

# Teaching is Not Always Easy: Mexican Pre-service English Teachers' Beliefs on Teaching and Learning

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One of the main goals of language teacher education programs is to prepare professionals who can respond to the growing demands for quality instruction. However, we often find that in second language acquisition training courses, teaching methodology and giving students experiences during practicum sessions has a limited impact on pre-service teachers' long established beliefs and ultimately on their practice. The purpose of this qualitative interpretative study is to explore the conceptual metaphors used by pre-service teachers when writing their teaching philosophy as a way of unveiling their underlying cognitive mappings. We propose that making future teachers aware of the entrenched metaphors they use to talk about teaching and learning might be a first step in changing their observable behavior. The results of this study show that in spite of exposure to current theories on teaching and learning and practicum courses, pre-service teachers tend to hold on to outdated theories. Nonetheless, their theories seem to be refined, strengthened, and modulated by the practicum experience that fosters the articulation of more detailed goals and the realization of shortcomings in their preparation. This work, in conjunction with strategies such as fostering reflection about pre-service teachers' practices, will help teacher trainers promote the integration of effective and context-appropriate ideas for improving language education.

**Keywords:** conceptual metaphors, teachers' beliefs, teacher education

## Introduction

Large-scale research on education has shown that teacher performance is the first school-related factor accounting for students' achievement (OECD, 2005). If we want to increase the quality of learning in our schools we should be aiming at improving teacher education programs. One of the biggest challenges faced by universities is finding ways to contribute to the development of quality teachers. There are many topics in the field of teacher education that continue to be explored. Some topics identified in the literature of language teacher education programs are a focus on reflective practice (RP) and teacher cognition. According to Farrell (2019b) "reflecting in general is advocated by most teacher educators as being an essential skill that needs to be nurtured in all teachers" (p.2). The author advocates for continuing research that involves reflection that is both productive and social. Therefore, programs and teacher educators should continue to explore the integration of elements that promote reflection.

There are many questions that have been raised which have no definite answer: How do teachers learn how to teach? How is learning to teach different from other learning? What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do we hope teachers will learn? There are some aspects of teaching and learning that are common to all kinds of teachers but also each discipline or area of study relies on different mechanisms or skills. This is the case of Language Teacher Education (LTE) since learning a second language, as some speculate, might not be explained solely by general learning theories (Bley-Vroman, 2009; Lorenzo & Longa, 2003). One important step in the search for a theory of language teaching is to consider teacher cognition:

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Teacher cognition is also a fundamental element in teacher learning; drawing on constructivist theories of learning, it is now accepted in LTE that how and what teachers learn is shaped in no small way by their prior experience, knowledge and beliefs. (Borg, 2011, p. 218)

Teacher preparation programs need to address teachers' cognition as an important aspect for improving their efficacy. Mexican universities offering undergraduate degrees aimed at preparing language teachers are often structured in a linear and top-down progression. Therefore, programs provide some foundation courses in linguistics, applied linguistics, and learning and teaching theories followed by methodology courses, culminating in practicum courses. The underlying assumption is that students have to acquire formal knowledge that they will later be able to apply to their practice. In addition, some unqualified views assume that learning to teach is a matter of trial and error and teachers will eventually learn how to teach once they are on the job. However, research has shown that when students in education programs graduate, they are still unprepared to face the demands of teaching (Akcan, 2016; Ben, Andrés, & Steffen, 2012; Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Some research on teacher preparation (e.g. Korthagen, 2004) concentrates on understanding what good teachers know and do and how they think, with the idea of transferring these findings to teacher education curriculums. However, knowing the characteristics of effective teachers does not necessarily provide an understanding of how they came to have these traits or what contributed to their preparation and, thus, may not aid pre-service teachers.

Programs and teachers faced with the difficult task of understanding how teachers learn to teach need to acknowledge that there are different moments in the process. First of all, students entering a teacher preparation program already have ideas and experiences in the field that they have indirectly and informally acquired during the many years they have been students in a classroom. In most cases, they have at least twelve years observing teachers. This type of learning is called *apprentice of observation* (Borg, 2004; Lortie, 1975). Teacher education, on the other hand, might last for around four years and the effects of this preparation sometimes have a limited impact (Johnson, 1994). During the first year of their professional life, teachers face a double challenge; they have to teach the courses assigned to them and they have to learn how to teach them through a process of survival and discovery (Alhamad, 2018; Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, & McLaughlin, 1989).

Some advanced education systems e.g. Finland Education (Sahlberg, 2010) acknowledge the importance of forming teachers during their first years on the job and provide induction programs for beginner teachers that last up to five years (Kansanen, 2003). After those first years on the job, teachers keep experimenting and consolidating their practice. Learning to teach often continues during their entire professional life although teachers tend to stabilize and reach some mastery after five to seven years of practice (Borko, Livingston, McCaleb, & Mauro, 1988).

Most teachers reach some stabilization and mastery of their job but the reality is that their performance does not always meet the expectations of quality teaching or reflect more recent approaches to teaching and learning (Feinman-Nemser, 2001; Feiman-Nemser & Remillard, 1996). It has often been pointed out that teachers' practice across generations remains unchanged. Although learning to teach is a multifactorial process, it has been recognized that beliefs and concepts of teachers towards the subject they teach and about teaching and learning have an important influence on their practice (Johnson, 2009). Furthermore, research shows that beliefs are not easy to change and that teacher education programs often leave prospective teachers' beliefs unchanged (Altan, 2012).

### **Research on Conceptual Metaphors**

This study is based on the work on conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) developed by Lakoff and Johnson (2008). A metaphor is traditionally conceived as a literary trope based on an implicit comparison of two unlike things. However, Lakoff and Johnson argued that metaphors are pervasive in everyday language as a way not only to improve our understanding but also as a way of structuring our thoughts. Structural metaphors in essence help us to understand one kind of thing in terms of another. They propose that we draw upon experiences in one area of life in order to give fresh insights and understandings to experiences in another, thus creating new conceptual realities. In CMT, a conceptual metaphor is defined as "the systematic structuring or restructuring of one conceptual target domain, a coherent organization of experience, in terms of a source domain through

the projection of semantic features of one domain onto the other” (Ansah 2010, p.6). Usually target domains are more abstract while source domains are more concrete.

Conceptual metaphors in education have aroused the interest of researchers for several decades. One of the earliest and most influential works was that of Oxford et al. (1998). They identified several metaphors from a large and varied database of discourse produced by theorists, methodologists, teachers, and students. Metaphors were grouped into four major views, namely: social order, cultural transmission, learner-centered growth, and social reform. One major point they make is that all those involved in education should constantly reflect on their assumptions and goals and that metaphors are a good means for this reflection. This work in turn has generated similar venues of research. Farrell (2006) analyzed the metaphors used by three pre-service teachers before, during, and after their six-week practicum in Singapore. Only one the participants showed a significant shift in the metaphors he used at the beginning. Nonetheless, Farrell concluded that metaphors helped teachers make explicit their beliefs and by articulating those beliefs and reflecting on them they could track the source and relevance of those beliefs to their present teaching situation. This was consistent with Oxford et.al. (1998) who suggested that merely reflecting on teachers’ views helps them widen their perspective and become aware of conflicts and incoherent ideas.

In education, metaphors have been used to explore the conceptions of teaching among university professors and their relation to both their practice and students’ expectations (Wegner & Nückles, 2015); ideas about learning, learners, and knowledge among pre-service teachers beginning their teacher education programs (Karla & Bajeva, 2012); the shift of conceptions about teaching and learning among elementary school teachers after a year in their initial content and practice courses (Leavy, McSorlye, & Boté, 2007); and about teachers’ attitudes towards educational reforms (Ungar, 2016). All these studies strongly support the use of metaphors from teachers for gaining insights into their conceptions and beliefs on different aspects of their professions through the use of elicitation tasks or interviews. At the same time, studies such Leavy, McSorlye, and Boté (2007) suggest that student teachers’ beliefs are difficult to change in spite of instruction and practice experiences if they do not have adequate opportunities to engage in reflection.

Equally important is the use of metaphors in language teacher education, especially for English language teachers. Komorowska (2013) states that:

By identifying the metaphors student teachers use, introducing new ones and analyzing them, teacher educators could more successfully counteract the impact of prior experience which often makes trainees teach the way they were taught in their school days. (p. 68)

Metaphors have been widely used in research concerning the characterization, understanding, and conceptualization of pre-service and in-service English teachers about their roles and their views on teaching and learning (e.g. De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000, 2002; Hatipoglu, 2018; Karagöz, Şükür, & Filiz, 2018; Lin, Shein, & Yang, 2012). However, some of the results have been somewhat contradictory. For example, while Lin, Shein, and Yang (2012) found that most of the metaphors used by Taiwanese student teachers were learner-centered and reflected a more constructivist view of learning, Karagöz, Şükür, and Filiz (2018) concluded that most senior pre-service EFL teachers in their study held to conventional roles such as the teacher as a provider of knowledge, guide, and cultural transmitter. Consistent with this last finding were the conclusions drawn by De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) who found that teachers continue to identify with traditional roles although some roles depended on personal preferences, attitudes, and problems faced by teachers. On the other hand, Hatipoglu’s (2018) study, in addition to exploring the metaphors used by teachers using the categorization proposed by De Guerrero and Villamil (2000), found some slight cultural differences among Turkish and German metaphors. The authors claim that while the metaphors used by German teachers were more animate, the ones used by Turkish seemed to be more behaviorist oriented.

Nonetheless, research on cultural differences between the metaphors used by pre-service teachers from different backgrounds has not been conclusive either. Can, Bedir, & Kiliańska-Przybyło’s (2011) research focused on whether the ideas of EFL teachers from different cultural backgrounds (Polish and Turkish) were different. They found that they are not necessarily different but the frequency of the ideas across these groups and the underlying ideas might be different. They also point out that not all the differences might only be due to cultural factors but also to some personal and contextual variables.

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Another close vein of inquiry to the previous research is the study of teachers' identity through the use of metaphors. An example of this is the work of Said (2013) who explored the identity of a novice language teacher through interviews in which the teacher recounted stories, anecdotes, and metaphors. The author found that, as the interview progressed, the teacher asserted more of her abilities and consequently her identity as a teacher developed. The author cautions that the metaphors might be culturally bound and suggests that more research must be conducted. Metaphors might not only be influenced by culture but they might also be determined by the teaching context in which the teachers practice or teach. For instance Nguyen (2016) investigated the identity of English teachers of young learners in Vietnam and found that the metaphors of 'mothers', 'artists', and 'trial judges' provided insight into the distinctive features of these teachers. These metaphors might be expected from teachers of elementary school kids but not necessarily from other teachers.

At the same time, metaphor research seems to be evolving into novel areas to explore other elements of English language teachers' education programs. For example, Yüksel (2019) used metaphor analysis to investigate the conceptualization of pre-service EFL teachers on the different aspects of the practicum, namely teaching practice, mentors, supervisor, students, lesson plans, and materials. This study is valuable because it can help teacher educators identify problematic areas that need attention. Finally, metaphor analysis has not only been used to explore teachers' views and beliefs about themselves but also to try to uncover the perception of the social value and social roles granted to educators (Alarcon, Vergara, Vásquez, & Torres, 2018) and to contrast their views of their role with the views of their students (Oktay & Osam, 2013).

Besides exploring topics related with the roles, views, and identity of teachers or student teachers at some particular point, several studies have pursued the investigation of changes or shifts that depict some professional and academic development. Some studies have attempted to elucidate the impact that courses and programs have on pre-service teachers' beliefs (Kavanoz, 2016; Şimşek, 2014). Others, as in the present research, have explored the changes of pre-service teachers as a result of taking a practicum course (İnceçay, 2015; Karavas & Drossou, 2010; Nagamine, 2012; Zhu, Rice, & Azhu, in production). Fewer have sought to investigate the changes teachers have once they are on the job (Erkmen, 2010). From these studies, we get mixed conclusions. Although it seems that one study confirms the superficial impact of education and courses on student teachers (Simsek, 2014), others report developments and alterations of their knowledge as a result of their teacher education program (Kavanoz, 2016). With respect to the effects on pre-service EFL teachers' tacit knowledge and beliefs as a result of the practicum, one author reports that there was no change and that practice had a major role in strengthening initial beliefs (Karavas & Drossou, 2010). On the other hand, two studies report that there was some change (İnceçay, 2015; Zhu, Rice & Azhu, in production) as a result of facing real-life contexts. In contrast, one study reported a significant change in the beliefs of pre-service teachers as a result of the practicum experience, although there were differences depending on the context in which the practicum took place. Finally, one of the latest studies seems to explore a promising venue of research, the impact service-learning has on EFL teacher candidates' underlying assumptions about foreign language teaching, their ideas of community service, and also their academic and personal learning (Simsek, 2020).

Regarding the methodologies used in metaphor change after the practicum, most studies used some kind of elicitation technique to help participants formulate their metaphors in writing through questionnaires, (e.g. Simsek, 2020) or through oral interviews (e.g. Nagamine, 2012) or both (İnceçay, 2015). Other studies presented participants with metaphors they could choose from (written or visual) and elicited reasons for their choice (Oktay & Osam, 2013). Only one study from the ones reviewed analyzed metaphors that were spontaneously produced by participants in the journals written in their practicum course (Dumlao & Pinatacan, 2019).

In the light of this literature review, our research project aimed at investigating the spontaneous production of metaphors in the teaching philosophies written by Mexican pre-service teachers at the beginning of their practicum course. Moreover, we sought to document the changes in their thinking and beliefs depicted in their post-practicum teaching philosophy. We believe that this project might shed light on various aspects of the literature reviewed. It seems that most education programs are geared towards non-traditional, constructivists, interactional conceptions of teaching and learning and many studies point to the persistence of traditional education depicted in the metaphor "a teacher as transmitter of knowledge" with a few counterexamples. Teacher education programs deal with several major problems in order to achieve the goal of quality and effective education (Farrell, 2019a). These include bridging the gap between theory and practice, making practice meaningful and significant for student teachers, and a lack of follow-up contact with teachers on the

job. We hope that this research can contribute on some of these aspects. We also hope to learn if the metaphors used by Mexican teachers seem to be culturally bound and can be applied in various social contexts, e.g. teachers as Victims (e.g. Alarcon, Vergara, Vásquez, & Torres, 2018).

Finally, research in this area has widely used elicitation techniques (interviews and completion tasks) that has purposefully lead to the production of metaphors with respect to some specific area of teaching or teachers (e.g. teachers' roles or their views on teachers and learners), and might not necessarily reflect the metaphors used by pre-service teachers when spontaneously describing their beliefs. It has been pointed out that making student teachers produce metaphors can complicate the thinking process (Nagamine, 2012)

This project was aimed at unpacking the beliefs of pre-service teachers as a way of making them aware of the implications of their practice. We believe that this is a first step that needs to be taken if education programs hope to make an impact on language teacher education. This study aims at contributing to research on pre-service teacher reflection.

## **Methodology**

The current study adopted a qualitative design, in spite of quantifying the metaphors produced by participants in order to contextualize the data. We used content analysis in order to codify the key words that allowed us to identify the metaphors and other relevant discourse. The aim was not to make generalizations but to document and interpret first the initial ideas of pre-service English teachers and, in turn, track the effects of the tasks carried out by participants in the practicum course.

### **Context**

The objective of this study was to uncover some of the metaphors used by pre-service teachers in an undergraduate program in a Northern Mexican public university. This four-and-a-half-year program in English prepares professionals in two areas: translation and English teaching, and is the only program at this university entirely instructed in English, which is a foreign language for most students and professors. The program began in 1982 and only until recently (six years ago) formally incorporated a practicum course. Before, practice for the students consisted in micro-teaching, observations, and service-learning. Student teachers have courses in linguistics, applied linguistics, English and British literature, writing and research, translation, and at least seven courses in TESOL and other education related areas. The students in their ninth semester are sent to schools of different levels from elementary to college for a TESOL practicum that lasts 16 weeks. Most of them have one or two mentors who are English teachers in the recipient schools and a supervisor who is a university professor. Three of the supervisors of this course participated in this research project. Student teachers have to complete several tasks, including observations, self-observations, videos of their own classes, journals, and lesson plans among other tasks. Many of the reforms in the program (e.g. the inclusion of practicum) stem from two different observed problems. One was the gap between theory and practice we had been observing in service learning, and then more systematically in the practicum course. Second, was that some of the activities in the practicum seemed to be failing their purpose. We saw that some pre-service teachers were not able to identify the problems they were having in their practice, nor did they seem to be able to come up with alternatives to improve their performance and the learning of their students. Most tasks aim at promoting reflective on-practice, and to a lesser extent in-practice. Moreover, we have been expanding the opportunities to discuss their reflections in small groups and to have more peer support.

### **Participants**

The participants in the study were from a convenient sample (Creswell et. al., 2007) of students in their ninth semester taking the practicum course during three of the semester periods between 2015 and 2016 from different cohorts. Participation was voluntary and 42 (27 females and 15 males) out of the 47 students gave permission to use their texts for this project. Students were in their early 20s and some had previous teaching experience while others did not.

## Data Collection and Analysis

For this project we used two tasks, one was the teaching philosophy they wrote at the beginning of the practicum course before they were even assigned a school and the other is called a post practicum teaching philosophy which was written at the end of their practice experience. Both of these assignments were collected in a teaching portfolio that students have to submit at the end of the semester. The corpus for this study were the texts from the students who granted their permission for use in this research project and they signed an informed consent form. The students receive detailed instructions, examples, and some guiding questions on how to write a teaching philosophy. In general they were instructed to write a Reflective Teaching Philosophy that included their beliefs about optimal teaching and learning, examples of how to put these beliefs into practice, and their goals—both teaching goals and goals for students' learning. None of the questions nor the guidelines prompted the student teachers to use metaphors, but while reading and analyzing their texts we saw that many of them used metaphors to make sense of their ideas about themselves as teachers and about teaching and learning.

We analyzed the texts written by the participants in order to understand what their discourse, and the metaphors in them, revealed about their conceptual framework before and after the practicum. For this, we

chose a qualitative approach, more specifically, content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) as a form of inquiry to analyze the discourse constructed by the participants. Segments of written discourse produced by the participants were connected to the different metaphors identified in the data, analyzing codes, and then constructing categories. To ensure reliability and validity, inter-coder agreement checks were conducted, the context was described in detail, and the original quotes were used with representative examples of the categories formed. The quotes used in the study might contain some grammatical or usage errors, but we decided to preserve the original form that the participants used to express their ideas.

Some of the first studies on CMT relied on the researchers' introspection and intuitions about how we use language. They often generated linguistic data that was later grouped in order to identify linguistic metaphors that were mapped according to metaphorical expressions to uncover the underlying concepts. The objective was to infer conceptual representations from the metaphorical expressions encoded in linguistic expressions. This procedure has been criticized for causing bias in the research and for not being systematic in the collection and analysis of data (Deignan, 2005). Thus, we adopted a method that has been proposed to systematize the analysis of metaphors (Heywood & Semino, 2007; Semino, 2007). We used The metaphor identification procedure (MIP), which consists of a series of steps that can aid in the identification and analysis of metaphors found in discourse collected from the data of language users as was the case in our study (Steen, 2002, 2010). Consequently, we identified all the sentences in the essays that expressed ideas about teaching, teachers, learning, and learners. Lakoff and Johnson (2008) claimed that behind metaphorical language are generalizations that reside not in language but in our way of thinking. The metaphors used to talk about something are good evidence of the concepts we hold. Moreover, the language used includes instantiations of our conceptual structuring and we can infer underlying beliefs and ideas that might influence our actions.

Following this procedure, the authors read the texts closely and identified the propositions in which the students expressed their ideas about how they understood the role of teachers and students and the teaching-learning process. These fragments were selected and imported into a database. The selections were then compared by the researchers and the discrepancies analyzed and discussed until an agreement was reached. These propositions, or chunks of discourse, were analyzed by highlighting any lexical items that had a more basic meaning than the one expressed in the context of the essay. E.g. *A teacher opens a door to the students*. In this example, we can see that the literal or primary meaning of the expression is different from the meaning conveyed in this sentence. A teacher does not literally open a door for the students. *Opening a door* is a conventional metaphor that expresses the idea that a teacher gives students' access to something else, perhaps a new opportunity. That something 'new' could be knowledge and skills, and the opportunities derived from them.

Thus, we proceeded to code these expressions as metaphorical in nature. By analyzing these two meanings and establishing a link of similarity between them, we were able to establish a metaphorical identification of the idea that the propositions communicated. Thus, we were able to establish metaphorical comparisons. The last

stage, in turn, involves making more specific connections between elements in the source domain, such as a person being in a room in which a door is being opened so there can be access to other places and opportunities and the target domain. This target domain involves analyzing which elements of the target domain fulfill a similar function. In our example, the teacher (through his work) gives students access to other possibilities in students' lives. Finally, the metaphorical mapping involves establishing entailments and inferences from the analogy proposed. From each metaphor, we established connections about the roles of students and teachers.

Towards the end of the semester, participants were asked to write their post-practicum teaching philosophy. These documents were expansions on their initial thinking and we found that they often reflected a sharp contrast between the participants' initial ideas and their ideas after the practicum course. This essay, as well as other reflection tasks, are shared in small groups with peers and supervisors. These papers were also used in the analysis in order to explore differences in their discourse and their metaphors on teaching and teachers.

## Results

### Pre-Practicum Metaphors

There were forty-one metaphors identified relating to various aspects of teaching and learning. Not all of the participants described their concepts and beliefs by using metaphors. We identified that some students did not express their ideas in this way, but rather they made other statements about their initial ideas. For example, one participant expressed his central idea about teaching and learning in this way, "A basic principle that I consider important would be motivation from the teacher because that would help both teachers and students to make a fun class" (J28). The results of the analysis are presented in the following table with token metaphors that exemplify the category. The sentences have been kept as they were written by L2 pre-service teachers without correcting or editing any grammar or writing mistakes.

**Table 1**  
*Categories and Metaphors Regarding Teacher Concept*

Category	Token metaphors	f	%
1. Teachers as owners of knowledge/learning is receiving		17	41.5
	My goal as a teacher is to <i>provide</i> sufficient knowledge to my students, teaching is about being capable of <i>leaving something to the students</i> that can help them, My goal is to <i>give students tools</i> to achieve whatever they set their minds and hearts to		
2. Teachers as guides/learning is a journey		9	21.9
	Teachers <i>give guidance</i> and support, Teachers <i>help students to move forward</i> , As a teacher I basically seek to <i>be the guide for students</i> , The teachers <i>is just a guide</i> that the students can follow		
3. Teachers as climate/atmosphere controllers/learning is experiencing		5	12.3
	A teacher's job is to <i>create an atmosphere</i> to develop skills, A teacher should <i>create a comfortable environment</i> , As a teacher I want to <i>give my students a peaceful and calm space</i> to learn		
4. Teachers as counselors/learning is a therapy		4	9.7
	We are there to <i>assist</i> , A friend you <i>can talk with</i> without feeling rear to be ridiculed, Teachers <i>help them develop</i> their one mind		
5. Teachers as fuel/farmers/learning is to catch fire/blossom		3	7.3
	You can be an <i>igniter</i> of capable and brilliant people, My objective as a teachers is to get others not only to learn what I have to teach but to spark for them to seek for their purpose in life, A teacher is the one who plants the seed of curiosity and questioning in his students		
6. Teachers and learners as discoverers/learning is discovering		3	7.3
	I think of all of us ( <i>students and teachers</i> ) as <i>discovering</i> something, I have to teach by to inspiring them <i>to seek for their purpose</i> in life, The goal of the teacher should be to <i>encourage students to discover</i>		
<b>Total</b>		<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>

These conceptual metaphors, as stated above, were not isolated but were repeated a number of times in the essays written by pre-service teachers, reinforcing the idea that they are part of the conceptual models used to understand their practice and profession.

### **Teachers as Owners/Possessors**

This metaphor of the teacher as the owner of knowledge represents one of the most traditional views on education and perhaps one that most educators seek to eradicate in the conceptual system of future teachers, especially language teachers. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2018) uses a metaphor to examine the traditional pedagogy that he calls the banking model of education. The banking model of education suggests that teachers possess full knowledge and learners are empty receptacles to be filled with knowledge, like a coin bank. Education thus, becomes the act of depositing information.

It also entails the idea that knowledge is a *commodity* owned by the teacher and it can be provided, given, or transmitted to students. Furthermore, it implies that students are passive recipients of this commodity, thus conferring no role for them to play in the learning process. This is consistent with Sfar's (1998) proposed conceptualization of L2 learning into two main metaphors, with one of them being the acquisition metaphor. The acquisition metaphor purports the objectification of knowledge that is projected by other means. For example, this overarching conceptual metaphor is materialized in a more specific metaphor of the teacher as a 'tool provider' as illustrated in some of the metaphors produced by participants, e.g. "Teachers provide students with the necessary tools for life".

However, this metaphor of the teacher as 'tool provider' is nonetheless slightly different from the previous one of teachers as simply owners or possessors of knowledge, since it implies two things. One is that knowledge is not something that is simply provided by the teacher but it is also something that learners must work for to obtain by using the 'tools' given. Furthermore, this metaphor for knowledge and skills implies some kind of action from the students. This is supported by the verbs used in the examples above in which the students must find, achieve, and open something in order for the learning task to be completed.

### **Teachers as Guides/Companions**

The second metaphor in the data was teachers as guides and companions in which the role of the teacher seems to be more symmetrical than in the previous metaphor. The use of this metaphor of the teacher as a companion rests on the assumption that learning is some kind of journey or trip that the students undertake with the teacher as a guiding companion. In contrast to the banking metaphor of education, in this paradigm there is an emphasis on the learner's outward performance. This view seems to be related to a cognitive apprenticeship approach to teaching that explores methods of helping students develop concepts and skills under the guidance of a teacher (Yilmaz, 2011). This theory emphasizes the teacher's ability to act like a facilitator or guide in the learning process of students. Instructors propose paths or routes of learning for students to undertake. The teacher models the learning process that students should follow. However, there are some entailments that can be further explored in this conceptualization of learning and teaching. For example, it assumes that there is just one road and it is perhaps the same for teachers and students and that the end point of this journey might be the same for everyone.

### **Teachers as Climate/Atmosphere Controllers**

In this metaphor of teachers as climate or atmosphere controllers, there is a significant difference from the previous metaphors. This one emphasizes the role of the teacher in creating what they consider appropriate conditions for the students to learn. It potentially assigns a differential but active role for both students and teachers. While the teacher's responsibility is to create and control the context for learning, it is expected that students will act within this environment provided by the teachers. This metaphor emphasizes contextual elements in the learning process that the teacher can create and control so the elements are conducive to learning. The teacher seems to be responsible for the environment and space in which the students can learn.

This metaphor might be linked to perspectives of learning that consider the interaction of subjects and their environment and how they influence each other, for example the bio-ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (2005). In these statements on the role of teachers, pre-service teachers showed a concern for the importance of the classroom environment, which might vary from peaceful to dynamic or fun but nonetheless must be conducive to learning. It seems, however, that the responsibility of the learning environment relies mainly on the teacher.



### **Teachers As Counselors**

In the teachers as counselors metaphor, we can identify a changing role in the concept portrayed by pre-service teachers. There is some evidence of an idea that depicts the role the teacher has in constructing a dialogue with the students, and interaction seems to be the key to learning. It is a way of conceptualizing teaching and learning that emphasizes the establishment of interpersonal relationship between teachers and students. This metaphor might be linked to a humanistic approach to education in which learning is seen as a personal act to fulfill potential. Moreover, this theory suggests that learning will take place if teachers act as a facilitators or counselors (Rogers, 1951, 1961). The facilitator should establish an atmosphere so learners feel comfortable to discuss ideas. Furthermore, the trust between participants should be in such a way that it is conducive to accepting mistakes and learning from them.

This relationship, however, is one that makes teachers and students co-responsible for the process of learning. Students express their views on teaching and learning more as a dialogue or a conversation in which the teacher can promote interactions with the students and this creates the opportunity to develop their own ideas and understanding based on their needs and not a pre-established teaching agenda.

### **Teachers as Fuel**

The teacher as fuel or spark/seed metaphor gives us two unique metaphors; however, they have similar underlying principles. The fuel or spark sets a fire that burns and gives light, while a seed that is planted give life to new things. Both carry an assumption of a creative force. Moreover, it reflects a stance on teaching and learning that is more consistent with current constructivist theories (Gergen, 1995). Constructivism is about active learning, a contextualized process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it. The learner brings his/her past experiences and cultural factors to a current situation and each person has a different interpretation and construction of the knowledge process. It assumes that teachers make students begin the process of learning but that the learning is something that students construct. It also reflects that questioning and seeking is an important activity for students' own learning.

### **Teachers and Learners as Discoverers**

This metaphor posits a more novel conception of teaching and learning in which the outcomes of education are not pre-established. It is also interesting that the process of discovery was posited not only for students but for teachers as well. It highlights the realization that although teachers are responsible for planning their courses, it is not until they are in a classroom and see the reactions of the students to the proposed activities that they will discover (along with the students) the things that can or cannot be accomplished. In this regard, teaching and learning is a social and interactional process with unknown effects.

Each of these student metaphors develops ideas, beliefs, and conceptions about teaching and learning found in the students' discourse. From their teaching philosophies, we were able to infer some of the teachers' roles pre-service teachers expressed through metaphors. This is evidence of how pre-service teachers position themselves and the impact teaching preparation courses have had on them.

### **Changes Post-Practicum**

At the end of the course, the students had to re-read their initial teaching philosophy. They were asked to write any changes they had in their initial thinking and ideas on teaching and learning as a result of the practicum experience. One significant difference in the post-practicum teaching philosophies was that the fragments of text added had fewer metaphors than the first one. The teachers concentrated more on describing some of the difficulties they had and how they solved their problems rather than focusing on idealized goals as they had at the beginning. In this section, we are not concerned with quantifying the changes or how many students did or did not change. Instead, we are more interested in the kinds of changes they had, if any. We have a sense from reading the texts that most made an effort in depicting some kind of change, for no one left the text unchanged as a result of the instructions given. We believe that it would be very hard to decide if there was a significant change in each and every student. We assume that most if not all had some kind of change in their thinking and behavior but there is no definite way to attest to the change. We had their ideas expressed in the texts and we

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decided to focus more on the quality of the changes they referred to. The following quotes from the participants in their post-practicum reflection depict some of these changes.

“Overall I think this experience was very good because I see now that is not the same thing studying or preparing for being a teacher than being in front of a class and trying to control a group of people with different personalities and get them to understand and like your class” (D21)

“At the beginning of my practicum, we were assigned to write a teaching philosophy. In the last meeting/class we were in, we discussed that at first we were all sugar coating the idea of a teacher, student, school, everything was extremely sugar coated. What kind of teacher am I? I still ponder about that question, because the answer is not as easy as it seems. I say what I think I am but not exactly what others think and that does indeed make a world of a difference.” (F12)

As these two quotes show, their initial ideas were altered in some way after the experience of teaching in the schools to which they were assigned. It seems that their goals and expectations did not seem as clear as they appeared in the beginning. Now they are pondering what kind of teacher they are, and that it is one thing to talk about something in their teacher education courses regarding teaching and learning and quite another to face the challenges of controlling a group of teens or children. In the second quote, the participant emphasizes the ‘sugar coated’ ideas she had at the beginning but more importantly that the ideas she has about herself might not be shared by others and that this makes a difference.

In the following table we present some comparisons of the kinds of changes evidenced in the post-practicum reflections by presenting some pre- and post-reflections of the same participants.

The content analysis of the reflection statements in Table 2 indicates that some pre-service teachers kept their metaphors after the practicum experience. For example, participant L15 still thinks that teachers should be guides for students and in that respect her metaphor remained unaltered. She additionally makes an emphasis in her pre-practicum reflection that teachers should respect their students and they should not focus only on grades. In her post-practicum reflections, however, she maintains the aspect of respect and not focusing on grades only but adds some ideas about the authoritative figure of teachers and how they must maintain discipline in the class and that they need to set boundaries. The practicum experience helped the participant to strengthen her metaphor but at the same time add new elements that might not have been considered at the beginning. This is similar to what happened to J19 and A27 who saw the role of the teacher as giving their students a key to open the world and providing the necessary skills and tools, respectively. The pre-service teachers also stated that their ideas did not change or change much after the practicum but they identified some needs in their preparation and changes in their performance. The first one mentioned the need to be more dynamic while the second felt the need to make consistent improvements. It seems that although the metaphors did not change much, the practice experience gave them the opportunity to experience some challenges and set more nuanced goals to accomplish in their professional lives. They articulated an understanding of teaching and learning that was more complex and grounded with a more realistic understanding of its difficulties.

The analysis also showed that the more difficulties that were reported in the post-practicum essays the less the pre-service teachers mentioned the ideals and goals they set for themselves before the practicum. This was revealed in the extracts of participants A4 and E38 in Table 2. The first one said that teaching was “the simple act of sharing all you have learnt” but in the post-practicum essay there was a modulation of that metaphor by saying that “teaching is like giving a part of yourself”. Furthermore, the participant opened the reflection by pointing out that teaching is not easy, requires a lot of time, makes you realize things about yourself, and that the most significant thing they learned was about problem solving.

**Table 2**  
*Pre- and Post-practicum Reflections*

Participant	Pre-practicum	Post-practicum	Changes
A.4	To me teaching is <i>sharing all your knowledge</i> to your students or to people. It is the simple act of sharing all you have learnt.	Teaching is <i>not always easy</i> ... It <i>requires a lot of time</i> and dedication. Teaching is like <i>giving a part of yourself</i> to people, Teaching is <i>rediscovering yourself</i> because you <i>realize something about you, you did not know</i> , Something teaching taught me is <i>problem solving</i> .	From idealized to more realistic goals Realization of demands and problems Self-awareness
E.38	I teach <i>to make a change in the actual situation of the student's life</i> , to make them notice the reality of globalization and how important is the language for their future development as professionals, <i>making connections with real life situations</i> , engaging them with the continuous learning of English	I <i>still believe</i> that we as teacher need to be prepared in our classes <i>to make real life connections</i> to create a meaningful learning for our students... I have to <i>admit that working with kids is very harsh</i> , but you need to <i>find your own way</i> to awake them from their sweet comfort cloud they are living in... and <i>the over spoiled attitude they are showing</i> nowadays ...	From general to specific goals Realization of difficulties Awareness of students realities
J19	Teaching is the ideas or principles taught by an authority, teaching is <i>the key to opening our world</i> . I believe we were brought to this world to make it better, I chose to contribute by teaching our young, <i>to give them that key</i> they need to succeed in this world.	My teaching philosophy <i>did not change much</i> I actually think i should <i>add more dynamic</i> things and <i>I still think</i> students learn better by playing games. One of the most important things I have learned thourout the practicum is that I need to <i>be more dynamic &amp; and not give them too much work</i> .	Realization of weaknesses as a teacher
A27	This career <i>has provided me the necessary skills and tools</i> to become a prepared professional English teacher. Motivation, as well, is important to me... by <i>creating a friendly environment</i> ... Another principle is communication, Lastly, involvement is part of the basic principles of teaching and learning... In conclusion, my teaching goals are <i>to provide the necessary skills and tools</i> ...	Looking back and acknowledging my first teaching philosophy <i>I would keep mostly everything</i> ... To conclude, my teaching goals are to <i>always feel the need to of improvement, to be loyal to what I believe</i> is better for me and my students and to always <i>be remembered as a teacher who cared her students</i> and who always did the best she could.	From considering to have all they need to the realization of the need of continuous improvement strengthening beliefs
L15	The role of a teacher is <i>to be a guide to students, and he/she has to be always respectful to everyone's ideas</i> , because that is what defines every human being... it is important to have <i>this respect and tolerance</i> , so we can establish this relation teacher-student. And finally, something I would like to add to my philosophy of teaching, is that is would be awesome that teachers <i>not only focus on grades, but on effort from students</i> . We all know each person is different...	The role the teacher plays is more than just a motivator, <i>the teacher is a guide</i> , but as I stated before, not only for academic purposes... <i>the teacher must teach discipline</i> to the students... <i>a teacher one needs to mark their line</i> , teachers represent <i>the authority</i> ... Respect is the base of any sort of relation teacher-student. I <i>still</i> hold my belief that <i>grades should not be the main focus of teaching</i> ...	A guide for students From being respectful to respect with discipline, lines and authority

Similarly, participant E38 who set as an objective of his teaching “to make a change in the actual situation of the student’s life and making connections with real life situations”, now admits that “working with kids is very harsh” and that he needs to find his own way of dealing with the “over spoiled attitude” of students.

In sum, the findings of this study revealed that the teaching practicum for pre-service EFL teachers brought about some changes, if not in the metaphors used then in contributions to their development as teachers in several ways. First, it helped them to move from idealized to more realistic goals and expectations and from general goals of their practice to more specific goals to pursue. Furthermore, the experience brought to the fore the idea of the evolving nature of teacher preparation. As one of them pointed out at the beginning, the program had provided “all a teacher needed to be a professional English teacher” but in the final reflections realized that the teaching goal was to always feel the need for constant improvement. Overall, the participants reported a realization of the difficulties, realities, and weaknesses they face as newer teachers.

## Discussion

Similar to other studies on metaphor analysis, this study found that Mexican pre-service English teachers spontaneously produced metaphors similar to those reported in previous studies. If we look at the categories provided in Oxford, et.al (1998) study and those used by Farrell (2006), the metaphors found in this sample span two categories, those of cultural transmission and learner-centered growth. The first one is depicted in the metaphors around the ‘teacher as owner of knowledge’ and the second was exemplified by the metaphors around ‘teachers as guides, atmosphere controllers, counselors, fuel, farmers, and discoverers’. The other two categories of cultural transmission and social reformer were not found.

As for the roles described in the study by De Guerrero and Villamil (2000), some of those roles surfaced in the metaphors in this sample, namely those of cooperative leader, provider of knowledge, agent of change, nurturer, and provider of tools, which were replicated in the ones found in this study. The ones not found were the categories of innovator, artist, repairer, and gym instructor. The aspect that appears relevant in these findings is the prevalence of the categories of transmission and provider of knowledge that we categorized as the ‘teacher as owner of knowledge’ that accounts for 41.5 % of the metaphors produced by the pre-service teachers. This is disappointing in some ways because efforts have been made in this program, as is the case in most education programs in the world, to bring about a change in this traditional way of conceptualizing teaching and learning. This indicates that still more efforts need to be made in making constant connections between pre-service previous knowledge and the discussion of theories, methodologies, and pedagogic concepts in courses.

Another aspect worth commenting on is how these results relate to cultural aspects. From the study of Can, Bedir, and Kilianska-Przybylo (2011) contrasting Polish and Turkish student teachers’ metaphors, we found similar metaphors to this group of Mexican teachers but with different frequencies of occurrence. In their study, both groups of Turkish and Polish pre-service teacher reflected the transmission metaphor but with less frequency than in this study. Furthermore, the results in this study are more consistent with those of Karagöz, Şükür, and Filiz (2018) and Oktay and Osam (2013) who found that most teachers’ metaphors depicted more conventional and teacher-centered beliefs.

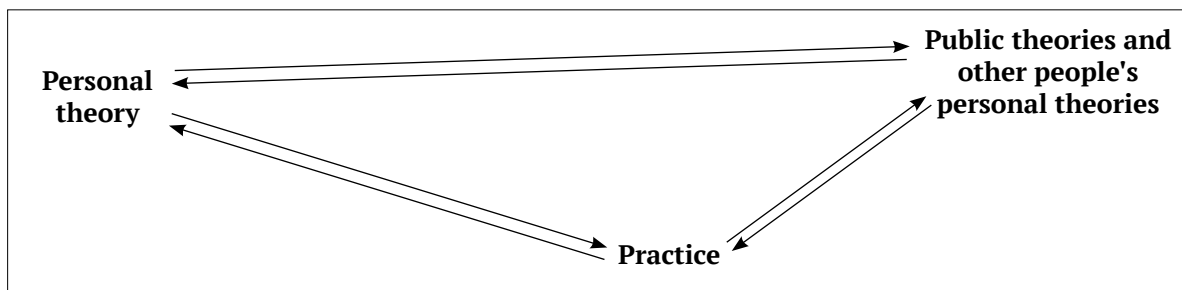
Nevertheless, we need to recognize that the rest of the metaphors produced by this group of teachers, which accounts for 58.5% of the remaining metaphors, were around roles representing the by category of learner-centered growth in Oxford et al. (1998). We regard this as positively reflecting the emphasis the program has been making towards more constructivists and interactional approaches to learning and teaching, which is similar to the the findings in the study of Lin, Shein, and Yang (2012).

Moreover, the analysis of the comparative reflections gives us some evidence that their ideas and beliefs were evolving as a result of the practicum experience. Some of the most significant realizations the student teachers had was that planning and preparation is important but the biggest challenge they face is their capacity to recognize and be aware of what goes on in their classes and with their students. They reported that they had to attune their planning and strategies to the reactions they got from the students and that their actions had to be adjusted and reassessed in the light of the interactions that took place in their classrooms. They recognized they had to be more dynamic or that they had to awaken their students from their sweet comfort, and that they have to develop problem solving skills. This can be interpreted as recognition of the situated condition of learning and its interactional dimension. Said (2013), who explored the identity of novice language teachers, found that as they progressed in their recounting of experiences, they began to assert more of their abilities and develop their teacher identity. We found that there were major changes in the metaphors used by teachers and that some metaphors were restructured or strengthened. We recognize that the seeming abandonment of idealized metaphors about teaching and learning such as “changing the students’ lives” or “sharing all they have learnt” were due to contextual factors in the practicum. These students were working in complex contexts with large groups of children and adolescents in unfavorable environments (participants A4 and E38), while others who kept their ideas were working with advanced and highly motivated older students in high schools (e.g J19). Nonetheless, all of the participants showed some degree of change as a result of the practicum experience as reported in studies such as Nagamine (2012).

Overall, the results showed that there is a need to further investigate how education programs can continue triangulating theories and experiences. Jourdenais (2009) proposed that instead of a linear process in the

construction of language teacher education curriculums and courses there should be a constant interaction of three elements, public theories, personal theories, and practice, as depicted in the following diagram.

**Figure 1**  
*Language Teacher Education*



*Note:* Adapted from "Language Teacher Education", by R. Jourdenais, In M. H. Long & C. J. Doughty (Eds.), *The handbook of language teaching* (p. 647), 2009, Blackwell. Copyright 2009 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

If we can achieve the constant interaction of these three elements, we can overcome the problem of disconnected theory and practice (Farrell, 2019a) and the inefficacies of training to bring about change in student teacher beliefs (Altan, 2012; Can, 2019; Inozu, 2011; McCrocklin, 2020).

## Conclusion

Educators and curriculum designers often assume that there is a direct relationship between the contents and activities proposed in teacher education programs and the impact these have on the beliefs and visions of pre-service teachers. It is taken for granted that the completion of certain tasks, passing exams, and some practice in teaching would lead pre-service teachers to reformulate their long-held beliefs based on their own experiences as students. In this study, the conceptions of pre-service teachers reflected in their metaphors depict some of their views on teaching and learning that might be disappointing for teacher educators, e.g. the metaphor of 'teachers as owner of knowledge' is still present in the conceptual system of some of the participants in this study. Moreover, some metaphors depict an idealized view of teachers. However, there is evidence that some pre-service teachers have developed a more complex understanding that captures other sides of the challenges of teaching and learning that are more consistent with current theories of second language acquisition.

The results of this study are to some extent consistent with those of Martinez, Sauleda, and Huber (2001) who found that teacher training is often effective in adding theoretical baggage but that the students' deep and tacit understanding that guides their actions mostly appears to be unaffected. However, this study shows the emergence of some important metaphors that should be part of the conceptual inventory of successful teachers. Furthermore, this study shows that the practicum experience does have an effect on some idealized beliefs on teaching and learning and that some might change or gain more insights into their initial thinking. However, there is some evidence that more sustained efforts are needed to overcome the previous concepts pre-service teachers have. Teacher educators need to make their students' conceptual systems be more explicit and enhance their reflection on the implications these concepts have for their actions as teachers. There is common agreement that reflection in and on practice needs to be enhanced but it also needs to be equally understood by teacher educators and pre-service teachers, and it has to be made more tangible and less vague for all (Hyacinth & Mann, 2014). Activities like the ones described in this study, we suggest, should also be linked to other activities of practice so there is a triangulation between thoughts, ideas, and actions implemented in real-life contexts by future teachers.

Although the aim of this project was not to make generalizations but to document and interpret the beliefs and concepts depicted in the metaphors of pre-service teachers and the effects of the practicum on pre-service EFL teachers, this study has the limitation of not triangulating the data with other sources of information such as interviews or the videos recorded during their practicum. Although we can infer that by reflecting on the

experience they were able to write about the differences between their initial ideas and their thinking at the end of the practicum, more research on the reflection process is needed in order to unveil teachers' cognition.

Learning to teach and teaching to learn are not easy enterprises and critical aspects of teaching should be investigated through various angles. This study of the metaphors used by future teachers is one aspect that can contribute to stimulating conscious reflection.

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