Chapter 1
Learning Through Metaphors With Adult Doctoral Students

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ABSTRACT

With doctoral attrition rates at 50%, there is a need to better support and facilitate doctoral student success. Although multiple solutions are needed, addressing students' experience in the classroom is a vital component. This chapter argues that one method to do so is through the power of metaphors as an engaged pedagogical tool. The first part offers the theory and research on metaphors, teaching, and adult learning. Requiring competence and creativity from the teacher, metaphors can help facilitate effective learning because they are comprehensive ways of orientating a student's conceptual understanding around a topic. As the foundation of their research, all doctoral students complete a literature review. And the second part of the chapter presents a pedagogical illustration about how to teach argumentation, analysis, and synthesis in the literature review via an extended engaged metaphor around film popularity. This final section brings the theoretical rhetoric around metaphor and doctoral learning into tangible reality.

INTRODUCTION

Completing a doctoral degree is a seminal achievement. The doctorate is not simply a terminal degree, but represents a level of theoretical and research

expertise. Perhaps it is not surprising then that few earn their doctorate. The latest census data reveals that while over a fifth of Americans earn a Master's degree, only 4.5% obtain a doctorate (America Counts Staff, 2019). Despite that percent being a two-fold increase since the year 2000, a doctoral degree remains a rare achievement. The challenge is that doctoral attrition rates remain high. Typically reported to be around 50% (Cassuto, 2013), other reports document that attrition rates can be as high as 70% (Jones, 2013). Myriad reasons exist for such high doctoral attrition rates, but Golde (2005), Roulston et al. (2013), and Cosgrove (2019) detail that common explanations include the academic rigor of the doctoral journey, lack of engagement with the department/faculty, and finally the failure to prepare a student for the dissertation. Although multiple solutions are needed, the three stated issues can all partly be addressed by their experience in the classroom—physical or virtual. As Lovitts (2001) argues "it is not the background characteristics students bring with them to the university that affects their persistence outcomes; it is what happens to them after they arrive" (p. 2). As a result, what is needed are a faculty and teaching practices that best support learning so that the student is academically prepared, feels connected to and supported by the department, and has the tools and dispositions for the rigorous road that the dissertation presents.

In this chapter I argue that one method to address that challenge is through the power of metaphors as an engaged pedagogical tool. The first part of the chapter will offer the theory and research on metaphors, teaching, and adult learning. The literature on metaphors establishes their vital role in how humans think and process (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors can help facilitate effective teaching and learning because they are not merely clever and concise examples, but rather comprehensive ways of orientating a student's conceptual understanding around a topic. This requires not only depth of competence from the instructor, but more importantly, creative thought and planning around both the metaphor and the corresponding engaged practice. In such lesson planning, using engaged metaphors forces the teacher beyond the de facto reality that often in our attempts to *cover* the content, we are guilty of not *teaching* it. The second part of the chapter presents pedagogy in practice. As the foundation of their research, all doctoral students complete a literature review to start their dissertation. This section offers a pedagogical illustration about how to teach argumentation, analysis, and synthesis in the literature review via an extended engaged metaphor around film popularity.

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