This is the author’s final peer reviewed version of the item published as:

Perry, Chris and Cooper, Maxine 2001-02, Metaphors are good mirrors: reflecting on change for teacher educators, Reflective practice, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 41-52.

Copyright: 2001, Taylor & Francis Ltd
**Title:**
METAPHORS ARE GOOD MIRRORS: REFLECTING ON CHANGE FOR TEACHER EDUCATORS.

**Authors:**
Chris Perry
Deakin University, Australia

Maxine Cooper
The University of Melbourne, Australia

**Abstract:**
In this paper we discuss the use of metaphor as an educative tool for reflection. In the instance of this paper we use metaphor to reflect on the personal images of change that were used by some women teacher educators to make sense of their professional lives and practices over the last decade. This last decade in teacher education has seen significant institutional and cultural change.

The paper discusses the strengths and limitations of the use of metaphor. The different interpretations of these metaphors illustrates how these women have used metaphor for explaining facets of change in their professional lives. The challenge of professional renewal is apparent in the metaphors in the ways that complexity, change, journeys, and movement are indicated.
Reflection on change in professional practice needs to be continuous. Use of metaphor in the way described in this paper encourages that ongoing process.

**Introduction:**

……. In particular, I urge [teacher educators] to explore how their passions and the personal images underpinning them might infuse and sustain their work. By identifying and sharing such images, we might well create a synergy that will assist us in collectively reclaiming and renewing our professional lives.

(Sumsion, 1999)

In this paper we share the metaphors, the personal images, that are used by some women teacher educators to make sense of the challenges posed by the often turbulent changes that have occurred in their professional lives over the last decade. We explore the usefulness of metaphor as a medium of reflection that is as Bateson (1990, p.34) notes "fundamental to the human search for meaning", most particularly for women teacher educators whose lives are often unrecorded, invisible and interrupted (Nias and Aspinwall, 1995).

Karen is a teacher educator who has worked in teacher education for nearly 20 years. She began her career as a research associate in a university. Karen was appointed to a lecturing position at a college of higher education and currently lectures in a university focussing particularly on teacher professional development. In attempting to describe her professional life over the last decade she alludes to a changing, unstable state. Karen says,

……. it seems that it is like trying to capture and represent in a static moment that which is located in time and space, like a sand dune, affected by the winds and waves, held together by plants and their root systems and in a delicate balance between erosion and continuing growth depending on the prevailing influences. This can extend further to see the root systems as a way of holding together a position: a network of beliefs, values and attitudes about myself and others. When you start to pull out some of the plants then the dune can become unstable, the trick is to selectively and progressively pull them out and replace them with more useful and well grounded plants.
Karen reflects specifically on the way institutional change has had significant influence on her perception of her position in the tertiary sector. Her metaphor also alludes to the need for both herself and the institution to be aware of the 'comings and goings' of people in the constantly changing environment within which institutions are situated.

Institutional Change:

For Faculties of Education in Australia, the late 1990s have seen tensions in universities regarding economic change and funding along with significant changes in structure and status. Tension too has arisen due to the attempt to blend the different academic cultures of universities and the former colleges of advanced education. Research by Mahony (1995) indicates that the restructuring of Australian higher education has been "carried out at personal and professional cost to many of the staff involved" (p.103). This continues to date to present a turbulent environment for the teaching profession within higher education. There has been a significant decrease in staffing numbers. In addition, academics in higher education continue to work within an environment of increased expectations (Dinham, 1997). Expectations include a press for research and research funding and for articles to be published in internationally refereed journals, along with an increase in teaching loads, larger classes, and an increase in administrative duties and community involvement. As Sumsion (1999) writes, these are changing times of dwindling resources and escalating pressures to publish or perish. Such changes are linked to an emphasis on accountability, rationality and management (Maguire and Weiner, 1996).

These diverse issues raise some strategic questions about the professional working lives of women teacher educators in facing and responding to challenges of professional and institutional change. We suggest that the use of metaphor as a tool for reflection provides a useful mirror for understanding and thus responding to those challenges.

What is metaphor?:
Dinckmeyer (1989, p.151) suggests that metaphor can be defined as the characterisation of a phenomenon in familiar terms. Metaphor, that is, giving a thing a name that belongs to something else, helps us make sense of our world and of the circumstances we are involved in. Metaphors can be used as powerful educative tools.

Myra, like Karen, has been a teacher educator for many years. In talking about her life in teacher education, Myra reflects that for her being a teacher educator is like -

being a traveler overloaded with luggage. You are on a train station hoping to catch the train and the burden of your luggage is difficult. The baggage is of all shapes and sizes and is extremely difficult to manage. Pieces keep falling all over the place, nothing sits easily. Some pieces are round, some square, some big some small, all different weights, sizes and shapes.

When discussing this metaphor, Myra notes that for her these items of luggage were symbolic of the curriculum, in particular the content in various subject areas that constantly compete for time and money, space and importance in the curriculum. By using this metaphor Myra describes the phenomena of a diverse and overcrowded curriculum in more familiar terms.

Berliner [1990, p.86] states that "metaphors are powerful forces, conditioning the way we come to think of ourselves and others. ...... They affect our thoughts in subtle but powerful ways." Much of what we say and how we form our thoughts about concepts is often dependent on the use of metaphors. Metaphors help structure our thinking and our understanding of events.

Classical rhetoricians such as Aristotle suggested that metaphor could invoke memory and invite discourse. For Augustine for example, memory was the present of things past (Pope and Keen, 1981). "Nietzsche once observed that all language, and therefore all truth and error, is metaphoric in origin. Virtually every word we utter ultimately derives from some image, thereby betraying its metaphoric genesis" (Nietzsche cited in Van Manen, 1990, p.49).

Virginia Woolf once described how words not only find their semantic limit in metaphor; but that the metaphor allows the poet to transcend that limit. “By the bold and running use of metaphor, the poet will amplify and give us not the thing itself, but the
reverberation and reflection which, taken into his mind, the thing has made; close enough to the original to illustrate it, remote enough to heighten, enlarge, and make splendid" (Woolf cited in Van Manen 1990 p.49).

These ideas have encouraged us in our exploration of the definition and usefulness of metaphors.

**Metaphors and the construction of reality:**
Postman and Weingartner (1971) argue for the relative nature of knowledge. They assert that emphasis is on the active construction of experience rather than knowledge being a static, analytic conception. Schutz (1967) suggests that action is mediated by a complex process of interpretation related to the experiences of the individual. For Kelly (1966) the construction of reality is an active, creative, rational, emotional and pragmatic affair. Kelly (1966, p.29) notes that a person evolves a set of constructions, that the person then "tests out and may ultimately discard in favour of a new set of constructions if the former fails to adequately anticipate events."

It may be then that if a person can construct their understandings through use of a metaphor, they may be able to "reconceptualise their practice, reflect on its value and renegotiate their role" (Stofflett, 1996, p.577).

**Reflecting on the use of metaphors:**
In his engaging book, "The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat", Oliver Sacks tells a story about one of his clients, Rebecca, who used the following metaphor to make sense of her life -

> I'm like a sort of living carpet. I need a pattern, a design, like you have on that carpet. I come apart, I unravel unless there's a design. I must have meaning.  

[Sacks, 1985, p.175]

From this, we suggest that metaphors can -

- provide a context from which we can make sense of the world. The 'seeing as...' nature of metaphor often allows us to think more easily about a particular concept.
Seeing Rebecca's life as a carpet allows us to appreciate the complexity of her view of her world.

- bring about a richer understanding of a concept by its ability to remark on features of similarity that were previously unrecognised. Metaphors allow us to re-organise our understanding of a particular concept because properties of that concept have taken on, through the metaphor, features that had previously not been noticeable or obvious.

Using the metaphor of carpet to explain a perception of life may encourage us for example to consider what are the interlocking 'warps' and 'wefts' in our life.

- identify something that has previously been un-named and as such provide us with a way of learning something new about the way in which we perceive or understand our environment (Perry, 1995).

If our life can be seen as like a woven carpet, how do the different patterns come about?

**Using metaphor as an educative tool:**

The use of metaphor as an investigative tool in the field of education is well documented. Munby and Russell (1989) suggest that it may be productive for all teachers to become students of metaphor. They assert that attending to the way a person describes the world gives clues as to how that person constructs, that is, makes sense of the world. Calderhead and Robson (1991) suggest that metaphor allows situations and events to be described at a high level of abstraction. Steen (1994) notes that metaphor is a deeply embedded part of the way we communicate. It is "part and parcel of our view of cognition" (p.5).

There are of course limitations to the use of metaphor as an educative or explanatory tool. Sharing metaphors relies on those involved having a common understanding of "the cultural fabric from which it originates" (Corradi, 1990, p.161) so that they can interpret the metaphor in the same way.

Additionally, particular metaphors influence the connections we make but also the connections we don't make, thus metaphors may "arrest the thinking and keep it locked into one train of thought" (Carter, 1990. p.113). As well some metaphors offer aspects of
limited significance and can only convey a part of the complexity of any given situation or experience.

The challenges of change:
In a recent book analysing the dynamics of change forces, and arguing for pursuing moral purpose in complex times, Fullan states, "at the very time we need more of a moral commitment to the public good, the forces of change are creating confusion, frustration and discouragement" (Fullan, 1999, p. 1). Fullan goes on to discuss concerns of the dynamics of diversity, equity and power; and the concept and reality of complexity itself as two reasons why achieving our professional purpose is complex.

In trying to reflect on the change forces in the personal and professional lives of women teacher educators the authors of this paper were recently involved in a research project where, in part, data was gathered by having conversations with a group of women teacher educators. These women who had been teacher educators for many years were now working in universities that had, like all universities over the last decade, experienced changes in direction along with changes in form and function. (These changes had often affected the Faculties of Education in universities most dramatically, in that unlike other university faculties, Faculties of Education have had to accommodate staff from former teachers' colleges.)

These women had previously been in Colleges of Advanced Education. Colleges of Advanced Education, now amalgamated with universities, had operated in the Australian tertiary sector as teacher training institutions.
The women, during the interview, were able to reflect on the challenges posed by change in teacher education over the last decade from the more collegial teachers’ college-based courses to those now based in universities.
Their comments reflected the fact that “(t)his change has been within a political context of movement from a social justice orientation to one that is essentially managerial and economically driven” (Cooper et al, 1999, p.143).
In the earlier study (noted above) the group of women teacher educators in their interviews reflected on how they had worked through and with these changes. As they reflected it became obvious that it was metaphor that was most clearly used to make sense of the challenges that changes in their professional lives had created. We have used the metaphors evoked in this earlier study and as well invited other women teacher educators to share with us their metaphors for their professional lives over the last decade during this period of complexity and change. The women who shared their metaphors for change have worked in teacher education for over 20 years. They are all experienced professionals who hold middle and senior positions in their institutions. This group does not include younger women working teacher education. We reflect on these metaphors in order to enable us to make sense and meaning out of our lives, our daily lived experiences, our sense of self and identity in an era of constant turmoil and change. This reflective use of metaphor focuses our endeavors to work in often challenging but at times constraining environments. In these environments the contexts of women’s lives at both personal and professional levels are often diminished, rather than enhanced. The constant impact of broad economic and political changes often ignore the significance of balancing ones professional and personal lives as daughters and sisters, wives and mothers, partners and parents.

Expression through metaphor - Facets of Change:
As with all the women reported in this paper, Ruth has worked in teacher education for many years. She began at a College of Advanced Education (teacher training institutions in Australia) that has now been incorporated within an existing university. She perceives that over the life of these several amalgamations she felt she was caught within the maelstrom of a rapidly tumbling kaleidoscopic picture - new roles, new courses, new administrative structures, a publish or perish expectation, constrained budgets, new colleagues, new challenges, further study, committees, committees and more committees.

A metaphor that I have used before to try and capture the nature of change in a given context is that of a kaleidoscope. The kaleidoscope provides me
with a way of attempting to describe the turmoil that characterises the context in which I have worked for the past 15 years.

As one looks into a kaleidoscope one observes an image formed by a myriad of interconnected pieces. This image is set in time and in a space. One touch and the pieces tumble and realign to create yet another image. The image created within the kaleidoscope is volatile - whilst the elements that create the image remain stable, outside influences cause shifts and the elements realign. Within this kaleidoscope I continue to carry out my work as best I can. Whilst I may grumble about the movement surrounding me I endeavor to keep reminding myself that first and foremost I am a teacher. There are still classes, students and courses to be delivered. For me this helps me to maintain equilibrium whilst all is swirling about me.

We can see here something of Ruth’s attempts to take control of the various facets, patterns and elements of her life. We see the sense of meaning she gets from her main focus, by reminding herself that she is foremost a teacher. We see through the metaphor the fragmentation and re-alignment of practice as institutions attempt to form a cohesive organisation.

Caroline, in reflecting on her career in the last decade, focuses on the accumulation of her knowledge and expertise. Caroline says,

My career is like a snowball that is rolling over different kinds of terrain in different places. It began quite small and became ever larger and larger. As it rolled over hills and bumps it picked up bits and pieces until it took on its current size and appearance.

At the centre of my career are teaching and learning, the things I did when I began as a tutor and which I still do. The parts that have been added are responsibilities such as doing research, course co-ordination, and membership of sundry committees and groups. As the environment where I work has changed so have the courses and the people with whom I interact within the university and within the community. All of these influences have helped to shape me and the knowledge and values I hold today as an educator.

For Caroline, the metaphor suggests a strong sense of moving and as she does so, she maintains many of her core responsibilities while developing and gathering others. This
metaphor acknowledges change through its notion of “different kinds of terrain in different places”.

As Kelly (1970) asserts, a person's construction of reality is pragmatic and rational as well as active and emotional. Ruth and Caroline's metaphors reflect this as does the metaphor expressed by Francis. Francis has worked in teacher education for 27 years. As with most of the other women, she began her work in a teachers' college. She is now in a multi-campus university in a region characterised by high levels of unemployment, considerable ethnic diversity and low levels of education and income. This university has a strong commitment to access and equity and is a vibrant place where people matter most. For Francis, the metaphor for her career over the last decade is a Magical Mystery Tour, which gives a sense of control and purpose.

I describe my career in this way because it seems to have taken a series of turns along the way; many of which have taken me into previously uncharted waters but all of which have added to the absolute delight I take in my work.

I’ve thought about the seeming accidental nature of all this and acknowledge things haven’t happened by pure chance. I guess I did pack the bags and make the bookings in some way through acquiring the relevant qualifications along the way. The passport and visas I could characterise as personal qualities of being open to having a go, following through and being successful along the way. I don’t think I’m much good with maps but I’m awfully good at knowing which bus is heading where, how to get on and if need be I can drive too.

The tour started when I fell into teachers’ college as the alternative to the nursing I had grown up seeing as my career (I’d read the Sue Barton and Cherry Ames books) ……… (it is now) ….. a long way from the mainly lecture loaded point at which I started; head a diverse department with on and off shore programs, a regional Koori initiated program, undergraduate programs in education, early childhood, physical education, outdoor education, youth work, computer mediated art and postgraduate programs in education and training, TESOL and tertiary education, lots of PhD students, manage a large budget, established Institute for Youth, Education and Training etc and that’s only a bit of it…. So many wonderful snapshots along the way and who knows what’s next?

Expression through metaphor - the changing journey:
As Kelly (1970) argues even though a person's psychological processes are similar to another's, people may differ from each other in their construction of events. For Francis the metaphor of the magical mystery tour reveals a sense of moving joyously through the changing environment. The metaphors expressed by Caroline and Margaret (below) reveal this sense of travelling more overtly and focus on the level of control each has at particular times through this period.

Caroline worked as a primary teacher before taking up a position in a primary teachers' college. That institution has been amalgamated with various other institutions and finally with a large established university. This university has a long tradition as an 'elite' university with strong links with powerful institutions in the State. For Caroline the metaphor is of herself as a rollerblader.

Being a rollerblader has something of the feel of being a woman in teacher education in the past decade. There is a sense of balancing on the edge of chaos, leaning too far to one side can make for disaster, living and moving on the edge, moving too fast, at times having control, moving well, feeling in control, lifting your head and being able to appreciate the scenery, the passing traffic, the clear blue sky, feeling the gentle breezes on your skin, the sense of power, balance, control and wonder at the speed, delight and delicacy of the passing world. At other times there is a sense of foreboding, a sense of being out of balance, of going over a stone in the pathway, a wet leaf on the footpath or a crack in the pavement made by a tree root, the wobble begins, the sense of balance fails, the sense of panic, what can I do to save the situation, which way should I fall, who or what can I grab to break the fall. Sometimes a tree near the edge of the path may save a full fall, a nearby arm of the rollerblader with a stronger glide and more experienced skills. If the collapse is unavoidable, can the fall be done with dignity and to avoid breaking a bone or striating the skin. Being a woman and being of a certain age seems to mean that people don’t expect to see you gliding along on roller blades, and certainly the idea of a fall and injury seems difficult for observers.

Time, energy and enthusiasm wax and wane, light, sunlight and moonlight on the edge of the seas when you are gliding on rollerblades from day into evening, lights and shadows cross and flicker on the path. Moments of wonder and magic, instances of fear and despair, can I move faster, slower, with more grace or if I lift my head up to revel in the motion and the moment will I falter. Can’t stop, won’t stop, going faster helps to
balance as long as the surface is smooth. Hoping the cracks and crevices will be easily discerned, and visible at some distance.

For Caroline the focus is on her understandings that there is a sense of being in and out of balance, in and out of being in control, in and out of having the courage to take risks and to challenge people's preconceptions of gender and age. She notes that often she is in a situation where at times one feel marginalised, being invisible, not being seen or noticed in daily activities until you wobble, falter or fall. Caroline suggests that for her this metaphor reflects trying to balance personal responsibilities such as family life and parenting with professional responsibilities such as those of teaching and research and maintaining professional associations and collegial networks.

There is a suggestion here of learning in and on the job as Fullan notes, "learning occurs on the edge of chaos, where a delicate balance must be maintained between too much and too little structure", and that "anxiety containing strategies are essential under such circumstances" (Fullan, 1999, p.ix).

The 'moving through change' concept is again reflected in the metaphor used by Margaret. Like Caroline, Margaret began as a primary teacher. Her institution too has gone through multiple amalgamations and was finally incorporated into a then relatively new but existing university. This university is multi-campus with a focus on productive partnership particularly through the use of technology.

Margaret says, I’ve been like a swimmer – sometimes the water is deep and cold and I have to struggle to make it through but sometimes the water is smooth and the going is easy. At times I am confident, I know the strokes and I can perform well but at other times I need the ‘floaties’ to support me, I need someone or something to hold me up. Sometimes the waves are high but it is a real challenge that I feel I can take but at other times it is so difficult, there is no challenge. I can sometime rest in the warm shallow water – it’s a rest, I don’t have to try hard. Not very often, but sometimes, it’s a race between myself and others to see who gets there first. More often it’s a group of us swimming together – sort of a support group. Sometimes there’s a shark nipping at your heels (its often something not as clear as a shark) but you’ve got to get it finished or else – getting the doctorate
finished was a bit like that. I learned to swim early, for some strokes. I was a primary teacher for many years – that helped. Early in my career as a teacher educator I had a great coach and swimming club (a very supportive head of department and group of colleagues). That was a wonderful start for me."

For Margaret there is a sense of being in and out of control, of being at times at the will of the environment but at others being able to manipulate the environment in which she works.

**Women's perspective on change:**

For the people who shared their metaphors here, there are some obvious points that emerge about being an experienced, “long serving” woman in teacher education. The metaphors note the importance of maintaining balance in your life, the precarious balance of personal and family relationships. For some there is a sense of both pain and pleasure in the vast and unsettling changes that the participants are experiencing. Noted too is the sense of moving fast on the edge of chaos but staying upright and not sinking or falling. The challenge of professional renewal is apparent in the metaphors in the ways that change, journeys and movement are indicated.

**Taking a wider perspective:**

It must be noted however that the metaphors offered by these women also inherit some of the limitations discussed earlier. For example, there is little indication of the importance of professional associations and networks of support that have been seen as significant in academic women's lives (Cooper et al, 1999), nor do the metaphors tell us in much detail, about how these women deal with the complexities of gender and power relations in the institutions where they work. The metaphors do not make it apparent the ways in which these women view and deal with aspects of their professional lives such as heavy work loads and an inequitable division of labour.

We acknowledge that these metaphors could be interpreted in a variety of other ways than have been explored here. As well, the metaphors for making sense and meaning out
of the daily lived experiences of these women may differ for younger women or for those less experienced in teacher education.

However for all these women, the metaphors do reveal much about the way they as individuals cope with the challenges of change. Viewed as a collection, the metaphors also indicate some wider issues related to the complexities effecting the professional lives of teacher educators.

As to one wider issue, another metaphor that has been influential in writings about women in teacher education has been the ‘chilly climate' metaphor. Acker (1998) for example, in discussing a study of education faculty members in Canada raised certain questions about the use of the phrase ‘chilly climate’. She asks that we attempt to comprehend the contradictions between and among women and their various experiences, that we look to the differences among women and to the similarities with some men. Acker's work suggests closer analysis of the institutional environments in which we work to establish in what ways they are hostile or helpful and on what occasions and at what particular times in our lives this may be evident. As Acker (1998, p.5) writes, "we are far from sustaining the kinds of climate in universities that would nourish us all", but in this somewhat chilly climate our journeys go on.

**Metaphors as mirrors:**
Use of metaphor provides a productive way for reflecting on our professional lives and practices in that it allows us to explore these lives and practices from a diversity of perspectives and over time. Thus use of metaphor encourages this process of reflection to be ongoing and purposeful. Further exploration of metaphors could examine issues of power and powerlessness, a sense of control and purpose in our lives encouraging us to reflect and take action on our professional renewal and practice.

Finally, as women we move and sway precariously in a sometimes hostile environment. Putting together some of our experiences through metaphors provides a mirror by which
we can see more clearly something of the different speeds, different directions and different contexts within which we work to bring about the changes in our lives and in our work situations.
REFERENCES:


Notes on Contributors:

Dr Chris Perry is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia. Her teaching covers both undergraduate and post graduate areas. She combines school based consultancies with lecturing in the area of individual's growth and development especially as it relates to the development of thinking and learning. The focus of her research is on cognitive development and effective learning. She publishes in the area of teacher professional development.

Chris Perry
Faculty of Education
Deakin University
Burwood, Victoria, 3125, Australia
(email: perryac@deakin.edu.au)

Dr Maxine Cooper is Assistant Dean (Professional Partnerships) in the Education Faculty at the University of Melbourne, Australia. She has had extensive involvement in teacher education and professional development programs in a variety of educational settings, both in Australia and overseas. She teaches in pre-service and post graduate teacher education programs in the area of change, gender and diversity. Recent research and publications include projects with a focus on gender, diversity and values education, the dynamics of teacher/student relationships in classroom settings and change processes in the teaching profession.

Maxine Cooper
Faculty of Education
University of Melbourne 3010
Australia
(email: m.cooper@edfac.unimelb.edu.au)