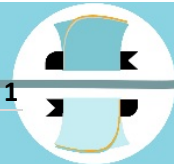


# Using Metaphors

Metaphors as illustration and reflection tool



Metaphors are a precious tool to both illustrate concepts and reflect on personal views in education or coaching. As an illustration tool, metaphors do not only help student teachers to understand certain ideas or models in a more profound way, but also to memorize these concepts and make them more accessible in practice. As a reflection tool metaphors work especially well to stimulate the process of self-reflection and to motivate people to exchange their points of view. Metaphors can be presented in many ways: as a mental image through description, as a picture (photo/drawing) or a whole gallery of different pictures, as an object, as a sound, as an installation, etc. The method works for individuals or groups of people who are in the process of learning or developing something. In the course evaluations of my student teachers at the SSDL, participants often mention the use of metaphors to be especially helpful to them.

Examples:

(1) Metaphors to illustrate concepts: The hiking trip metaphor

The idea for this metaphor is taken from Jim Scrivener, who compares the process of planning a goal-oriented lesson to the process of planning a cross-country hike.<sup>1</sup> As a “guide” you have to set a challenging destination/a goal and you must find an interesting trail that gets you there. Everybody should be able to reach the destination a given time frame. You must know your group so that you can provide additional support if necessary. You can make small detours, but shouldn’t get lost on the way, etc.

To introduce this metaphor, student teachers are given a blank sheet and are asked to make a rough sketch of a landscape where they would like to go hiking with a group. The instructor does the same on the board. Learners are asked to mark the destination of the hike with a little flag and to indicate an interesting trail that leads to the destination. Once the instructor has introduced the comparison, student teachers can come up with more correspondences.

(2) Metaphors to reflect on personal experiences and opinions

During our PROLEA project meeting in Tuebingen in October 2016, we used metaphors to find out how participants felt and what they thought about the current state of the project.

In a first activity at the beginning of the meeting, the group was led to an installation in the staircase of the Teacher Institute and was asked to place themselves on the stairs (see picture).

At the end of the meeting, participants could visit a gallery with pictures of different buildings. The question for reflection was the following: If PROLEA was an architectural construction, what would it be? Standing in the middle of PROLEA, how does it feel? In both activities, people’s choices and comments were highly insightful and fruitful.



<sup>1</sup> Jim Scrivener (2011). Learning Teaching. *The Essential Guide to English Language Learning* (3rd ed.). Macmillan. p. 137.