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The Presence and Power of Metaphors

The metaphor is perhaps one of man's most fruitful potentialities. Its efficacy verges on magic.

—José Ortega y Gasset (1925, p. 35)

NOT JUST WORDS

Language and leadership are inseparable. Leaders traffic in language. It is language that defines problems and solutions. It is language that stirs the imagination, defines critical issues, creates collective consciousness in followers, and frames agendas for individual and collective action, whether proactive or reactive. Language is the ultimate form of the construction of symbolic power, the means to stir humanity to pursue conquest, manage change, right perceived wrongs, find compassion for the fallen, or confront impossible odds. And the essence of language for leaders is the use of metaphor.

Goethe once said, "All things are metaphors" (Campbell & Moyers, 1991, p. 286). How we think, how we make sense of the universe, is by means of metaphor (Beckett, 2003; Turbayne, 1962). Metaphors are not just a literary flourish used by those with a poetic turn of mind, but a fundamental tool that has been used by humans from the earliest times to shape

thought and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). As Ortony (1975) says, "metaphors are necessary and not just nice" (p. 45). They are so pervasive and embedded in the way we think about things that we often don't even recognize when we have used them.

> Metaphor is an aspect of our lives so ordinary that we use it every day automatically and unconsciously and with so little effort that we rarely find occasion to remark upon it. Whatever our pedigree or education, our waking thoughts and probably our sleeping ones are shaped by metaphor . . . it is not—most decidedly not—merely a matter of words. (Mangham, 1996, p. 20)

FROM GILGAMESH TO OBAMA: METAPHORS COMMUNICATE AND CONNECT

From "I want to win that next battle—for justice and opportunity," used in the Obama presidential campaign, to the Sumerian epic of the warrior Gilgamesh, over two-and-a-half-thousand years before, ideas employed on leadership resonate through metaphor. In the epic, Gilgamesh is criticized for his love of war and for not acting as a "shepherd to his people" (Sandars, 1960, p. 60). Such images have been used as narratives and poetry "to transfer knowledge and elicit emotion" over the millennia (Goodwin, 1996, p. 487). The mixing of metaphor in speech and poetry is a potent mix of knowledge and emotion. Such an aim is even more critical in our own times for, as Booth (1979) observed,

> For the first time in history, a society finds itself offering immense rewards to a vast number of hired metaphorists, hired to make metaphors accomplish a predetermined end regardless of what they say about our character or do to it. (p. 66)

Bowdle (2005) has even suggested that television presenters use a metaphor in every 25 words of communication. Orwell (1961, pp. 353–367) has argued that the use of language both contributes to and reflects the state of politics. He uses the metaphor of a person who takes to drink because he feels a failure but then fails all the more, because of the drink. So policy makers and practitioners in education may use metaphors to conceal their failure to think and act effectively, but such language encourages a further decline in the clarity of analysis and action in response. For example, in describing Winston Churchill's leadership, Jenkins (2001) remarked, 'He thought rhetorically, and was constantly in danger of his policy being made by his phrases rather than vice versa" (p. 116).

Metaphors function positively and negatively. They have the power to help us create meaning and understanding and to improve how we lead.

They also have the power to manipulate, to shut down thinking, to deflect creativity, and to harm. Their very ubiquity, their indispensableness, lends metaphors great power.

This volume aims to make more apparent to all those with an interest in educational administration the positive, imaginative, and productive potential of metaphors and also their sometimes "hidden cargo of dubious implications" (Cornelissen, 2002, p. 267) and "insidious tendencies" (Van den Bulte, 1994, p. 419). The first aim of this book is to shine a light on the worldview of educational leadership created through the use of metaphor. A second aim is to explore possible new worldviews to be constructed through metaphor and to use metaphors to illustrate the leaders we need. We will argue that metaphors are not only about leadership; they embody the very act of leading. They are both subject and object simultaneously.

HOW METAPHORS WORK

To understand the power of metaphors we need to know how they work. The first phenomenon of metaphors is that they trigger an effect (Camp, 2005) by comparing two things that are both similar and dissimilar. The reader or listener is thrown into a state of momentary uncertainty, where the degree and significance of the similarity and dissimilarity must be considered. We are tilted off balance and find ourselves "exiles from the familiar" (Burns, 1972, p. 109). The term used to capture this mental state is "liminality," defined by Anderson (2005) as "the ambiguous condition of being between, at the limits of existing structures and where new structures are emerging . . . a transformative stage where a thing is in process of becoming something else" (pp. 590–591). A metaphor takes us into a state of liminality, where we work at creating sense: "It preempts our attention and propels us on a quest for the underlying truth. We are launched into a creative, inventive, pleasurable act" (Swanson, 1979, p. 162). The effect is greatest when the similarity is perceived to be not total but significant, so that meaning is created. For example, Barack Obama's generation is now described as "Generation Jones" instead of the "late baby boomers." Wells (2009) indicates that "Generation Jones" reflects the "yearning (or 'jonesing') of its members for the coolness of the 1960s and their parents' efforts to keep up with the Joneses" (p. 36).

The second aspect of the use of metaphor is that it constructs a relationship between the user and the receiver. Cohen (1979) believes that by using a metaphor the writer or speaker extends a kind of invitation. To respond, the reader or listener must actively engage and, by doing so, a degree of connection and, to Cohen, empathy and trust, is created. Such trust has the potential to be a positive or negative in creating acuity in the receiver. For example, Schapper's (2009) title, *Investing in a Girl's Education*

is Like Watering a Neighbor's Tree invites the reader to consider in what ways watering the tree of a neighbor might be like the education of a girl, but not a boy. The reader has to create his or her own sense, imagining first what the attitude might be of someone watering a plant that belongs to another: generosity, foolishness, a community gesture toward the future? Then there is consideration of the tree belonging to someone. Does this mean that the girl belongs to someone in the way that a tree might? We have only touched the surface of the rich meanings, the sense making, the challenge to one's values created by this one image. The reader cannot receive it passively. He or she must actively draw on personal experience to make judgments in response and thereby be drawn into a relationship with the writer to learn more.

Engagement with metaphors has the potential to sharpen analytical acuity, to create new ideas, and to demand an active process of meaning making to understand what people do or how they relate to each other. However, metaphors do not always work in this way. Some metaphors have become so embedded in our language and thinking that they do not trigger the effect just described. Instead, they have become "dead" or "frozen" (Goodwin, 1996; Tsoukas, 1991). Cornelissen (2002) defines dead metaphors as

> those concepts which have become so familiar and so habitual in our theoretical vocabulary that not only have we ceased to be aware of their metaphorical precepts, but also have we stopped to ascribe such qualities, instead we take them as "literal terms." (p. 261)

When educators speak of "delivering" programs, or of "strategy," they are not generally aware that they are using metaphors. For example, in a speech by the former UK prime minister, Tony Blair (2005), outlining reforms that "will create and sustain irreversible change for the better in schools" he uses such metaphors as

> Over the last 50 years, state education has improved. And that improvement has *accelerated* in the last eight years.
> But successive reforms since the war have not always *delivered* all that they aimed to *deliver.*
> What is different this time is that we have learned what works. We have the experience of successful schools.
> What we must see now is a system of independent state schools, underpinned by fair admissions and fair funding, where parents are equipped and enabled to *drive* improvement, *driven* by the aspirations of parents. (our italics)

The metaphors indicated here by italics are likely to be taken as literal by most; that is, listeners to the speech will not consciously engage with

assessing the degree of similarity and dissimilarity and its significance. However, the message of central government and parents acting rather as machines, accelerating speed, delivering what is intended, driving, is evident once pointed out. It is schools and teachers who are to be driven and accelerated. The machine metaphor establishes education as a thing, not as people. While the metaphors may be dead in the sense of not registering as metaphors, they are very much alive in reflecting a worldview of education, a cultural and historical position. Dead metaphors have the capacity to shape thinking and values as much as those that are live. Such are Van den Bulte's (1994) "insidious tendencies" (p. 419).

WHY A BOOK ABOUT METAPHORS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS?

Current educational leaders are beleaguered and overlooked; they do not have a voice in national policy debates and are very closely supervised as well. As a guide to leaders working in this context, the market offers many books with technicist and over-simplistic critiques and platitudes for improving education leadership. Such texts offer different frames for analysis, but on the human level may fail to inspire. The analyses and the implications for action that follow minimize the human variable. Rational dissection of leadership practice may fail to engage, reinvigorate, inform, or improve real practice. Leadership is about performance, and that is about inspiring and motivating people. That requirement contains more than working from checklists and management plans. It requires an interactive and dynamic presence, an ability to turn a key phrase in order to prod or inspire people to think beyond themselves.

We suggest that leaders can, by being more aware of the metaphors they and others use, add incisiveness to their capabilities and enhance their effectiveness. We note here that in the early career of the great French journalist Émile Zola, he made a deliberate choice of the bank of metaphors he would employ in his life. "I would bid farewell to the lovely lies of mythology; I would respectfully bury the last naiad and sylph; I would spurn myths and make truth my one-and-only" (Brown, 1995, p. 109), writes Zola. Instead, Zola turned to the sciences, and especially natural and medical sciences, for his metaphors.

Recent leadership theories, for example transactional leadership, distributed leadership, strategic leadership, and entrepreneurial leadership, do not tap into the long history of human engagement with leadership, which generally has been metaphorical rather than theoretical. For millennia, people have been profoundly interested in leadership, but the way they have tried to understand it is cognitively more sophisticated than through the right-brain-dominant, rational language modeling that has come to characterize our notions of leadership for, as Gandhi once observed,

"if you want something really important to be done, you must not merely satisfy the reason, you must move the heart also" (Iyer, 1973, p. 287). This book sets out to provide stimuli in a standards-free zone and to encourage leaders to adopt a plurality of human responses, using both mind and heart in a comprehensive way. The book draws on a range of disciplines such as philosophy, anthropology, humanities, and literature to explore what metaphors related to leadership might mean.

We envisage a journey that draws the reader through historical and cognitive possibilities that are intended to inspire, resolve, confuse, and provoke reflection on leadership in education and what acting as a leader might entail. The volume will use metaphor as an heuristic, expanding on how the instability of metaphors found in policy documents, in literature, and in academic disciplines can be used as a tool for human development, locating leadership within a mythological universe, and not just a political and social one. We apply the framework of ideas specifically to leaders of schools, colleges, and universities, considering the relevance and utility of particular categories of metaphor to the purpose and practice of education leaders. The volume also dissects metaphors, both alive and dead, in the debate and discourse around education leadership in policy texts and current academic literature, proposing that while metaphors may have a positive purpose to stimulate reflection and inspire, they may also be used negatively to obscure, misdirect, and evade.

STRUCTURE

The book is structured into three sections. This introductory chapter establishes the rationale for the book and the framework for understanding what metaphors are, how they are used and their function in human thinking.

The second section of the book looks in more detail at how specific metaphors have been used and what they seem to be suggesting about how leadership works. Chapter 2 considers education leadership as a machine. The leader's role as inspector and quality controller is frequently described in mechanistic metaphors that stress adherence to procedures that are standardized and detached from human judgment. There is also a pedagogical machine, which supports not humanistic values and learning but instead the assessment of children's ability to perform as proscribed. This chapter considers why machines have become such a potent metaphor in relation to twenty-first-century leadership. Chapter 3 considers the role of leaders as accountants. The simple definition of giving an account does not begin to capture the baggage that has accumulated in our schools as a result of accountability measures. The chapter explores the reductive impact of a relentless pursuit of efficiency and waste alongside the compulsion to measure everything.

Chapter 4 examines the varied cultural understandings of the image of leader as warrior. Western concepts of warrior vary from Chaucerian rules of knighthood to twentieth-century codes of conduct or 'standards.' Late twentieth-century attitudes toward codes are reflected in education in the enshrinement of competitive behavior—a very different concept than some eastern understandings of warrior, such as the spirituality of the samurai. The influence on practice of war metaphors and the implications for how we consider the role of school leader are the substance of this chapter. Chapter 5 unravels the powerful influence of sports metaphors. While leadership in sports has much resonance with educational leadership, it also imports unrealistic notions of heroic leadership and a history of sexism. The chapter considers how far our policy and practice in education are driven by a kind of simplified and simplistic sports mentality which expects and extols the achievement of the sole leader or coach.

Chapter 6 considers education leadership as theater. Theater has long been a potent metaphor in relation to undertaking the role of leader, relating to varying audiences, and adopting or adapting a range of scripts. The chapter adopts two perspectives. First is the school as a stage, where there is an ever closer and more demanding audience influencing what can or cannot be enacted. Second is the school as staged, where administrators manipulate the actors, props, and scripts to ensure that the individual and corporate performance draws applause from a variety of audiences. Chapter 7 considers metaphors related to religion. The explicit moral, ethical, and spiritual role of leaders in education has been stressed for millennia. Many find in their faith inspiration and guidance that can be directly applied to practice in educational administration. However, the chapter also explores the prophetic nature of education standards and the priest-like use of ritual to embed ideas and actions that restrict rather than empower children. Quasi-religious rites are harnessed to shape leadership; for example, Calvinist notions of the chosen few and the wider Protestant notion that perfection is possible become expectations of educational leaders.

Finally, in this section, Chapter 8 considers the leader as lunatic. An exponential growth in bureaucracy has led to pathological behaviors evidenced in research throughout the world. The leader conceived as a lunatic obsessed with ordering, and with an obsessive–compulsive zest for perfection, may hide a lack of order and profound insecurity with burgeoning change. The chapter considers, among a range of disordered behaviors, sociopathic attitudes to faculty and to children, the fetishistic engagement with statistics, and other seemingly pathological behaviors. In the second section, each chapter ends with three subsections in which we consider what the metaphor that has just been explored tells us about the context, about leadership practice, and about leadership development needs, drawing out lessons for developing our leaders and schools.

The final section of the book looks at how metaphors and metaphorical thinking are embedded in recent policy and guidance documents in the US and the UK, and the implications for practice, for children, and for communities. The focus is on deconstructing manipulation and misdirection and exploring the range of devices by which people, leaders, and communities are persuaded consciously and unconsciously to pursue ends that may be contrary to their interests and values. The grand discourses in metaphors of leadership, those of perfection and equality, are exposed. The chapter considers how such metaphors may support aspiration and inspiration, but may also lead to a deluded belief in goals that are unattainable, thereby distracting from the reality of the current situation. They may be displacement activity, encouraging the appearance of striving for the positive when the action undertaken offers a means of hiding, and of maintaining, the status quo. Metaphors can act as a means to encourage articulation of goals and actions to achieve them, and as a means of supporting flight as people, organizations, and governments evade issues and difficulties. The chapter challenges the reader to imagine which metaphors might capture what we need in educational leaders for the twenty-first century, considering the criteria for the selection of metaphors with a full sense of human agency, rather than those which evade or function in a partially human way. The images of steward and of teacher are suggested as embodying care not only for the present, but for the future of all our children.

TOWARD A NEW KIND OF WISDOM

We have argued that the language of education is replete with metaphors (Marcellino, 2007) and that language both describes and creates reality (Giddens, 1976; Tsoukas, 1991). Our intention is to expose to leaders and to those who support them how "words beautifully woven may be a deceptive lure, a travesty of truth, an enticement to false judgment and immoral action" (Moss, 1993, p. 51). We also want to support them to see more clearly how metaphors have positively shaped and inspired policy and action and could further do so in the twenty-first century. Miller (2004) posits; "the dharma talks of the Zen masters' use of analogy or metaphor to clarify—little parables where every small object becomes a means to enlightenment . . . All these things become portals for a new kind of wisdom to arise." Our hope is that the exploration of this book offers a chance for a new kind of wisdom distinct from the standards-driven and seemingly rational discourses that currently fuel leaders' journeys.

In our preface, we explained that the starting point of the book was a deep sense of malaise and our belief that language is both a cause and an effect of our etiolating school systems in the US and the UK. Specifically, we think metaphors are at the heart of shaping our thinking and the

actions that follow. We opened the book with a quotation from Hamlet where, in answer to Polonius' question asking what he is reading, Hamlet answers, "Words, words, words" (Shakespeare, 1951, 2.2.192). Polonius follows up with a query: "What is the matter?" meaning what is the substance (Shakespeare, 1951, 2.2.193). Hamlet imputes a second meaning: What is the trouble? This book is about the matter of education in both senses; we focus on its substance as refracted through language, and we explore the trouble it is in. We hope we have made a contribution to diagnosing not only the issues, but something of how we might begin to address them, rejecting superficial means such as a facile compliance with sets of standards. Rather, we suggest the more profound strategy of utilizing the intelligence and humanity of school leaders through reworking their language.