

Mountains and Pit Bulls: Students' Metaphors for College Transitional Reading and Writing

Exploring students' conceptualizations of reading and writing can help teachers meet students where they are and guide them to where they need to be.

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"Reading is like a portal to another realm."

"Reading is like going somewhere with no directions."

"Reading is like baking a cake."

"Reading is like getting my teeth pulled."

These are just a few of the ways that students in recent college transitional, or developmental, reading courses have chosen to articulate their conceptualizations of academic reading at the college level. It is not uncommon for students to discuss their views of academic literacies—the college-oriented reading and writing they participate in—through a metaphor construction; indeed, often such metaphors come up in classroom conversations naturally. The question that we aim to address in this article is what educators and researchers in the field can do with the rich conceptual information that is embedded in students' metaphors for academic literacies.

Background on Conceptualizations and Metaphors

Students' beliefs about learning and their conceptualizations about themselves as learners have long been associated with levels of academic success (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Vacca, 2006). Specific to literacy studies, several investigations have provided evidence that students' conceptualizations about themselves as readers can affect overall levels of reading effectiveness (e.g., Conlon, Zimmer-Gembeck, Creed, & Tucker, 2006; Goodman & Marek, 1996) as well as strategy choice and usage (Nist & Simpson, 2000; Schraw & Bruning, 1996). Similarly, research on writing has also made the link between student conceptualizations and writing development (Lavelle & Zuercher, 2001; McCune, 2004; White & Bruning, 2005). These bodies of scholarship have acknowledged the need to look beyond learners' test scores and behaviors to understand the belief systems motivating their literacy practices. Here, we describe these belief systems as learners' conceptualizations about academic literacies.

One area in which this is especially relevant is college transitional, or developmental, reading and writing courses, which aim to support beginning college students as they navigate and negotiate academic literacies. Students enrolled in such academic support courses are often there by virtue of scores on placement tests or conditional admissions programs, and, like others, these students may hold conceptualizations of college reading and writing that could hinder their apprenticeships into academic literacy practices in college. One way to get at learners' conceptualizations is through a process of metaphor analysis (Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), because our conceptualizations, our actions, and consequently, our language are "metaphorically structured" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5), suggesting a link between what is said (or done) and what is thought.

Metaphor analysis is an investigational and analytical approach that examines metaphors articulated by participants, and then categorizes those metaphors in terms of the themes that emerge from the analogical mappings that underlie participants' metaphors. This categorization provides insight into participants' perspectives and understandings of a given topic (see de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002; Kövecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Cameron and Low (1999) explained metaphor analysis as a method that involves "collecting examples of linguistic metaphors used to talk about the topic...generalising from them to the conceptual metaphors they exemplify, and using the result to suggest understandings or thought patterns which construct or constrain people's beliefs or actions" (p. 88). A metaphor analysis approach thus involves close examination of the components of a metaphor in terms of the source and target domains of that metaphor analyzed and categorized in a way that provides insight into participants' belief systems about a given topic.

We have used student-generated metaphors as learning and discussion hubs in a variety of instructional contexts, including first-year college transitional reading and writing courses as well as graduate-level teacher education seminars. Encouraging students and teachers alike to become more metacognitively aware of the metaphors they use to describe reading, writing, and academic literacy contexts has proven a useful

route to helping students navigate their literacy transitions (in the case of our first-year students in transitional reading/writing courses) and their understanding of how to more effectively position and teach academic literacy practices (in the case of our students in graduate education courses). Often, the prompts we use to encourage students to create deliberate metaphors about reading and writing are very simple, for example, completing the sentence stem "Reading is like _____." Despite this simplicity, these prompts elicit a rich variety of student responses, which provide marvelous material for discussion and learning that can promote self-discovery and awareness useful to students well beyond their immediate instructional context.

In light of the usefulness and variety of responses we have found when asking students in our courses to create metaphors that describe their conceptualizations of reading, writing, and different literacy contexts, we were motivated to ask similar questions to a greater number of students. Our focus centered on whether the variety of responses we have seen in our classes would be reflected in larger numbers of students, with an eye toward categorizing that large number of responses in a way that would help us make sense of some of these conceptualizations. In this article, we provide a base of student-generated metaphors about academic literacies that go beyond a single classroom situation to present pedagogical implications for more informed support of transitions into college contexts of reading and writing.

The Study

The theoretical framework through which this project was designed is twofold. First, this study relies on the theoretical foundation of metaphor analysis as described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Kövecses (2002), a cognitive linguistic view of metaphors that disrupts views of metaphors as being simply linguistic phenomena, or poetic turns of phrase. However, because that cognitive linguistic view does not fully represent the social and cultural nature of language practice, a social constructivist framework is also

One way to get at learners' conceptualizations is through a process of metaphor analysis.

adopted to more adequately understand and explain the language practices represented by the metaphors articulated by the participants in this study. In short, the methodology allows an analysis of participants' metaphors to inform their implicit and explicit conceptualizations of literacy practices, and these conceptualizations are formed through a variety of social networks, are culturally bound, and are responsive to specific situational contexts.

Methods

The goal of this study was to uncover students' conceptualizations of academic literacies. We purposefully used minimal, streamlined data-gathering materials that would be suitable for use by an instructor in a classroom setting: straightforward to implement yet still providing copious amounts of information.

Metaphors were collected through the use of an open-ended survey that explained the study, described the type of responses being sought—including examples of metaphors unrelated to reading, writing, and learning—and elicited analogical metaphors in the form of similes using a “complete the stem” statement. The elicitations were as follows:

- College writing is like _____. How or why? _____
- College reading is like _____. How or why? _____
- The writing and reading class I am enrolled in at the [Center] is like _____. How or why? _____

Participants' responses thus included two aspects for each statement: the stem-prompt completion (i.e., the metaphor) and their explanation (i.e., the “How or why?” part). These prompts were chosen for their open-ended nature and their appropriateness for use in a classroom context as well, as will be discussed in subsequent sections of this article.

In this study, the metaphor was the elicited stem-completion task, with the targets of the metaphorical construction being college writing, college reading, and the reading and writing course in which participants were enrolled. The source is thus the analogical metaphor that participants chose to use to illustrate their conceptualizations of writing, reading, and their course. Our examination of these survey data builds on the approach to metaphor analysis initiated by

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and developed by Kövecses (2002). In this analysis, the metaphorical language that participants used was categorized in terms of the conceptualizations that those metaphors entailed to provide insight into participants' belief systems and understandings of a given topic (see de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002, for an example of this process).

Participants

The participants in this project were 128 students enrolled in 15 sections of a mandatory paired reading and writing course (see Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986, for a description of this type of class) in an open-access unit called the Center (pseudonym), housed in a large Midwestern university. Like the learning assistance programs or developmental education units of many community colleges, the Center provides transitional courses in reading, writing, mathematics, and communication, as well as general first-year experience courses for beginning college students. The purpose of the Center is to scaffold students' academic transitions with the goal of preparing them for eventual matriculation into one of the university's four-year colleges.

University institutional data for the students enrolled in this course at the time of the study are useful in further describing the population of interest. Fifty-six percent of the students were female, 44% were male, and using official university ethnicity categories, 2% of the students identified themselves as Hispanic, 4% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 36% as white/non-Hispanic, 52% as black/non-Hispanic, and 6% as other/unknown. The average age of students enrolled in this course was 19, and the average high school GPA was 2.5. In terms of college entrance exams, the average composite ACT score was 16, and the average SAT score was 762. Students enrolled in this course had an average score of 44 on the Degrees of Reading Power reading placement test, and on the in-house holistic writing placement test, the average score was 2.06 out of 5. Although these data provide a snapshot of the general demographic information on the participants in our study, and although the range of population characteristics described here will seem familiar to most instructors of these courses, we want to emphasize that there is no “typical” student enrolled in transitional reading and writing classes (Boylan, 1999).

Data Analysis and Findings

In all, participants provided a total of 218 metaphorical linguistic expressions (MLEs), which ranged from mundane comparisons with close connections between the target and the source (e.g., “*College reading is like high school reading*”) to much more emotion-laden, evocative comparisons in which a greater distance between the target and source existed (e.g., “*College reading is like having a hammer hit me in the head over and over*”; students’ MLEs are represented by *italics*, with any student explanations or other discourse nonitalicized). Within each area of academic literacy that we asked participants about—reading, writing, and the context of their reading/writing course—there were wide ranges of MLEs provided, as well as several MLEs common to more than one student.

Three key categorizations relevant to learner conceptualizations emerged through our analyses of these data: a dichotomy of academic literacy as a metaphorical product versus a process, another dichotomous categorization of negative and nonnegative metaphors, and a semantic categorization based on thematic patterns we identified in the collected metaphors. Analyses and findings of the three categorizations follow.

Product/Process Categorization. Following an inductive process of open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967),

we began analyzing participants’ MLEs for evidence of conceptualizations of academic literacies as inhabiting either of the two parts of a traditional dichotomy in the field: literacy as a product, or literacy as a process. This aspect of the analysis includes a process similar to that of Schraw and Bruning’s (1996) approach of sorting responses to one of two broad perspectives on literacy. Where Schraw and Bruning chose transmission and transaction as their endpoints, we used product and process, because those concepts emerged from the initial open coding of these data. In this categorization, we examined each MLE individually to determine whether the actual metaphor, minus any explanation, indicated a more product-oriented conceptualization or a process-oriented one. Any language in the metaphor suggesting an analogy to an action or activity was categorized as “process,” whereas any language in the metaphor suggesting an analogy to an object, event, person, or experience was categorized as “product.” A few sample categorizations are shown in Table 1.

Far more MLEs were categorized as product ($n = 160$) than process ($n = 57$), a ratio of 2.8:1. In all three conceptual targets focused on in this study—college reading, college writing, and the college reading/writing class—there were significantly more product MLEs than process ones, indicating that some students may hold a deeply engrained conceptualization

Table 1 Examples of Student Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions Categorized as Product and Process Metaphors

Product	Process
<i>College reading is like a cramp.</i> It’s annoying and I don’t like it.	<i>College reading is like putting together a puzzle.</i> Each piece you put together, each story you read ties together in some way. Each piece fits.
<i>College writing is like a video game.</i> Because it will keep getting harder.	<i>The writing and reading class I am enrolled in is like washing a car.</i> You have to do it regardless if you want to.
<i>The writing and reading class I am enrolled in is like a tutor.</i> It’s helping me for my higher English classes.	<i>College writing is like throwing a dart into the bulls eye,</i> because it’s a hit or miss thing with me.
<i>The writing and reading class I am enrolled in is like a mountain.</i> It’s going to be hard to make it to the top.	<i>The writing and reading class I am enrolled in is like training for a job.</i> It gets you ready for all the important writing and reading assignments in higher classes.
<i>College writing is like a job.</i> You have to do what is told and when it is due.	<i>The writing and reading class I am enrolled in is like being a paleontologist.</i> You always find something new and learn more.

Note. Students’ metaphorical linguistic expressions are represented by italics, with any student explanations or other discourse nonitalicized.

of academic literacies as a passive transmission of an object as opposed to a more active, social construction of meaning. Viewing participants' metaphors from this perspective provided insight into students' conceptualizations, and we relate this dichotomy to the work of Schraw and Bruning (1996) and their emphasis on epistemology of text. What we are examining, however, is epistemology of academic literacies.

When students come to college and continue their academic literacy transitions, a conceptualization that literacy is a product that can be passively transmitted can be detrimental to their ongoing apprenticeships into academic literacy practices and, by extension, their academic success. This, of course, is a common concern in the literature related to college reading: "Most college freshmen believe learning is simple, can be accomplished quickly, and that knowledge and learning occur when someone else 'does something to you'" (Simpson & Nist, 2003, p. 172). In other words, many of the participants in this study seem to understand academic literacies in terms of a transmission model in which they are recipients of information rather than active constructors of knowledge.

Negative/Nonnegative Categorization. Another dichotomous categorization that arose through open coding of the metaphors was that of an overall negative view of college academic literacy contexts or a neutral/positive view. That is, we were interested in whether students' conceptualizations revealed a general negative response to their current college literacy context. This is not a classic metaphor analysis aspect, but it is important here because of anecdotal claims about students, especially those enrolled in transitional coursework, generally not valuing or overtly disliking the idea of being in a college transitional reading/writing class. Of course, multiple possibilities exist for why students might hold negative viewpoints: Most transitional courses do not count toward graduation, they delay the start of college-level coursework, they act as gatekeepers, and a host of other issues.

In this analysis, we examined each MLE individually to determine whether there were overtly negative implications in the language. Rather than present this as an overly simplistic negative/positive dichotomy, we opted to consider all MLEs that were

not overtly negative to be nonnegative. The following are some examples of MLEs categorized as negative:

- *Reading is a punishment* because it kills me.
- *Hell*. Too much reading not enough time.
- *Washing a car*. You have to do it regardless if you want to.
- *A pit bull*. It works when you work with it, but if you turn your back it might bite you.

Some MLEs categorized as nonnegative ranged from overtly positive (e.g., "*the icing on the cake*. Because it's the one fun thing I do for down time and I'm learning at the same time") to neutral (e.g., "*a movie*. You can picture parts in your head").

There were a total of 152 nonnegative MLEs and 61 negative ones, a ratio of 2.49:1. Based on a popular assumption about how students feel about taking transitional reading and writing courses, this ratio surprised us, as we had anticipated that more MLEs would be overtly negative in nature. Interestingly, the MLEs categorized as negative seemed to mostly focus on level of difficulty, amount of time needed, amount of work or effort required, and interest level. Several nonnegatives included potentially negative aspects, especially those involving a negative-to-positive progression (e.g., it starts out difficult but gets easier with time).

Semantic Categorization. After the product/process and negative/nonnegative categorizations were complete, we returned to the participants' original data—the MLEs they produced—and began an additional type of analysis process: categorizing MLEs by semantic or thematic similarities. For example, the MLE "*College reading is a highway*" would be grouped with MLEs such as "*College reading is a bus trip*," and "*College reading is walking from the east coast to the west coast*." With these semantic groupings in place, following basic metaphor analysis procedures (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), we were then able to identify a conceptual metaphor (CM) underlying the students' MLEs. Thus, for the three MLEs above, the CM would be "COLLEGE READING IS A JOURNEY" (in metaphor analysis literature, CMs are traditionally depicted in all capital letters). Some CM categories were comprised of only a few MLEs.

Table 2 Examples of Student Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions Categorized as Conceptual Metaphors

Metaphorical linguistic expression	Conceptual metaphor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>College reading is like a highway.</i> • <i>College reading is like a bus trip.</i> • <i>College reading is like walking from the east coast to the west coast.</i> 	COLLEGE READING IS A JOURNEY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>College reading is like catching a pass from [NFL quarterback] Brett Favre.</i> • <i>College reading is like swimming.</i> • <i>College reading is like riding a bike.</i> 	COLLEGE READING IS A SPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>College writing is like a video game.</i> • <i>College writing is like a maze.</i> • <i>College writing is like a game.</i> 	COLLEGE WRITING IS A GAMING ACTIVITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>College writing is like an open door.</i> • <i>College writing is like free speech.</i> • <i>College writing is like expression of mind.</i> 	COLLEGE WRITING IS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The reading/writing course is like preschool.</i> • <i>The reading/writing course is like elementary.</i> • <i>The reading/writing course is like high school.</i> 	THE READING/WRITING COURSE IS ANOTHER EDUCATIONAL LEVEL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The reading/writing course is like family.</i> • <i>The reading/writing course is like a family.</i> • <i>The reading/writing course is like a sibling.</i> 	THE READING/WRITING COURSE IS A RELATIONSHIP

Note. Students' metaphorical linguistic expressions are represented by italics, and conceptual metaphors are represented by all capital letters.

However, other CMs were constituted by a dozen or more MLEs, including “*College reading is a visual medium*,” in which the MLEs revolved around movies and television shows. Table 2 illustrates the categorization of some of the MLEs into CMs.

In the next section, we provide a discussion of the results, conclusions, and implications of this study. Following the discussion, an extended pedagogical implications section provides actual classroom examples intended to clarify the utility of a metaphor analysis approach for literacy instructors.

Discussion

Taken both separately and together, the results of these three categorization approaches represent a wide variety of learner conceptualizations. This key theme of

variety may not be surprising, as most educators will likely recognize that college students in transitional, or developmental, course contexts do not represent a homogenous group, and the students in this study likewise represented a range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. Importantly, even though scholarly conversations regarding such diversity are common, and research in the field of developmental education has provided evidence that refutes the notion of a single “type” of student in developmental courses (e.g., Boylan, 1999; Boylan, Bonham, & White, 1999; Higbee, 2009), the reality is that assumptions of student uniformity are widespread (see, e.g., Mutnick, 1996), and not just among practitioners and administrative and political stakeholders, but among students as well.

Conceptualizations are formed through a variety of social networks, are culturally bound, and are responsive to specific situational contexts.

One of the many problems with such assumptions is the potential for students' diverse understandings to be overlooked or disregarded. Further, when such important conceptual mismatches—like students' versus educators' epistemological understandings—exist, they must be taken into account when developing curricula. Just as the students do not represent a particular type of student, accordingly, these students' conceptualizations are anything but

homogenous, making informed student-centered instruction all the more important.

Conceptualization Diversity

Transitions to postsecondary educational contexts are complex and can be even more complicated depending on the conceptualizations of academic literacies that students bring with them to college. However, students are not coming to college as blank slates. Copious evidence has demonstrated that students' conceptualizations about academic literacies vary widely; therefore, instructors need to consider this wide range of beliefs when planning lessons, activities, and approaches. Just as reading is not a monolithic concept, neither is there a single conceptualization of reading among a given group of students.

Within the diverse range of conceptualizations about college-level academic literacies held by the students in this project and in our classes, some of these students appeared to conceptualize literacy learning through a transmission model epistemology, and these conceptualizations of academic literacies and their expectations of literacy instruction have the potential to hinder students' apprenticeships into academic literacy practices (e.g., Hardin, 2001). For example, Armstrong (2007) found that this type of self-perceived lack of control and agency, manifested in learners' metaphorical language, had a significant impact on writing development. Similarly, Simpson and Nist's (2002) research found that successful students believed they were in control of their own learning, but less successful students believed the professor was responsible for their learning.

Conceptualization Mismatches

That students may indeed hold conceptualizations of literacy learning that run counter to instructor expectations is important for instructors to be aware of and address in a systematic way in class. As noted at the outset of this article, we view these metaphorical data through a sociocultural lens, and as such we emphasize an important aspect of understanding student struggles at this level in terms of the difference in primary discourses (e.g., home-language systems) and secondary discourses (e.g., school-based language systems; see Gee, 2001). Taken together, these issues constitute a mismatch of student and institution expectations, discourse, and goals. A similar concept has been discussed previously by several researchers (e.g., Dressman, Wilder, & Connor, 2005; Lundell & Collins, 2001; Paulson & Armstrong, 2010; Rogers, 2004) as being central to the issue of what is generally thought of as preparedness for college-level academic literacy demands, and it is a discussion we find salient and integral to findings from the current study.

As we pointed out in our description of the theoretical frame within which this study was undertaken, conceptualizations are formed through a variety of social networks, are culturally bound, and are responsive to specific situational contexts. That is, the very context within which this study took place—a required transitional reading/writing class—is also part of the students' social framework and can play a role in forming the conceptualizations articulated by the students in these classes. Importantly, within the larger social framework of their lives, students also have degrees of agency, in which they are not only shaped by their sociocultural context but also play a role in shaping that context.

In this study, we posed relatively straightforward sentence stems to students, and one reason for using those minimal prompts was to demonstrate the ease with which instructors can use similar prompts to gather this same type of information to generate class discussions revolving around beliefs about academic literacy practices. As our product/process analysis revealed, we received rich and varied data in return, which allowed us a glimpse of the diversity and range of conceptualizations represented in this population. Our goals here include emphasizing the potential for student

empowerment while at the same time encouraging appropriation of useful literacy tools, and we consider raising awareness of these conceptualizations as progress toward those goals. For that reason, in the following section, we describe some possible pedagogical outcomes of focusing on metaphors in the classroom.

Pedagogical Implications: Metaphor Analysis in the Classroom

Classroom conversations need to directly address conceptualizations of academic literacies. This is especially important in the context of college transitional reading and writing courses because the recognition and awareness of students' conceptual starting points can serve as a way to facilitate students' understandings of and transitions into differing literacy expectations of academia. Such conversations should include local (e.g., course-specific) as well as global definitions of academic literacies. Because discursive understandings about academic literacies are not discrete skills or bits of knowledge, having such conversations with students can be invaluable in transitional college reading and writing classrooms. What follows is a description of the use of student metaphors in the context of one of Sonya's (second author) transitional reading courses. The intention is to exemplify the use of metaphors as described previously to discover information related to students' conceptualizations of academic literacies.

In Sonya's college transitional reading courses, students' metaphors for reading are solicited on the first day of class. Initially, this is couched in a larger information-gathering activity: Each student is given a note card and asked to provide basic information, such as intended program or major, adviser's name, e-mail address, favorite reading material, and metaphor for reading (structured as a simile stem prompt: "Reading is like ____"). These note cards are then collected, and the metaphors provided are read aloud to the entire group without identifying the authors.

As the survey data reported in this article have demonstrated, there is usually a wide range of responses, which prompts much discussion in the class about how and why such varying views of reading exist, even within the same classroom. As the metaphors are read,

students are encouraged to consider the implied "because clause" that would follow the stem-prompt completion. For example, for a response like "*Reading is like riding in a hot air balloon*," the entire class is prompted to reflect on why this comparison is being made (i.e., how is reading like a balloon ride?) and whether that metaphor works based on their own views of reading; this is similar to the "How or why?" question students responded to in the prompt used in the study. Sometimes the metaphor's author will self-identify while attempting to explain the comparison, especially when other students do not provide a satisfactory explanation of the metaphor; however, students are never asked to identify their own metaphors publicly.

Inevitably, at some point in this discussion, at least one student raises the issue of different reading purposes or text types with an "it depends" statement. Often, this will lead back to a connection with students' favorite reading materials, and other students begin to acknowledge that their view of reading depends on what is being read and why. This first conversation serves multiple purposes, as it is an ice-breaker to get students talking about reading, and a springboard into other literacy-related conversations to come throughout the semester. It is a lengthy conversation, usually taking at least the entire first class, and often part of the second as well.

Following this initial class discussion, students' metaphors can be analyzed using, for example, the product/process categorization described earlier; such an analysis can provide much insight into students' perspectives on academic literacies. In a recent reading and study strategies class, for instance, the following are examples of product-based metaphors provided by students:

- "*Reading is like John Madden*—confusing and doesn't make sense."
- "*Reading is like water*. Even if you don't like it, it's essential."
- "*Reading is like a boring movie*."

All of these metaphors have in common an implied transmission-based model of reading. For example, in each of these metaphors, the reader is situated in a position of receiving something (i.e., Madden's sports commentary, basic life nutrition, poor entertainment)

from an external source that is not necessarily welcomed, but that the reader does not seem to be able to avoid. Just as the examples provided earlier in this article, product-based metaphors tend to fit into this transmission model category and provide much information about students' conceptualizations as reluctant, passive receivers rather than active participants and agents.

In these same classes, the following are examples of metaphors provided and categorized as being more process-based:

- “*Reading is like baking a cake.*”
- “*Reading is like going somewhere with no directions.*”
- “*Reading is like playing soccer, because you play soccer to win and you read books to become successful.*”

These metaphors have in common a positioning of the reader as an active participant and an implied explanation of reading as an action or process—something that one does, rather than something some external force imposes upon the reader. Often, students' process-based metaphors tend to reflect a more mature, or at least a more positive, view of reading; however, that is not true of all process-based metaphors. In fact, in these same classes, another metaphor was provided and categorized as a process-based one: “*Reading is like running even though you don't want to run.*” Clearly, this student is also situating herself in a position of powerlessness that echoes the previous product-based metaphors; however, even though she is not the catalyst for the action, she is still the one actively doing something.

Similarly, not all product-based categorizations necessarily imply a negative view. Take this metaphor, for example: “*Reading is like a doorway.*” This is not as straightforwardly within the transmission model as the other product-based metaphors listed earlier. Indeed, regardless of the grammatical function of the comparison word, the implications are far more action-based if the student views this doorway as one he, as an active reader, will step through while reading (in fact, this was a situation in which the student self-identified in class, and he explained this metaphor in just this way).

What these classroom examples demonstrate is the multidimensional continuum of conceptualizations described previously in this article. This kind of product/process categorization, although not linear or simple,

can lead to discussions that can expose students to varying viewpoints, thereby encouraging aspects of critical thinking. Also, these discussions can promote awareness and self-reflection of students' own positionings and, in an effectively scaffolded environment, can lead to positive conceptual changes that can shape students' approaches to academic literacy practices that are more active, strategic, and generative in nature.

Following this example of an early-semester structured activity, the students' note cards are also kept on hand for critical-moment teaching (Goodman, 2003) throughout the semester, and student metaphors are pulled out whenever relevant to a conversation. About midsemester, for example, after the class has tackled one novel-length text and multiple shorter, more expository academic texts, students are asked to revisit their metaphors for reading with an opportunity to create a new metaphor. An abbreviated version of the initial metaphor discussion ensues.

During the last week of class, this exercise is repeated, although no new metaphors are elicited from the students. Instead, the initial metaphors from the note cards and the midsemester metaphors are read, and students are prompted to think about whether their views of reading have changed. This conversation always includes not only whether views have changed but also, importantly, why and how.

From an instructor's perspective, this information is critical to larger discussions of academic literacy practices going on in the classroom and to the planning of relevant instruction. For example, based on the initial metaphors, instructors can get a sense of students' overall attitudes toward reading (or writing, as this activity is easily adaptable), including whether there is a predominance of emotion-driven views, and if so, whether these are primarily neutral/positive or overtly negative. If educators believe that the foundation of good teaching is meeting students where they are, then it is essential that methods for determining where that is conceptually be incorporated into classrooms when students begin their journey in higher education. Additionally, these metaphors provide a glimpse at students' text experiences, their epistemologies of text (Schraw & Bruning, 1996), and their interests during the initial conversation about reading preferences, purposes, and practices.

Classroom practices like those described here that involve close examinations of students' conceptualizations of academic literacies are useful for instructors and students alike. Similarly, continued research that focuses on students in transitional literacy contexts in higher education is important because these students are already positioned by social, cultural, and institutional forces at the margins of academe. Utilizing a metaphor analysis approach for these kinds of pedagogical and research goals can be an important tool in moving toward a genuine understanding of transitions involving academic modes of literacy.

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