Chapter 40
Metaphors for Wellbeing: Enhancing Students’ Learning and Teaching Perceptions Within a Pre-service Education Course

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Abstract This chapter focuses on metaphors for wellbeing that were developed by a number of pre-service teachers (students) within prescribed education units undertaken during their year-long Graduate Diploma in Education (GDE) Course. In light of readings, discussions and reflective activities, students explored attributes and potential of the metaphor for defining a sense of self and sustaining personal wellbeing during their course. Students used this valuable background knowledge and understanding of “self” to create personal metaphors that represented themselves on a “learning journey” undertaken within their prescribed education units. Students’ metaphors became sources of personal wellbeing and sound bases for enhancing their learning and teaching perspectives within the framework of their course.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to engage students in developing metaphors for wellbeing that represented themselves on a learning journey undertaken during their year-long Graduate Diploma in Education Course. It was anticipated that these metaphors, whilst building on students’ sense of wellbeing, would also provide sound bases for enhancing students’ learning and teaching perceptions within the framework of the pre-service Course.

Methodology

This study was guided by qualitative research techniques. Qualitative research occurs in natural settings or contexts where there are naturally occurring events, programs and interactions. The researcher seeks to be “non-manipulative, unobtrusive, and non-controlling” (Patton, 1990, p. 40) and is open to whatever emerges in the data. “Varieties of viewpoints and multiple realities portrayed by respondents”
(Caulley, 1992, p. 33) contribute to acquisition of a holistic research perspective culminating in detailed, “thick” description of the phenomena under study. The particular branch of qualitative research that was most applicable to this study was considered to be hermeneutic phenomenology.

According to Richard and Morse (2007), “Hermeneutical phenomenology: (Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, van Manen) believe knowledge comes into being through language and understanding. Understanding and interpretation are intertwined, and interpretation is an evolving process. Hermeneutic phenomenologists use culture (symbols, myth, religion, art, and language), poetry, and art in their interpretations” (p. 49). Hence the use of metaphors symbolising students’ wellbeing fostered during their personal learning journeys was considered to be an appropriate application of hermeneutics. As students formulated their metaphors and analysed them they followed closely an interpretation of hermeneutics expressed by Neuman (2003):

It {hermeneutics} emphasizes a detailed reading or examination of text, which could refer to a conversation, written words, or pictures. A researcher conducts “a reading” to discover meaning embedded within text. Each reader brings his or her subjective experience to a text. When studying the text, the researcher/reader tries to absorb or get inside the viewpoint it presents as a whole, and then develop a deep understanding of how its parts relate to the whole (p. 76).

During their Course students entered into their individual metaphors or “texts” and in so doing developed a deeper understanding of how these metaphors related to their lives, personalities and sources of actual and potential wellbeing, thereby providing sound bases for enhancing learning and teaching techniques within the curriculum.

By adopting a qualitative research design advocated by researchers such as Bouma (2004), Burns (2000), Caulley (1992), Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Janesick (1994) and Patton (1990), the researchers were able to engage in a dynamic process of learning. Each researcher or student thus took into account his or her current unique context, did not attempt to manipulate that context, was open to enlightenment as it emerged from the metaphor and was not confined by predetermined outcomes. According to Patton (1990, p. 13), “Qualitative methods permit the evaluator {or researcher} to study selected issues in depth and detail”. Hence “a wealth of detailed information” involving a smaller number of people and cases. . .” (p. 14) can be obtained. Given the potential richness of data that may be gathered from a small number of participants, it was decided to use purposeful sampling techniques for this study.

**Purposeful Sampling**

Patton (1990, p. 169) notes that, “Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (n = 1), selected purposefully”, cases that will yield rich data which “will illuminate the questions under study.” Purposeful sampling allowed for variation in the design of personal metaphors representing