Chapter Seven

Metaphor as a Tool for Understanding (and Questioning?) Preservice Music Teachers’ Beliefs

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In her keynote address at the 2013 Symposium on Music Teacher Education, Karen Hammerness urged music teacher educators to consider the ways in which teachers’ visions—their “images of their ideal classroom practices”1—can help us understand their aims in the classroom. By articulating their vision for teaching, teachers allow underlying beliefs to surface, which, in turn, can serve as a means for examining and even challenging those beliefs.2 Beliefs are powerful influences on our thoughts and actions, and, for this reason, the study of teacher beliefs has been an important area in the field of education.3 Beliefs about teaching, learning, and subject matter function for teachers in a variety of ways, including three characterized by Fives and Buehl: (1) as filters through which they process new information and experiences, (2) as frames for facing new situations and problems, and (3) as guides for their intentions and actions.4

Upon entering teacher education programs, preservice music teachers bring with them a set of existing beliefs formed throughout their many hours of K–12 schooling, what Lortie refers to as their “apprenticeship of observation.”5 These belief systems can temper experiences in teacher education coursework, and unfortunately, they can “wash out” the influence of even a good preparation program.6 It is critical that music teacher educators provide preservice music teachers with opportunities to examine and reflect on their beliefs about teaching, learning, and subject matter. However, examining and discussing beliefs can be challenging because many beliefs are held tacitly or subconsciously and thus can be difficult to articulate. Furthermore, whereas researchers have confirmed beliefs of in-service teachers by observing the
ways in which these beliefs manifest in teaching practice, there are few, if any, opportunities to observe the practices of preservice teachers, making their beliefs even more difficult to discern.

One way in which beliefs can be brought into conscious examination is through the use of metaphor, “the essence of [which] is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.” Lakoff and Johnson argue that, beyond its function as a figure of speech, “metaphor is not just a matter of language” because “human thought processes are largely metaphorical.” We make sense of the world and understand ideas or concepts by relating them to understandings of other things. For this reason, “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. . . . The way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.”

Metaphor has been shown to be a useful tool for eliciting teachers’ beliefs about teaching and learning. Researchers have gathered data on preservice and in-service teachers’ metaphors for teaching through interviews and writing as well as through surveys. In music education research, Thompson and Campbell used both drawn images and written descriptions as they investigated the teaching metaphors of preservice music teachers enrolled in an introduction to music education course. Outside of music education, researchers have used metaphor as a tool to examine preservice teachers’ belief changes. However, more research is needed on preservice music teachers’ metaphors for teaching and how these might change over time.

In light of this need, the purpose of the current study was to explore first-year music education students’ developing conceptions of teaching as evidenced by their personal teaching metaphors. Specific questions guiding this study included the following:

1. What do written and drawn metaphors of teaching reveal about incoming first-year music education students’ beliefs about music teaching?
2. To what extent do changes in metaphor within a semester-long course reveal changes in first-year music education students’ beliefs?
3. To what factors or experiences do students attribute their growing self-awareness and questioning of beliefs that led to the change in or affirmation of their metaphors?

CONTEXT AND METHOD

The participants in this study were thirty undergraduate students attending a large university in the Midwestern United States and enrolled in the freshman-level Introduction to Music Education course, for which I was the instructor. The majority of the participants were majoring in music education;
however, a few were music performance majors interested in exploring music education or students enrolled in non-music-related majors, such as child development. All of the students who were music majors were either first-year or transfer students just beginning in the music education program at this university.

The initial data collection occurred on the first day of class in late August. We ended this first class meeting by discussing the idea of metaphor. I then asked the students to reflect silently on several questions, which included the following:

- What is the purpose of a music teacher?
- What does a music teacher do?
- How does the music teacher interact with students?
- What does the music teacher accomplish?

Following this reflection, I prompted the students to construct a metaphor for a music teacher. Drawing from a technique used by Thompson and Campbell, I asked each student to draw an image of him- or herself as a teacher, label the picture "A teacher is like . . . " or "Teacher as . . .," and write a short paragraph describing what the picture was intended to show. (Although the prompt was phrased as a simile rather than a metaphor, I chose to maintain this wording in order to remain consistent with Thompson and Campbell.) I then collected the metaphors and did not discuss them with the students until the end of the semester.

After this initial data collection, we proceeded normally with the Introduction to Music Education course, which met twice weekly for fifty minutes and was focused on critical inquiry. Rather than emphasizing the content knowledge or skill development involved in becoming a music teacher, such as writing lesson plans or learning to lead warm-ups, this course was focused on ideas, experiences, reflection, and questioning, which occurred primarily through readings and discussion. For most class meetings, students read an assigned article or book excerpt and then engaged in whole-group, small-group, or one-on-one discussions about a variety of topics. Among these topics were student creativity, student voice and ownership, alternatives to traditional music programs, and reaching diverse learners, including consideration of factors such as race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, SES (socioeconomic status), and disability. In discussing these topics, the students and I shared our prior experiences, reacted and reflected with one another through questioning (e.g., What are the implications of this?), and played devil’s advocate, all strategies that were drawn from Brookfield and Preskill.

In addition to critical discussion, there were several other components of the course that prompted students’ exploration and reflection on ideas and
questions from the field of music education. Guest speakers, including several music education faculty members, graduate students with prior K–12 teaching experience, and one in-service music educator, appeared in several sessions. Another component of the course was the exploration of a variety of music teaching possibilities, which was accomplished through both class discussion of these options and multiple opportunities to observe in a variety of public school music classrooms. Every student completed three observations, each in a different setting (instrumental, choral, and general music) and at a different level (elementary, middle, and high school). Finally, the students began developing their personal philosophies for music education by way of class discussion as well as a final critical reflection paper, in which they explored their own beliefs about music teaching and learning.

The final data collection for the current study occurred in late November, three months after the initial data collection. During one of our last class meetings, I reminded the students of the initial metaphor task they had completed on the first day of the semester, including the questions on which they had reflected. I returned to each student his or her original metaphor and asked him or her to respond in writing to the following questions:

- Has your metaphor for a music teacher changed from the one you created in August?
- If so, how has it changed? What factors or experiences have contributed to the change in your thinking?
- If not, what factors or experiences have reinforced or solidified your music teaching metaphor?

I collected both the initial metaphor documents and the subsequent written reflections, along with permission forms allowing me to use students' documents as research data, in a sealed envelope that I did not open until after submitting final grades for the course.

Data Analysis

In the first stage of data analysis, I focused solely on the initial metaphor documents. Rather than approaching the analysis with predetermined codes or categories, I chose to analyze the initial metaphors inductively by reading and studying them all multiple times to see what salient ideas emerged. At this initial stage, my attention was drawn to the contrast between the metaphors that were more teacher centered and those that were more student centered. Based on this observation, I drew from Patchen and Crawford and classified each metaphor as primarily teacher oriented or primarily student oriented. Metaphors classified as primarily teacher oriented were those that "focus[ed] on the ways in which educational processes affect and are affected
by the teacher” and in which students had “little, if any, role in contributing to the outcome,” appearing “as passive recipients of the teacher’s work” or not at all. Metaphors classified as primarily student oriented were those that “explicitly describ[ed] roles, processes, and goals in relation to students” and even showed “teachers and students [working] together toward particular objectives.” Secondly, the nature of the various ways in which the students characterized the role of the teacher caught my attention. Thus, I chose a second level of coding the metaphors according to the characterization of the teacher’s role, using categories loosely based on those used by Saban, Koebeke, and Saban and Thompson and Campbell. Among the teacher-oriented metaphors, three role characterizations emerged: (1) teacher as knowledge provider/transmitter, (2) teacher as craftsperson, and (3) teacher as authority figure. Two role characterizations emerged from the student-oriented metaphors: (1) teacher as facilitator and (2) teacher as nurturer.

The second stage of data analysis focused on the subsequent written reflections. Similarly to the first stage of analysis, I began by classifying each reflection as being primarily teacher or student oriented. (For some students, reading their written reflections also caused me to revise my categorization of their initial metaphors due to the additional insight their reflections provided.) I then compared each reflection to the corresponding initial metaphor, noting whether each student’s metaphor and implied beliefs had strengthened, changed, or remained static throughout the course of the semester. I also noted whether the student’s reflection was more teacher oriented or more student-oriented in comparison to his or her initial metaphor. Finally, I coded the factors to which the students attributed the change in, or affirmation of, their personal metaphors and grouped these factors into related categories.

To enhance the credibility of these findings, I solicited assistance from an external auditor who had experience in music education and qualitative research. This peer reviewer examined data excerpts along with my corresponding codes, categories, and interpretations and provided feedback on the extent to which he agreed (or disagreed) with my findings. As a result of this discussion, I recategorized several metaphors and consulted with the auditor a second time.

FINDINGS

Initial Metaphors

Of the thirty initial metaphor documents, seventeen used metaphors that were primarily teacher oriented, while twelve used metaphors that were primarily student oriented. One student provided a literal description of an aspect of a
teacher's job. Because this was not a metaphor, I eliminated the description from analysis.

Metaphors in which teachers were characterized as knowledge providers or transmitters depicted the role of the teacher as one who passes on knowledge to students. In these metaphors, the teacher was considered an "expert" who knew what students should learn and controlled when and how they were instructed. One such metaphor described the music teacher as "a gift bearer of musical knowledge. . . . We are like angels bearing great gifts." This student's drawing depicted the teacher as being high above the students, who are acted upon by the teacher (see figure 7.1). Another example of a teacher-as-knowledge-provider metaphor was that of an orientation video (see figure 7.2). This drawing portrayed no interaction between teacher and student. Instead, the teacher presented a set of predetermined knowledge, seemingly with no consideration of the students' needs or interests.

Metaphors in which the teacher was characterized as a craftsman involved the teacher using his or her expert skills to create a final product. This final product was most often a musical performance, as in one example in which the teacher was classified as a weaver (see figure 7.3). This student compared a teacher to a weaver because "they bring everybody together in a beautiful blend of 'colors.'" These teacher-as-craftsperson metaphors often depicted students as a "raw material" to be directed or manipulated by the teacher in order to achieve a high-quality product. For example, the student who described a teacher as a weaver stated, "The yarns could be children,"

Figure 7.1. Teacher as Gift Bearer
and "the teacher would weave them all together to create beautiful tapestry or a pleasant sound and unified group."

Metaphors in which teachers were depicted as authority figures characterized the teacher as one who has control over students and their learning. For example, one student described a teacher as being like Moses (see figure 7.4) because "Moses led his followers to the Promised Land, and they all looked to him as their leader." This drawing showed the teacher as large and foregrounded, while the students were small and faceless as they followed behind.

Metaphors in which teachers were characterized as facilitators portrayed the teacher as one who provides students with tools or opportunities for learning. Rather than dictating exactly how and what the students should learn, the teacher helps students reach their own destination or create their own final product. One such metaphor depicted the teacher as an artist’s supply box. This student explained, "[Teachers] give you all the tools to paint your world, but they don’t paint it for you. They teach you how to think rather than what to think."
Finally, metaphors in which teachers were depicted as nurturers focused on student growth and development. For example, one student compared a teacher to a cocoon “that helps the caterpillar become a beautiful butterfly” (see figure 7.5). This student described her own experiences as a student, stating, “My music teachers boosted my self-esteem by encouraging and motivating me and making me feel special and of value. They helped me feel beautiful in spirit.” This drawing put the student (the butterfly) in the foreground with the teacher (cocoon) smaller and in the background.

End-of-Semester Reflections

The students’ written reflections on their metaphors at the end of the semester revealed a wide range of stability or change. In their written reflections on their metaphors, three students maintained views that were entirely teacher oriented at the end of the semester, while other students’ metaphors showed at least some change toward student-oriented views.
Figure 7.4. Teacher as Moses

There were some students whose initial metaphors were primarily student-oriented to begin with, but their reflections at the end of the semester revealed additional insight into their beliefs. One such student’s initial metaphor compared the teacher to the lines on a road because the teacher “allows students to go as far as they want in their musical journey” and “guide their students to accomplishing whatever goals they choose to accomplish” (see figure 7.6). At the end of the semester, this student reflected:

I still agree that a music teacher is like lines on a road, taking students wherever they want to go. With many of our discussions we have talked about how teaching is not actually about the teacher but what the students need. We have talked about how teachers aren’t there just for themselves but to help students grow and expand their knowledge of music. Throughout this class I have learned many different ways to further students’ education and lead them to have the most success they can have. While these methods might mean breaking from [the] traditional music classroom, it is what is best for the students and the future world of music.

Another student created an initial metaphor comparing a teacher to a gardener “because with the rain and sun the flowers will grow, but with the extra care of a gardener they will grow stronger, just like kids grow up every day no matter what, but with music they will have richer, stronger lives.” At the end of the semester, this student reflected:
I think my metaphor is true in some ways because I still believe part of any teacher's job and especially a music teacher's is to better, enrich, and help the student's life. But it is a little different because students don't have to accept your help and input, and we don't reach all students. Talking about the small populace we do reach as music teachers was something I didn't think about and can be hard to accept. It's like now the gardener is only watering some flowers, which would less benefit the whole garden (to keep with the metaphor). Plus, some don't necessarily take music to heart and do anything with it to impact their lives. Our talks have made me wonder how to fix that. . . .

Figure 7.5. Teacher as Cocoon

In addition to revealing more insight, some written reflections revealed strengthening of belief. Some students initially had created student-oriented metaphors, but their written reflections showed evidence that they had grown even more student-oriented throughout the semester. For example, one student's initial metaphor depicted the teacher as a global positioning system (GPS) for navigation, which I initially classified as primarily student oriented because the purpose of a GPS is to reach a destination of one's choosing. However, this student's written reflection at the end of the semester revealed a different interpretation:
After being exposed to so many varying methods of teaching, I have found that a teacher is more of a suggestion maker or question asker rather than a "dictator-like" GPS. Students are just as responsible for forming their musical knowledge as the teacher is. Rather than simply providing directions for students to follow, a teacher needs to captivate all students and motivate them to craft their own music.

![Figure 7.6. Teacher as Navigation Tool](image)

The most notable instances of growing self-awareness and questioning of beliefs occurred for several students whose written reflections suggested they had shifted from being primarily teacher oriented to more student oriented. For example, the student who originally depicted the teacher as Moses wrote at the end of the semester,

> While Moses leads all of his followers to one location, just like a music teacher does, Moses leads everyone in the same way. While listening to the professionals speak to us, I realized music teachers lead their students to one location, but must lead each of their followers in a different way. Everyone reacts to the teacher and the subject matter in many different ways, and the leader must adapt to work with everyone.

Another student who originally depicted the teacher as a door later reflected, “The thought of a teacher as a door is almost as if there’s a barrier that can only be passed through the teachers themselves. Through personal experience and discussion in this class, I know that music doesn’t have to be formally taught.” Another student compared the teacher to a painter, with each class being a “blank canvas” and the students as “colors,” and “it is up to the teacher to apply these colors to create something beautiful for the student to see.” However, at the end of the semester this student wrote,

> I feel that maybe students are not so much of a blank canvas as I thought. Students come with prior life experiences and we have to incorporate these into the classroom. It can still be a beautiful picture, but maybe more of a collage than a painting. From visiting classrooms and reading about students with unique qualities, I can see that no one is really a blank canvas.
The most dramatic change during the course of the semester was revealed in Matthew’s reflections. Matthew came from a large, intense, performance-focused high school band program in Texas, and in August he expressed that he actually had no desire to teach K–12 students, but, instead, he planned to become a college tuba professor. Matthew’s initial metaphor depicted the teacher as a bumblebee (see figure 7.7) and he stated, “A music teacher pollinates us with music. They create musical life within us.” At the end of the semester, Matthew reflected, “I think that my metaphor has changed. Before with my metaphor of the teacher being a bumblebee and the students being a flower, that metaphor depicts the teacher forcing knowledge of music in a kid’s brain.” Matthew then stated, “I now believe that [a music teacher] is like this” and drew a new image (see figure 7.8). Matthew’s new metaphor shows the teacher as a salesperson who sets up a “shop” offering all kinds of music and knowledge from which students (shown in a variety of shapes and sizes) can choose. Perhaps most striking is Matthew’s reflection on why/how his beliefs about music teaching have changed: “My opinion has changed because I did not know any other type of learning music [than] getting it shoved down my throat.”

Through their written reflections, students attributed change in, or affirmation of, their metaphors to a variety of factors. Several students cited guest speakers as catalysts for reflection. For example, one student mentioned that his metaphor had changed in part as a result of a particular guest speaker who made him consider the need for “asking ourselves what our students need,” while another student stated that her metaphor was reinforced by “the idea of creativity and ownership which has been reaffirmed time and time again by speakers.” Classroom observations were another factor that many students identified as influential to their thinking about music teaching. An example was a student who explained that her metaphor had changed “after being exposed to so many varying methods of teaching.” In addition to providing the students with opportunities to consider new possibilities for their future music teaching careers, these observations also pushed the students to reflect on and broaden their views about music teaching and learning.

In addition to guest speakers and classroom observations, class discussion was cited as an influence on metaphor changes. For example, one student reflected that his metaphor was solidified “when the class [discussed] how music means something different to each of us or that people define music differently.” Another student stated, “The discussions in class have only emphasized my belief,” while others gave specific examples of how class discussions had changed their thinking, such as one student who wrote, “Discussions from this class made me realize that I care far more about the state of individuals’ hearts and souls than their exact knowledge or execution of musical concepts.” For many students, simply having a chance to reflect
Figure 7.7. Teacher as Bumblebee

...and even question—their experiences, and to hear the views of others, caused them to be more conscious of their own beliefs.

DISCUSSION

Through creating written and drawn metaphors for music teaching, the preservice teachers who participated in this study revealed underlying beliefs about music teaching and learning, including beliefs about the role of the teacher, how the teacher interacts with students, and the teacher’s larger purpose. These metaphors also served as a tool for the students’ subsequent reflection on their beliefs as well as on the experiences that had contributed to metaphor change or affirmation throughout the course of a semester while enrolled in an introduction to music education course. While the metaphors
Figure 7.8. Teacher as Salesperson

served as an effective means for revealing beliefs and reflecting on them at the end of the course, these metaphors also could have been used to explicitly guide reflection and identity development in an ongoing way throughout the course. Just as Karen Hammerness suggests that teachers should be encouraged to "elaborate and interrogate their visions" as a way of possibly leading them "to identify conflicts and contradictions, vaguenesses, and even blind spots in their visions," preservice music teachers might be encouraged to reflect on their personal metaphors for teaching as well as on the metaphors of others, examining what they imply about music teaching and learning.  

We also might ask our students to compare metaphors with similar topics but different dynamics, such as comparing the "teacher-as-painter" and "teacher-as-artist’s-box" metaphors created by students in the current study. What are the differences implied? How might those teachers’ music classrooms differ? How might the experiences of their students differ? Other metaphors could
also be explored, such as a metaphor for the music classroom or for the music learner.

While the findings of this study suggest that many participants’ metaphors for teaching changed as a result of their developing self-awareness throughout the semester, it cannot be concluded with any certainty whether these changes in teaching metaphor reflect broader and longer-lasting change in belief that might manifest in music teaching practice. Therefore, in addition to using metaphors as a tool for revealing and reflecting on preservice teachers’ underlying beliefs, future research might examine whether and how changes in metaphors during teacher preparation become reflected in the novice music teacher’s practice, during either student teaching or early career teaching.

Furthermore, we might also examine the extent to which being presented with new metaphors for teaching might lead to a change in beliefs. According to Lakoff and Johnson, “new metaphors have the power to create a new reality.” Similarly, Tobin claims that adopting a new teaching metaphor can act as a “master switch” for beliefs, observing that, for teachers in his study, “reconceptualizing [their] role in terms of a new metaphor appeared to switch an entirely different set of beliefs into operation.” Tobin also suggests that what teachers do in the classroom may be directly connected to their teaching metaphors. For example, how might the beliefs of a teacher who conceptualizes his or her role as a knowledge transmitter play out in the classroom? How might the actions of someone who conceptualizes teaching in this way differ from those of someone who conceptualizes teaching as facilitating? More research exploring the extent to which teachers’ metaphors for teaching relate to their actual teaching practice is needed, specifically in the field of music education.

Finally, the results of the current study support and justify the inclusion of a critically reflective and discussion-based introductory music education course for all music education students early in their programs, ideally in their very first semester of coursework, in order to encourage them to begin thinking like teachers and reflecting on their own experiences as soon as possible. Zeichner and Tabachnick suggest that, by immediately beginning with teaching students techniques for how to teach, teacher educators may actually reinforce traditional teaching and learning practices. “By focusing on how things were to be done without asking students to consider what was to be done and why, the university initiated discussions that tended to encourage acquiescence and conformity to existing school routines.” In advocating the study of teachers’ visions, Hammerness states that “uncovering [pre-service] teachers’ lay knowledge and beliefs can have a profound impact on how and what [they] learn (as well as unlearn) in their professional development programs” and that “teacher development programs must elicit teachers’ lay knowledge to confront contradictions, challenge assumptions, and
deepen knowledge, in turn laying the groundwork for more complex personal and theory-based professional knowledge." If we as music teacher educators begin by providing our students an opportunity to reexamine their prior experiences and to reflect on what we do in music education (both currently and what we might do in the future) and why we do it before focusing on the how in methods classes, we can start our students on the journey to becoming more reflective practitioners through ongoing contemplation and development of their beliefs about music teaching and learning.

NOTES

2. Ibid.
4. Fives and Beuel, "Spring Cleaning."
8. Ibid., 6.
9. Ibid., 3.


16. Patchen and Crawford, “From Gardeners to Tour Guides.”

17. Ibid., 290.

18. Ibid., 291.


24. Ibid., 9.