Book Review: Metaphors We Teach By: How Metaphors Shape What We Do In Classrooms

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Abstract

As I sit to write this review, I find myself musing over the sub-title to this text, *How Metaphors Shape What we do in Classrooms*. Worthy of a place in educational texts, this context of shaping targets a consideration for everyone working educationally with students. In this context, this book provides readers with much to think about. In my perspective, it is this consideration toward what I will call the heart and dispositional sensibility of education, a Christian sense of place, so to speak, that makes this book valuable.

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The work itself is a collection of nine essays flowing from Christian author perspectives about metaphor. Each of these essays probes the unavoidable essence of metaphor in the realm of education. The first four essays focus on teaching and learning in the classroom. Essays five and six consider the use of metaphor in curricular framework and metaphor as framing the role of assessment. The final three essays focus on the use of metaphor and its implications in the wider culture and life fabric of the learner.

Since I am familiar with the writing of the majority of authors in this volume, the latter chapters personally appealed to me the most. They tie into the larger themes that those of us who are seasoned (note the avoidance of age) find to be essential to faith in learning conversations.

The purpose of the editors of this text is to explore the question: "How do the metaphors that we employ in education either deflect us from our proper work or move us closer to work that is proper, worthwhile and lasting?" In answering this question I would hope to see not only what is currently being done, but what could yet be done. Some essays explore this more deeply than others. I think that depends on how one defines and gives voice to proper work. In commenting on this text, I

shall do so in relation to my strengths, interests and from consideration of my own metaphor for teaching which involves wonder, truth, justice and reconciliation. As someone interested in literacy and worldview, I gravitate to the essays by Elaine Brouwer, Allyson Jule, and Monika Hilder, and what I see proper work to be in their perceptions of metaphor.

In the essay by Elaine Brouwer, *Curriculum as a Journey for Wisdom* (p. 68-88), the search for wisdom is central to proper work. She probes the precedence of intended curriculum over enacted or experienced curriculum, exploring the what, how and why of curriculum design in making wisdom and relationships prominent. In examining five clusters of curricular metaphors, Brouwer explores curriculum as a verb, not a noun, and her metaphors are rich in linking learning and life. Her proper work involves a spoken, relational dialectic within daily life as being essential to the pursuit of wisdom. Her future vision is in helping develop within the student the ability to 'see what they do not see' in their search for wisdom. This stance provides teachers with a rich landscape for further development. I suggest reading this book in conjunction with the text: Lee, H. K. (2010). *Faith-based education that constructs: A creative dialogue between constructivism and faith-based education*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Allyson Jule explores the work of media as something working against wholeness in identity formation for children in her essay, *Princesses and Superheroes: Metaphors That Work Against Wholeness* (p. 109-119). In this essay, the perception of what is desirable in being male or female is explored largely in relation to Disney products. Reminiscent of Postman's conception (1985, 1988, 1993, 1995) that we are becoming a

society that thinks with our eyes, Jule explores the effect of media, costuming and consumerism on the developing gender and identity perceptions of students. Her proper work is that of encouraging teachers to subvert a capitalist agenda of selfhood by providing alternate realities containing Christian virtues of mercy, justice and humility. What is provided provides fertile ground for future work in the classroom for imaginative teachers. This essay deals very well with the ever present issue of consumerism, leaving me eager to contemplate more possibilities for alternative models to combat this rising tide.

Finally, Monica Hilder's essay, *Metaphors for Spirituality in Public Educational Settings* (p. 120-133), explores three interconnected metaphors from Christian writers: irrigating the imagination (C. S. Lewis), following the invisible thread (George MacDonald), and breaching the wall (in reference to the history of the Berlin Wall). Like Brouwer, she is seeking the wisdom to have an instinctive response to good and evil. Like Jule, she is seeking to raise questions surrounding current cultural issues. Her emphasis on knowing how to ask the right questions rather than knowing how to get the right answers is central to what she would see as proper work. Her examples are well developed, and work within the Christian and public spheres.

Brouwer, Jule, and Hilder subvert the basic content, curriculum, worldview stance often framed in Christian discussions regarding metaphors. This stance commonly describes what teachers and learners do rather than extend what teachers and learners are becoming within an extended community as they further engage daily life. The doing/being tension tends to become merged in their proper work and then extends from it as a past, present and future story. Within our own stories we can then explore how metaphors shape us as they reside in the grand conversations and larger stories of our lives.

In reflection, I am sure that both the beginning and experienced teachers who read this book will find it a wonderful aid to understanding, developing and further enriching one's own metaphor for teaching and learning, both inside and outside of a room with desks and chairs in it.

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