sense understanding of the world. In particular, they were asked to observe how textbook writers and teachers draw on content knowledge to make appropriate pedagogical choices in terms of how knowledge is mediated. During their practicum sessions, student teachers completed an observation assignment in which their attention was drawn to the ways in which the teachers they observed worked to organise and present content knowledge in pedagogically appropriate ways (Rusznyak & Moosa 2014). They were subsequently introduced to lesson planning guidelines and teaching practicum assessment documents that have also been designed to present teaching as a complex practice that rests on a teacher's content and pedagogical knowledge bases (Rusznyak & Walton 2011).

Towards the completion of their first year of study, students were again asked to construct a metaphor for 'being a teacher' and provide a rationale for their analogy. A subsequent metaphor is again a useful way to access any shifts in students' deep-seated beliefs about teaching which we believe we would not have obtained by asking them to write a narrative about what they had learnt about teaching during their first year of study. These subsequent metaphors provide the second dataset for this study. The construction of the two metaphors had a pedagogical purpose beyond generating data for this study. Once their subsequent metaphors were written, students' initial metaphors were returned to them. Students then used concepts from their coursework as a framework for analysing how their understanding of being a teacher deepened

and/or changed over the year. At the end of the year, students were asked to write an analysis of their overall professional development over the course of the year. These reflections form the third dataset for this study. Their responses provide some preliminary insights into the learning and experiences student teachers believe to be pivotal in prompting them to reformulate their initial conceptions of being a teacher.

We are aware of the design limitations of this study. The more complex the concept, the more variety one finds in the metaphors generated (Yob 2003), so one metaphor could never adequately portray the full complexities of teaching (Chen 2003). We are mindful that students in this study may hold more than one metaphor of being a teacher and our data are limited to the two written metaphors each student submitted as part of their coursework. While conceding that our findings are partial and tentative, we nevertheless maintain that the construction of a single metaphor is a useful way of accessing what stands out as the most salient aspect of teaching in the minds of student teachers at a particular point in time.

Data analysis

Most work on metaphor analysis in the different theoretical traditions is concerned with language-inuse and relies on corpora of various sizes and focus areas. This offers the possibility of identifying and understanding metaphorical clusters and patterns as they occur naturally (Cameron & Deignan 2006). Our analysis is different, in that the metaphors we have to work with are not embedded in texts but have been explicitly elicited from student teachers. We have drawn on Schmitt's (2005) systematic metaphor analysis, in a process that started with the individual metaphorical items generated by student teachers. Here we found 50 different metaphorical occupations, most commonly comparing 'being a teacher' with a pastor, social worker, medical professional, gardener, driver, sports coach, president and parent. However, the rationale upon which the analogies had been constructed varied considerably even when students had chosen the same metaphorical occupation, reflecting something of Ricoeur's (2003:229) assertion that 'resemblance is not only what the metaphorical statement fashions, but also what guides and produces this statement'. We thus focused on the verbs used in the rationales to determine how student teachers described the interaction between the metaphorical occupation and a group of others. We then clustered the verbs generated into the following seven clusters, each of which portrayed students' understanding of interaction between teacher and learners in similar ways:

. Teachers nurture; support; care; understand; sympathise.
. Teachers create; shape; mould; style; manufacture; sculpt; construct; design.
. Teachers perform; captivate; inspire; motivate; entertain.
. Teachers lead; command; run; direct; steer; control; drive; coach; mentor.
. Teachers repair; diagnose; fix; heal; mend; prescribe; cure; correct; rescue.
. Teachers organise; plan; arrange; provide.
. Teachers inform; tell; deliver; reveal; present; demonstrate.

Following Schmitt (2005) who advocates the use of terminology emerging directly from the data to name metaphorical clusters, we chose a cluster verb that best represented how interactions between teacher and learners were portrayed. We found that items originally coded as Teachers lead needed further differentiation. Some rationales allocated to this cluster emphasised an intentional effort to lead a team taking cognisance of the different strengths and weaknesses of individuals within that team. In contrast, other rationales portrayed learners as an undifferentiated group whose development was determined by the competence and benevolent actions of a leader. The rationales that were originally coded as Teachers lead were therefore subdivided into two distinct categories, namely Teachers direct and Teachers mentor. Once the eight clusters were defined, we then rechecked the coding of each rationale and made adjustments where warranted. Where a rationale included aspects from more than one cluster, we assigned the metaphor to the cluster in which the teacher/learner interaction was most strongly emphasised. To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, we conducted regular inter-rater reliability checks between the authors during

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the categorisation and analysis processes. We present an overview of the nature and shifts of the metaphors in our dataset, and then we consider the initial and subsequent metaphor of one student, Mbali. We discuss the significant shifts in her conception of being a teacher as evident in her metaphors.

Clusters of metaphors for 'being a teacher'

We start with a brief overview of the eight metaphorical clusters defined in our study. Table A1 in the Appendix provides a summary of how each metaphorical cluster depicts the nature of teacher/learner interactions.

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1. Teachers care

The metaphors in this cluster portray the teacher's main role as meeting the physical, psychological and social needs of individual learners in their care. Typical metaphorical items used include teacher as parent, social worker, pastor and psychologist. This enables them to 'identify those children who suffer from emotional stresses, domestic violence and other sorts of abuses' and offer 'counselling to the child' or 'a shoulder to cry on'. In this cluster, the expertise of teachers is ascribed to inherent personality traits such as 'being encouraging' and 'having a lot of patience' so that 'all learners feel warmth, trust and care'. In several cases, students conflated teaching with providing emotional support to learners. For example, one student asserted: 'T]he only difference between a teacher and a child psychologist is that a psychologist only deals with one patient at a time but a teacher deals with about 30 of them at a time' (emphasis added). The role of a teacher's content or pedagogical knowledge is not acknowledged within metaphors in this cluster.

2. Teachers create

These metaphors depict the teacher as a 'highly skilled' artist who uses some expertise to 'mould or shape' learners into an 'innovative product' or 'masterpiece'. Metaphorical items include the teacher as artist, florist, sculptor, miner, hairdresser, architect and chef. Teachers draw on specialised pedagogical knowledge to unlock the potential that lies within each individual learner.

3. Teachers perform

Teachers are portrayed as performers who entertain their learners. Metaphorical items compare teachers to actors, musicians, masters of ceremonies, priests and motivational speakers. Teachers, in these metaphors, should strive to 'create an exciting atmosphere that captures learners' attention'. The success of the performance can be gauged by whether the performer has prepared sufficiently to 'keep their audience focused on the performance, and if that happens then they have achieved their intentions'. Teachers need, according to these metaphors, an ability to 'exude confidence as one talks in front of many people'. These metaphors acknowledge the preparation that teachers undertake in knowing their script in order to appear confident. They portray learners as part of an undifferentiated audience or congregation.

4. Teachers direct

Teachers are portrayed as authority figures who lead learners to where they need to be. Metaphorical items include politicians, presidents, priests, pilots and taxi drivers. In the light of students' dependency on the minibus taxi industry for transport, several compared teachers' effectiveness to the competence of taxi drivers. One student writes: 'A teacher is like a driver because the futures of the students lie in the hands of the teacher. When a driver is driving a taxi, the lives of the passengers are in the hands of the driver. If an accident happens, some passengers may survive and some may die. If the teacher is not effective, the

learners are going to fail'. Learners are portrayed as a homogenous group who all benefit from the vision, informed leadership and ethically sound actions of the teacher but who are powerless in the face of incompetence. For example, one student writes: 'Like a teacher, a president's decisions need to be based on the well-being of the state. His decisions will influence the citizens either negatively or positively'. These concerns regarding teacher competence and learner powerlessness might be understood in light of the schooling experiences of many South African learners.

5. Teachers repair

Teachers are portrayed as those who treat, cure or mend. Typical metaphorical items include medical personnel and therapists, such as doctor, nurse or occupational therapist, and repairers, such as mechanics. Teaching acts intervene to treat a problem. For example: 'As a doctor you need to identify the patient's sickness. When you know the sickness you will give the patient the right medication that will cure his sickness, while as a teacher you will know what you must teach about. Teachers encourage learners to study, complete their homework in time, pass tests and even attend classes regularly'. Like doctors, teachers 'need to have excellent subject knowledge in order to observe where the student is going wrong and take the correct course of action to help them'. These metaphors acknowledge both diverse learner needs and the content and pedagogical knowledge required to select an appropriate treatment for the malaise.

6. Teachers organise

These metaphors focus attention on the teacher's role of organising an environment that provides learners with what they need in order to thrive. Metaphorical items used to convey the teacher as an organiser include farmers and gardeners. Numerous metaphors in this category acknowledge the importance of the teacher providing appropriate knowledge and learning opportunities, monitoring the development of learners and providing extra support when necessary. For example, one student explains: 'If plants or flowers do not grow as they are supposed to grow, the gardener puts some fertiliser for the plants to produce bright and beautiful flowers. This is the same as a teacher: if learners are not performing well in the class, the teacher needs to arrange some extra lessons and see to it that the learners pass in their exams'. Like other categories, these metaphors implicitly acknowledge the content and pedagogical knowledge needed to identify and plan interventions.

7. Teachers inform

Metaphors in this category depict the teacher as a source of 'detailed and accurate information' which needs to be dispensed to others. Some metaphorical items included tour guide, public relations officer, waiter and journalist. A typical response in this category is exemplified in the following metaphor of teacher as journalist: 'Their work, like teachers, requires them to know the facts of the content before revealing it to the public. Intense research, planning and time management are some of the skills you need'. Teaching is depicted as a transfer of information and so the importance of teachers being well-informed with strong content knowledge before they teach is strongly emphasised in this metaphorical cluster.

8. Teachers mentor

Metaphors represent teachers as leaders who work with a group of learners towards a common purpose. Metaphorical items such as sports coach, supervisor and project manager depict the teacher as a more knowledgeable individual who through his/her expertise in a particular area deepens the knowledge and skills of a team. A student using the analogy of a coach says: 'A coach must know all the knowledge and methods of coaching for his/her team to be the best'. Teachers need to know both 'how to teach and what to teach'. Metaphors indicated the importance for the team leader 'to be able to put together a strategy to

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work as a unit to win a match. Just like in teaching a teacher has to know each student's strong and weak points in order to make sure each student is learning something in each lesson'. In addition to having adequate content and pedagogical knowledge, metaphors in this cluster emphasise the need for teachers to be aware of the differing abilities and requirements of individuals in the team.

Shifts in understanding of teaching as evident in differences from students' initial and subsequent metaphors

Table 1 provides a summary of the number of initial and subsequent metaphors that fell into each cluster. By far the greatest number of metaphors (35%) depicted the most salient aspect of 'being a teacher' as nurturing learners. The second largest category (representing 16% of the students in our study) constructed metaphors that depict teachers as those who are knowledgeable and impart that knowledge to others.

The second aim of our study was to investigate how resilient these preconceptions are, given that the students in our study participated in a course in which teacher educators attempted to access and explicitly work with students' conceptions of teaching. We found 27 cases (21% of our sample) where students' initial and subsequent metaphors remained within the same cluster, although they were able to articulate their rationale in a more nuanced manner, in much the same way as described in Entwistle et al.'s (2000) study. In the other 103 cases (79% of our sample), students' subsequent metaphors were in a different cluster from their initial ones, showing some change in what students found most salient about being a teacher. Another finding evident in Table 1 is that 36 students (80% of those whose metaphors had initially emphasised how 'teachers care') produced a subsequent metaphor in another cluster (many shifting into the teachers create, direct, repair, organise and mentor clusters, as evident in Table A2 in the Appendix). The vast reduction in the number of students who emphasised teaching as nurturing in their subsequent metaphors suggests that students in this study started to take seriously the idea that being a caring, kind person does not necessarily enable others to learn effectively. Furthermore, we notice an increase in those whose subsequent metaphors depict teaching as organising, a cluster that acknowledges both content and pedagogical knowledge bases for teachers. In light of their diverse apprenticeships of observation, each student teacher was required to work individually to analyse his/her initial and subsequent metaphors of being a teacher, identifying the continuities and the shifts. For some students, their initial metaphors/rationales already demonstrated a relatively sophisticated understanding of being a teacher, and their experiences/observations during the practicum were fairly similar to what they had observed as learners. These students found their initial conceptions of teaching reinforced and extended by university coursework and practicum observations. For many others, the difference was radical.

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Table 1: A quantitative analysis showing the extent to which students' subsequent metaphors changed categories

Cluster	Number (%) of students whose initial metaphors were assigned to this cluster	Number of students whose metaphors remained in this cluster	Number of students whose subsequent metaphors JOINED this cluster	Number of students whose subsequent metaphors LEFT this cluster	Number (%) of students whose subsequent metaphors were assigned to this cluster
1. Teachers care	45 (35%)	9	6	36	15 (12%)
2. Teachers create	13 (10%)	2	16	11	18 (14%)
3. Teachers perform	12 (9%)	2	9	10	11 (8%)
4. Teachers direct	12 (9%)	4	9	8	13 (10%)
5. Teachers repair	7 (5%)	1	12	6	13(10%)
6. Teachers organise	12 (9%)	3	31	9	34 (26%)
7. Teachers inform	20 (16%)	3	11	17	14 (11%)
8. Teachers mentor	9 (7%)	3	9	6	12 (9%)
TOTAL	130 (100%)	27 (21%)	n/a	n/a	130 (100%)

We present the metaphors of Mbali, a student teacher who initially understood teaching as nurturing but whose subsequent metaphor showed a significant shift.

Mbali's initial and subsequent metaphors

Mbali completed her National Senior Certificate in 2010 at a secondary school in a township in Gauteng. She chose to specialise in secondary school teaching. Initially, she compares being a teacher with being a social worker, and on the basis of her rationale her initial metaphor was assigned to the *Teachers care* cluster as she depicts the interaction between teacher and learners primarily as providing emotional support:

> Teachers are like social workers who work with children and help them by talking to them about the psychological issues that affect them as individuals. Teachers must also tackle these issues in their classrooms because they need to understand the circumstances that their learners live under and what issues cause the learners to be distracted. Like teachers, social workers help children face their fears so that they can have the courage to go out there and live their dreams. (February 2011).

From the outset, she is aware of the individual needs learners may have, and she emphasises the importance of teachers and social workers understanding individuals and the personal challenges they face. Mbali recognises that these personal challenges may impact on learners' ability to concentrate in class. In her subsequent metaphor, Mbali compares being a teacher with being a hairstylist. On the basis of her rationale, her subsequent metaphor was assigned to the cluster Teachers create:

> A hairstylist needs to know which products to use for which styles and hair type. Knowing her customers' personalities is important so that the hairstyle she creates and customer's personality complement each other. In the same way teachers need to know the content knowledge; they need to think of appropriate ways to teach particular subjects. When a hairstylist does the hair she thinks of

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> other things she could try with the hair. Teachers in the same way think while they teach: they think of appropriate examples to use, ways of organising the information and their use of suitable language for the learners. People go into salons with ruined and damaged hair; the hairstylist has to make sure that they come out of it looking beautiful. In the same way, learners may come to class with misconceptions; the teacher has to make sure that she clarifies them before they leave. (October 2011).

Mbali now emphasises the extent to which teachers make appropriate decisions taking into consideration the content knowledge and the needs of particular learners. Her metaphor conveys a sense of considering various options and making informed pedagogical decisions, including how to represent content knowledge, the use of appropriate examples and language level in her explanations.

In both metaphors, Mbali depicts learners as a group of individuals who have particular needs. From the outset, she is acutely aware of how teachers need to be responsive to those needs and consider those needs in the course of her classroom practice. In her initial metaphor, individual learner needs are portrayed as important because of how learners might behave. In her subsequent metaphor, she indicates an awareness of how learner needs inform pedagogical decision making. The biggest shift evident in Mbali's metaphor is that her initial metaphor placed providing emotional support at the core of a teacher's interactions with learners, whereas her subsequent metaphor places developing learner understanding at the core of what it means to be a teacher.

Implications for how conceptions of teaching might affect how students engage with initial teacher education programmes

We now look across the defined metaphorical clusters to consider their implications for how student teachers might engage with the identified priorities of initial teacher education: that students understand the importance of courses that develop their content and pedagogical knowledge and can work productively with learner diversity.

1. The extent to which metaphors acknowledge teaching as having a knowledge base

While all metaphors showed students' understanding that teachers work with a group of others, only some metaphor clusters acknowledged (either explicitly or implicitly) knowledge bases for teaching. We consider the extent to which student metaphors refer to working with content knowledge, and then we consider the extent to which different clusters alluded to a specialised pedagogical knowledge.

The importance of teachers having high levels of content knowledge was most explicit within metaphorical clusters that emphasise how teachers inform. Given the recent under-emphasis of content knowledge in South African schooling, we were not surprised to find that only 16% of the students in our study emphasised that teachers work to impart knowledge. This stands in contrast with Wood's (2000) study, where imparting knowledge was the most prevalent initial conception of being a teacher among students in the UK. Students whose metaphors fall in this cluster tended to depict teaching as an unproblematic transfer of information. While they still have much to learn about the mediation of content knowledge and responsiveness to learners, they are nevertheless very well positioned to recognise the importance of courses that develop their subject expertise. Other clusters containing some metaphors that allude implicitly to content knowledge included Teachers organise; Teachers repair; Teachers create; Teachers mentor; Teachers direct; and Teachers perform. Many (but not all) metaphors in these clusters indicated a peripheral awareness of the role of content knowledge in how teachers interact with learners. Reference to content knowledge was largely absent from metaphors that emphasised how teachers care.

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The pedagogical knowledge needed to make appropriate decisions was most prevalent in the cluster of metaphors that emphasised how teachers create; repair; direct; organise; and mentor. We contend that the initial awareness of teaching as a reasoned practice provides a starting point from which students can deepen their understanding of teaching as a complex, knowledge-based practice. These students are likely to be invested in their pedagogy courses, and could benefit from explicitly exploring how content knowledge and learner needs drive the pedagogical choices teachers make. Other clusters containing some metaphors that alluded implicitly to pedagogical knowledge included Teachers inform and Teachers perform. Reference to pedagogical knowledge was largely absent from metaphors that emphasised how Teachers care, as students attributed effective teaching more to personality traits than to a knowledge base. Teacher knowledge, if acknowledged at all, tended to focus on the importance of a teacher having knowledge of individual learners and the contextual challenges they face.

While the personality traits mentioned in the Teachers care metaphors undoubtedly describe beneficial qualities that teachers could bring to bear in their practice, we are concerned that on their own, they do not necessarily ensure that someone with these qualities can effectively enable learning. Whereas only one Taiwanese student teacher (2% of the sample) in Lin et al.'s (2012) study produced a metaphor that depicted teaching as caring for a child as a parent would, 8% of Turkish students in Saban et al.'s (2007) study produced metaphors of this sort. That 35% of students in our study produced an initial metaphor of this nature suggests that the current state of schooling in South Africa contributes significantly to how prospective teachers tend to regard teaching as care-giving. It is of particular importance that during the course of their teacher education programme, students whose metaphors initially fell in this cluster are explicitly introduced to the role that content knowledge plays in informing appropriate pedagogical choices. Without this, these students are most likely to discount the importance of courses aimed at building their content and pedagogical knowledge bases.

While students from our institution are drawn from different contexts and provinces, we make no claims that the clusters that emerge from our dataset would necessarily be the same if the study were to be replicated at different teacher education institutions. However, what we can claim is that a significant percentage of students in our study entered initial teacher education with a conception that the main role of a teacher is to nurture. While this conception may serve the student well in some respects (Nieto 2003), it may not adequately predispose students to recognise the importance of courses designed to build their content and pedagogical knowledge bases for teaching.

2. Students' initial understandings of learner diversity

All metaphors in our study show that, from the outset, students understand that being a teacher involves interacting with a group of others. Most South African schools that were previously segregated are now multiracial with learners of different cultures, (dis)abilities, religious beliefs and socio-economic statuses. This is especially true of many urban schools, which draw diverse learners from a wide range of backgrounds. However, this is not necessarily true of all urban schools, as high fees, language policies and religious affiliations still exclude some learners. The continued effects of the now repealed Bantustan/Homelands Policy and Group Areas Acts, especially within rural areas, mean that there remain many mono-racial, mono-lingual and mono-cultural schools. Although it has been shown that the student teachers participating in this study came from schools located in suburban, rural and township contexts, not all would necessarily have been through school with culturally diverse classmates. It is a priority that regardless of their experiences of learning with diverse peers, all student teachers understand diversity within the South African context, and are able to teach diverse classes of learners (DHET 2012). We find that for their initial metaphors of being a teacher, certain clusters tended to depict a relationship with a homogenous group of learners whereas others portrayed teachers having one-on-one relationships with a group of highly individualised learners. Clusters of metaphors that explicitly revealed students' initial awareness of individual learners and their unique needs included Teachers create and Teachers care. Our

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concern is that students who perceive learners as excessively individualised may find it difficult to recognise commonality between learner needs and may more easily become pedagogically paralysed by the burden of uniqueness. This is especially important in the South African context where class sizes in public schools are large. At the other extreme, students whose metaphors depict teachers as those who inform, perform and direct tended to present learners as a homogeneous group (like an audience, a tour group or a congregation). Such groups receive a generic presentation irrespective of who is in attendance.

We notice that most beginning student teachers (with the notable exception of those whose metaphors fall into the Teachers mentor cluster) either over- or underestimate the extent to which teachers work with learner diversity, and are not yet aware of the need to 'respond simultaneously to differences and commonalities between learners' in a class (Dyson & Howes 2009:156). We argue that both these extremes can undermine attempts to produce teachers who are responsive to (yet not overwhelmed by) the diverse learning needs in the classes they teach.

In correlating our classification of students' initial metaphor with the type of schooling that student attended, we see similar patterns emerging from students who attended township and suburban public schools, with 43% and 39% respectively providing initial metaphors that foreground how teachers attend to the individualised needs of learners in their classes. In contrast, only 24% of students who attended schools in rural contexts constructed an initial metaphor showing how teachers work with individualised learner needs. This stands in stark contrast to the 70% of students who attended independent (often religious affiliated schools) whose initial metaphors did so. Our present data do not enable us to interpret the extent to which students' understanding of how teachers work with learner diversity (as reflected in their initial metaphor) is attributable to differences in the homogeneity of classes within various geographical contexts, the extent to which parents paying high school fees demand individual attention from teachers, relative class size or other factors not considered here. Further research into this finding is therefore warranted.

Students' perceptions of what prompted the shifts in their conceptions of being a teacher

At the end of their first year of study, students were asked to write an open-ended essay in which they analysed continuities and disjunctures between their initial and subsequent metaphors. In particular, they were asked to respond to the following questions:

. What do you find most interesting about the rationale for your metaphor of being a teacher that you constructed at the beginning of the year?
. What is important to you as a teacher now that was less important to you then?
. Is there evidence in your rationale of the start of an understanding that has now developed into a deeper understanding?
. What do you understand now about teaching that you didn't understand then?

In their responses, many students articulated their surprise at uncovering aspects of teaching that had been hidden from them as learners. For example, one student teacher explains:

> Honestly, when I started this degree, I never knew about lesson planning. The concept was new to me. I never knew there was so much thinking and complex ideas involved in planning one lesson. The idea that I had was that the teacher just gets a guide and reads it with the learners every day until the year has ended. Now I understand why we can't deliver an effective lesson without thinking through the content knowledge, possible learner misconceptions, organising knowledge and transforming it into understandable content for children and how to scaffold the learning tasks.

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From comments like this, we notice how university coursework not only introduced student teachers to 'new' concepts associated with teaching, but also gave them access to a language with which to describe the practices of teaching.

Several students used their newly acquired theoretical concepts and language of practice to revisit their personal experiences of schooling and interpret them from a different perspective. For example, one student reflects: 'What frustrated me when I was at school was that teachers would mark us wrong but not tell us the correct answers, and they would fail to answer the questions we asked. I thought they were making us find out for ourselves. In learning about teaching as pedagogical reasoning and action [Shulman, 1987], I realise now that they might have acted this way because at times their content knowledge was weak or that they were not well prepared for their lessons'. Their access to a conceptual framework for thinking about teaching enabled these students to reinterpret aspects of their apprenticeship of observation from a more critical, theoretically informed position.

Furthermore, numerous students attributed a shift in their understanding of the nature of teaching to opportunities they had to observe a different kind of teaching to that which they had experienced as learners. One student, for example, explains: 'At my school, all independent written work was given as homework tasks. We would do nothing during class time except copy down notes. But during the teaching prac[ticum], I saw how these teachers kept the children involved with content – learners were so busy listening, answering questions, reading and writing that they never got bored'. In her response, we notice that the student teacher's reflection focuses on how teachers enable learners to work with content knowledge in the lessons they teach, which was a major part of an observation assignment for students during their first teaching practicum session in the schools. In responses like this, the observation of an alternative model of teaching enabled some student teachers to extend their imagination of the possible, and recognise some limitations of their apprenticeship of observation.

While students generally attributed the shifts in their conceptions of teaching to insights they had gained through coursework and/or during their observations in teaching practicum, their use of concepts to describe these shifts suggests that neither the coursework nor the practicum experiences worked in isolation. Without access to the organising insights of a conceptual framework and access to a more specialist language of teaching practice, the students would have been unlikely to interpret observations in a classroom any differently to how they had as learners. Furthermore, without the observation of an alternative model of practice (either in real school contexts or through the study of videotaped lessons and other artefacts of practice), it seems unlikely (from their responses) that students would have been able to imagine the embodiment of a different kind of teaching practice to what they had observed during their own schooling. We acknowledge the limitations inherent in the case study design, which reduces the generalisability of our findings. The particular nature of the teacher education programme in which students worked explicitly presented students with a particular conception of teaching as a complex knowledge-based practice. As a formal object of study, the nature of teaching was revisited repeatedly through coursework, during students' school-based observations, during their analysis of classroom artefacts during tutorial classes, during the analysis of key readings and through written assignment tasks. The conceptual coherence between the coursework and practical work established conditions of possibility, we believe, for students' acquisition of a framework that enabled them to critically interrogate and revise some of their underlying assumptions about teaching. The contextual boundedness of this study might mean that the shifts that were present in the analysis of our data may not be replicated in other teacher education programmes where the nature of teaching is not an explicit object of study.

Because students in this study were not formally observed and assessed during their teaching practicum sessions, it is not possible to analyse whether or not the changes in their conceptions had any effect on their actual classroom practices. However, Morrow (2007) maintains that because the effectiveness of teaching relies on knowledge and professional judgement, the clarity of thought and understanding of practitioners

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Using metaphors to gain insight into student teachers' conceptions of teaching directly affects the quality of their engagement with the practice. Further research is needed to investigate empirically how students' conceptions of teaching influence their teaching within the South African context.

Conclusion

Students come to initial teacher education with deep-seated ideas or beliefs about what it means to be a teacher, and these ideas may be resistant to change. These ideas will influence how students engage with the different components of their teacher education programme, so it is important, but difficult, to access them. Given that metaphors reflect people's view of the world (Botha 2009), an analysis of student metaphors offers a valuable way to access students' understanding of what it means to be a teacher. This study investigated what students' metaphors reveal about the way they understand 'being a teacher' at the beginning of their initial teacher education programmes and whether there were any changes in their conceptions over the course of a year. One third of students in our study initially portrayed teaching as nurturing, an endeavour that they ascribe to inherent personality traits, and ignored the need for a teacher to have content or pedagogical knowledge. While 'teachers care' is a common theme in studies of student conceptions of teaching carried out internationally, the prevalence of students in our study with this initial conception of teaching is significantly higher than studies conducted elsewhere. If student teachers do not come to recognise the importance of courses that intend to build their teacher knowledge bases and commit to them, we are concerned that 'poor conceptual and content knowledge amongst teachers' (DHET 2012, 6) may continue to plague South Africa's education system despite policy and curriculum interventions.

In contrast to studies that claim that students' initial conceptions of teaching are persistent, our study found that there was evidence of shifts over the course of a year. A significant shift evident in the subsequent metaphors of our sample of students was a reduced focus on teaching as being primarily about nurturing learners and a greater emphasis on teachers drawing on content and pedagogical knowledge to promote learner understanding. If prospective teachers are to develop an understanding of teaching as a complex, knowledge-based practice that is responsive to the needs of diverse learners, then teacher educators need to work intentionally with constraining aspects of students' initial conceptions of 'being a teacher'. Within an education system desperately in need of quality teachers, this is too important to be left to chance.

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Metaphorical category	Metaphorical items	The way in which being a teacher is depicted	The way in which learners are depicted	Professional interactions between teachers and learners	Acknowledged teacher knowledge and personal traits
Teachers care	mother, social worker, hairdresser, pastor, psychologist	Teachers are portrayed as 'compassionate, caring and loving' adults who care for the individual needs of each child in their class.	Learners are children who are in need of emotional support so that they can develop confidence.	Teaching involves addressing the emotional needs of learners so that they build hope and develop their confidence.	Caring and patient personality traits; knowledge about learners
Teacher create	artist, florist, sculptor, hairdresser, architect, chef	The teacher works to shape each learner. Teachers seek to identify and reveal each child's unique potential.	Learners are the 'raw material' that teachers work with.	Teaching is a process whereby undeveloped learners become a work of art, worthy of admiration.	Knowledge about individual learners; pedagogical knowledge about making appropriate decisions in terms of learner needs
Teachers perform	actor, musician, master of ceremonies, motivational speaker	Teachers are performers whose job it is to inspire, motivate or entertain. The role of the teacher is to hold the attention of a group of learners.	Learners are part of an undifferentiated audience or congregation.	Teaching is a performance which is designed to capture the attention and interest of the audience.	Charismatic personality; pedagogical knowledge
Teachers direct	president, taxi driver, politician, pilot	Teachers are in a position of authority. They should act competently and benevolently for the	Learners are a group of homogenous subjects whose fate depends on their teachers' competence and their	Teaching involves making correct decisions that will ultimately benefit a group of learners.	Content knowledge; pedagogical knowledge; commitment to making ethical choices

ble A1: Summary of how categories of metaphors depicted teachers, learners and the nature of the interaction between them

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Table A1 (Continued)

Metaphorical category	Metaphorical items	The way in which being a teacher is depicted	The way in which learners are depicted	Professional interactions between teachers and learners	Acknowledged teacher knowledge and personal traits
		good of the learners in their care.	ability to make ethically sound decisions.		
Teachers repair	doctor, nurse, occupational therapist, psychologist	The teacher diagnoses some individual pathology and prescribes a cure to treat that problem.	Learners present with individual problems, illnesses or deficiencies that need to be cured.	Teaching diagnoses a problem and prescribes a remedy. If learners follow the dispensed advice, they will be cured.	Pedagogical knowledge; content knowledge; caring personality traits
Teachers organise	farmer, gardener, nanny, florist	Teachers organise an environment that provides learners with what they need to flourish.	Learners are immature beings who could reach their full potential given the right conditions/ interventions.	Teaching monitors the natural development of learners and puts intentional interventions in place to prompt and support development.	Pedagogical knowledge; content knowledge; caring personality traits
Teachers inform	tour guide, public relations officer, waiter, journalist, newsreader	The teacher is a source of accurate information which needs to be dispensed to others.	Learners are a homogenous group who benefit from the acquisition of dispensed information.	Interaction involves a transfer of information from one who knows to those who don't yet know.	Pedagogical knowledge; content knowledge
Teachers mentor	sports coach, supervisor, project manager	Teachers are knowledgeable experts in a field and are aware of the differing abilities and needs of individuals in the rest of the team.	Learners bring different strengths and weaknesses to the team. The teacher capitalises on these to the benefit of the whole group.	Teaching involves the mutual engagement of teachers to develop a specific kind of competence.	Pedagogical knowledge; content knowledge; caring personality traits

Table A2: An analysis of how the metaphors produced by students shifted from one category to another

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Subsequent metaphors (OCTOBER)		Initial metaphors (FEBRUARY)								
		1 Teachers care	2 Teachers create	3 Teachers perform	4 Teachers direct	5 Teachers repair	6 Teachers organise	7 Teachers inform	8 Teachers mentor	TOTAL
	1 Teachers care	9	1	1	0	3	0	1	0	15
	2 Teachers create	6	2	0	1	1	2	4	2	18
	3 Teachers perform	3	0	2	2	2	2	0	0	11
	4 Teachers direct	4	0	1	4	0	2	2	0	13
	5 Teachers repair	6	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	13
	6 Teachers organise	9	4	5	4	0	3	7	2	34
	7 Teachers inform	3	3	2	0	0	2	3	1	14
	8 Teachers mentor	5	2	0	1	0	0	1	3	12
	TOTAL	**45**	**13**	**12**	**12**	**7**	**12**	**20**	**9**	**130**

Note: This table shows in more detail how the students' metaphors shifted from February to October of their first year of study. For example, the shaded block shows that six students (including Mbali) who initially focused on how *teachers care* emphasised how *teachers create* in their subsequent metaphor.