METAPHORS AS A SOURCE OF TEACHERS' REPRESENTATIONS

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Abstract: *Based on the understanding of the metaphor and on representation concepts, this study investigates implicit metaphors which were categorized in order to reveal the representations that the teachers have of their own role. The data were analyzed according to the thematic contents proposed by BRONCKART (1997) in his methodological proposal for linguistic analysis. The reflections are based on data obtained from a questionnaire answered by one group of Brazilian State School English teachers who are participants in a program of continuing education.*

Keywords: *education; implicit metaphors; representations; EFL teachers' roles.*

Introduction

This article[1] analyzes Brazilian State School English teachers' metaphors in order to understand these teachers' representations of their role. We decided to focus on the study of metaphors because we believe that it is a powerful instrument to dive into teachers' representations of themselves. According to RITCHIE (2002), MARKGRAF & PAVLIK (1998), DENZIN (1992), and CONNELY & CLANDININ (1994), teachers express themselves to describe their teaching act using metaphors that represent their thoughts and conceptual system.

This paper originated in the analysis of teachers' discourses because according to LAKOFF & JOHNSON (1980), the concepts by which our thought is governed are not only related to the intellect, but they also direct our daily activities. Such concepts can be emphasized via language; thus, it can be said that metaphors exist linguistically because they exist in the conceptual system of each one of us.

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Our enterprise presupposes that if teacher educators have a better perception of teachers' tacit knowledge, the courses they design will suit more appropriately the teachers' needs in real life. We expect to help other teacher educators use the study of metaphors to enrich their instruments to explore teachers' minds.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. The use of metaphors

According to MUNBY (1986),

> *Metaphors are a way to discover something about teachers' beliefs or knowledge from the perspective of the teachers themselves. It is important to capture the thinking of teachers in their own language. Metaphorical language is employed to give tacit knowledge voice.*(MUNBY, 1986, p.198)

This idea is central to this paper, since its objective is to attempt to analyze the teachers' beliefs that are present in their metaphors, which are "*a compelling alternative to conventional and formalistic approaches to the study of teacher cognitions.*" (MUNBY, 1986, p. 197)

However, there are many different views on what a metaphor is. Therefore, it is necessary to say that this work is based mainly on the concepts proposed by MUNBY (1986) and ZANOTTO (1995). According to MUNBY (1986, p. 199), "Metaphor is a process by which we encounter the world and metaphors offer a different way of perceiving reality." ZANOTTO (1995) believes that through metaphorical thought we can see different beings and establish bridges between them. MUNBY (1986) also argues that metaphors are a tool to discover something about teachers' beliefs from their perspective and in their own language.

These points support our proposal of analyzing teachers' speech in order to establish some bridges between their beliefs and their practice. Our aim is to be able to open some paths to shorten the distance between their beliefs and their practice, so that we can adjust the teacher education course curriculum to the teacher's needs.

According to TELLES (1997, 2005), the study of metaphors offers us a method of research and reflection. EISNER (1991) and CONNELLY & CLANDININ (2000) think that this method seems to reveal the landscape teachers live and work in.

Although "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action" (LAKOFF & JOHNSON, 1980, p. 3), we cannot deny that "each metaphor clarifies some aspects of the concept and hides partially others." (LAKOFF, 1985: 59). Having this in mind, we researchers must be careful in the metaphor mapping and analysis, and we must also consider

more than one instance (MARGOT, VINZ, DOWNING and ANZUL, 2001) while trying to make sense of the data that we are analyzing.

TELLES (1997, 2005) reminds us that in the analysis of teachers' implicit theories, researchers and educators should pay attention to the metaphorical content of teachers' speech.

In light of all that was mentioned above, we decided to focus on the teachers' speech and to carry out our analysis we based ourselves on two essential concepts: implicit and explicit metaphors.

2. Implicit and explicit metaphors

As it has already been said in the Introduction, based on linguistic evidences we can consider that most of our conceptual system is of metaphorical nature. For this reason, there have been many researchers, such as DIAMOND (1999), MARKGRAF & PAVLIK (1998), MELLO (2005) and TELLES (1997, 1996, 2005), among others, who have identified the metaphors that structure our thoughts and actions through either explicit details in the considered statements or interpretations of the statements when inserted in a larger net of meanings.

Thus, we can say that metaphors are expressed implicitly and explicitly. If the referent is not expressed in the same clause, the metaphor is called implicit. When the literal referent of a metaphor is expressed in the same clause, it is an explicit metaphor.

In our study, for the first case we established a form of coherence among the thematic contents (BRONCKART, 1997) in the clauses in order to reach the implicit metaphor. It is important to emphasize that the analysis of implicit metaphors involves an additional cycle of inferences among clauses or between clause and context (STEEN, 1999). For the explicit metaphor, it is necessary to understand the clause and this is based on strategies of grammatical analysis.

GIBBS (1999) alerts us to the need to distinguish between the initial (immediate) reactions that the reader presents in relation to the metaphors, and the subsequent (deeper) reflection. He emphasizes the distinction between the process of metaphors' identification and the product as a result of the reader's search, considering that the more an investigator reads a text and thinks about it, the more metaphors he tends to find.

In that same direction, GIBBS (1999) emphasizes his concern for the decisions that the reader makes due to his great knowledge about the researched area and about the people whose speech is being examined. STEEN (1999) confirms that the recognition of an expression as metaphorical depends significantly on the understanding that the reader has of the context taken into account.

As the analyzed data basically presented implicit metaphors, we have concentrated on them for our discussion.

3. Representations

As well as metaphors, representations (MAGALHÃES, 2003) have been thoroughly studied and researched in the several theoretical frameworks related to teaching and learning. The representation concept considered in this paper is based on social-discursive interactionism, a theoretical frame that understands human actions as products of socialization, which is historically and culturally located (BRONCKART, 1997).

In this theoretical framework, representation is not understood as something fixed, but as something marked by the communication situation in which the human being is inserted, and mediated by language. Thus, different discursive formations constitute the language actions in the human being's interactions with different speakers in distinct contexts. Considering the context of teacher education in this paper, we agree with MAGALHÃES (2003), who understands the representation concept as

> *a chain of meanings constructed in the constant negotiations between the participants of interactions and the understandings, expectations, intentions, values, beliefs, and truths referring to the theories of the physical world: the norms, values and symbols of the social world and the expectations of the agent regarding himself as a subject in a particular context. Representations are always constituted inside socio-historical and cultural contexts and are also related to political, ideological and theoretical matters; therefore, they are related to truths and self-understanding, which determine who has the power to speak on behalf of whom, which discourses are valued and whose interests they serve."* (MAGALHÃES, 2003)

For us, it is important to interpret the teachers' representations about their teaching actions so that we can understand the connections that they establish between the different meanings in their thoughts and those governed by their daily social and cultural situations.

It is interesting to recall what LAKOFF & JOHNSON (1980) state: that the concepts which govern our thoughts are not just related to the intellect, but they also navigate in our daily activities. However, they are not always conscious. Such concepts are materialized through language and we can, in this case, say that the metaphors emerge because representations are present in the conceptual system of each one of us.

4. Theoretical background for the analysis

The fact that we are working within social-discursive interactionism makes us believe that language plays a key role in the understanding of human actions. For this reason, we have analyzed the data according to the theoretical-methodological model proposed by BRONCKART (1997). Among the aspects dealt with by this model, we decided to focus on the thematic content of the

teachers' speech.

The thematic content is visible in the general plan of the text and is characterized by a group of information that emerges from the linguistic choices of the agent-producer. It is important to emphasize that the information contained in the thematic content is based on the representations built by the agent-producer. The thematic content can refer to the representations or to the agent's knowledge that is related to the *objective world* (the state of existent things), to the *social world* (the interpersonal relationships, recognized as valid by the individuals in a cultural context) or to the *subjective world* (the individual's experiences and feelings, revealed to or hidden from other individuals in the community).

As the information belongs to the three worlds, it is available in the agent-producer's memory before he begins the verbal action and it is constituted in agreement with the experiences that the agent-producer have in the *world of life*.

The three worlds mentioned by BRONCKART (1997) offer us roads to identify the representations of the agent-producers. The three worlds can be better understood in the example below, extracted from the speech of a teacher who collaborated in our research:

> *The didactic text* (refers to something in the objective world) *is more adequate to the students' needs* (refers to something based on social norms, that is, to something in the social world), *many times it is more updated, but there are many texts found in textbooks that are good, in my opinion* (refers to personal impressions of the agent-producer that exist in his subjective world).

METHODOLOGY

1. The context

This research is set within a reflective teaching education program which aims at educating state school English teachers so that they become reflective and critical. The objective of the course is to create spaces and situations in which the teachers can think about their actions in order to understand them, never in an isolated way, but always inside the social-political-cultural context in which they are inserted.

Thus, we can say that the focus of the reflection work helps the teacher to find a conscious answer to the question: "what interests do my actions serve?" (MAGALHÃES, 2003).

The teacher education program involves three institutions: Sociedade Brasileira de Cultura Inglesa, a large and non-profit language teaching organization which sponsors the whole program and offers a language improvement course; the Catholic University of São Paulo, where the reflective

course *Reflection on and in Action: The English Teacher Learning and Teaching* is taught; and the State of São Paulo's School System, where the teachers who attend the program work.

2. The data

The data for our study were the answers to a questionnaire that was given to the teachers - from now on teachers-students - on the first class of the course *Reflection on and in Action: The English Teacher Learning and Teaching*. This course lasts 214 hours; it is composed of 12 modules and is taught in three semesters.

For our study, we decided to analyze the answers given by 10 teachers-students out of a group of 36 teacher-students who started the course in February of 2001.

3. The teacher-student

The teachers-students who attend the course *Reflection on and in Action: The English Teacher Learning and Teaching* are all Brazilian State School English teachers. All the participants in this research hold a teaching graduation certificate. Their teaching experience ranges from six to twenty-six years. Most of them have a very heavy teaching load, ranging between twenty and forty teaching hours per week. Their classes are very large (about 40 students in each class).

4. The questionnaire[2]

The questionnaire was composed of fifteen questions and aimed to reveal the teachers-students' views on: their educational background; the role of English teaching in the Brazilian State School System; the relationship between teachers and students; the teachers' reflective process; the textbook and the content of the classes they give (See Appendix).

5. The process of analysis

At first, we looked at the answers given by the teachers in the questionnaire to find explicit metaphors in them. However, we soon realized

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[2] This questionnaire was designed by the teacher educators involved in the course *Reflection on and in Action: The English Teacher Learning and Teaching,* considering the context of the Brazilian State School. The version used for this paper was the one of 2001. The questionnaire has been changed and we have analyzed its reconstruction in Ninin; Hawi; Mello and Damianovic (2005).

that these metaphors were not present in a significant number for our study and we decided to search for implicit metaphors in the teachers' discourse.

We tried to group the data in many different ways, and after we had identified the representations present in the groups, we started to search for metaphorical categories indicating teacher's role.

The procedure that was chosen would also allow us to identify metaphorical categories indicating student's role and activity's role. However, this study focuses only on the metaphorical categories related to teacher's role.

The answers to the questionnaire were analyzed according to the categories proposed by BRONCKART (1997). The table below organizes the way in which we analyzed the data:

What do we want?	What are we going to look for?	Procedure of analysis	Reasons for the choice
• to create metaphorical categories concerning how the teacher-participant sees his own role	• to look for the teachers' representations of teacher's role	• identification of the themes present in the answers to the questions of the questionnaire, by means of the thematic contents	• possibility of identifying the teachers' representations through syntheses
	• to identify metaphors that are implicit in the teachers' answers, regarding teacher's role	investigation of: • verbs, adjectives and nouns; • explicit metaphors present in the thematic contents	• possibility of supporting the representations that were identified

Table 1: Analysing Data

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Perhaps, it is important to say that the metaphors constructed by us are based on the work of MARKGRAF & PAVLIK (1998). In their work, the metaphors of the teaching-learning process in popular film images are presented and they fall within three categories: Teaching as Dogmatic Task Mastering, Teaching as Heroism and Teaching as Intimacy.

The first one involves the teacher as a harborer and disseminator of doctrines and the learner as a passive, humble and empty-ended recipient of ideas. There is an authoritative teacher-learner relationship and the students

are supposed to master the subject as it is understood and conveyed to them by the teacher.

The second one involves the teacher as a role model and a leader who rescues others from danger (in the case of the education scenery, the teacher rescues the students from ignorance and also inspires them to become disciples) as if he had a large mission similar to God's mission. Finally, the third one involves the teacher as a close friend, a mother or a father or, in some cases, a very attractive person who "seduces" the students.

Guided by MARKGRAF and PAVLIK's (1998) three categories, we decided to name our categories according to the data we had and to our teachers-students' culture. That is important to say because for us, none of their three categories applies to the way our teachers-students see themselves. For this reason, we named our five categories as follows: the GATE KEEPER, the PARTNER, the RESEARCHER, the GUIDING STAR and the IF TEACHER.

In order to present parts of the teachers-students' discourse that support the categories created and also to explain the reason why they were created, we decided to draw pictures and charts for each metaphoric representation found in the data.

1. The gate keeper

The traditional teacher metaphor is described in Figure 1. By traditional we mean the type of teachers whose conception of knowledge is related to a package one puts in the other one's mind. We also mean by traditional the teachers who consider that their role is to keep the students quiet and passive so they can absorb all the content the teacher brings to the classroom.

From this image of "tradition" one can notice that the teachers' representations are "To teach, I need to know lots of things to transfer to my students", "I need to be authoritarian" and "I need to put many things into the students' mind".

These three representations are closely related to the teachers' conception of knowledge and of language learning process. Therefore, if they believe knowledge is a package/object to be passed on, they believe they have to study very much because first they have to put things into their own mind in order to have things to pass to the students.

The teachers may also believe they need to be authoritarian because they consider themselves the ones who have the truth the students need to get.

When talking about the metaphor of Teaching as Dogmatic Task Mastering, MARKGRAF & PAVLIK (1998, p. 76) poses "… without teachers, learners posses no "real" knowledge, no capacity for thought, and no propensity for reflection and abstraction".   In our study, the teachers-students feel they have to take many courses, so that a great amount of truths is obtained and passed to the students' mind.
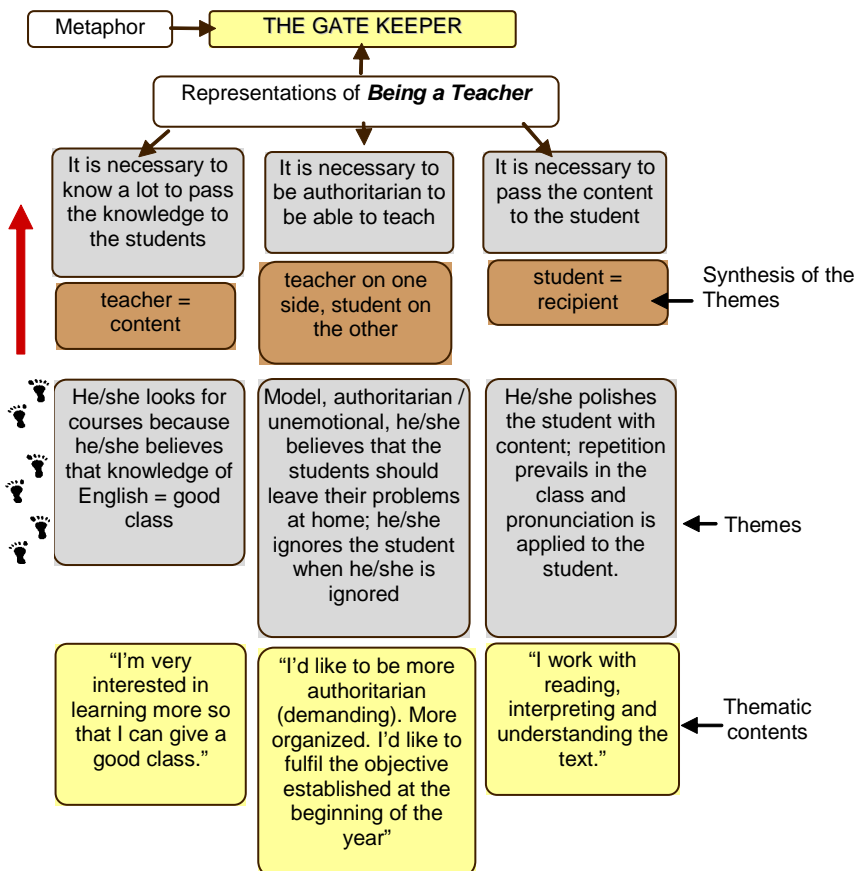
Metaphor	→	THE GATE KEEPER

Representations of ***Being a Teacher***

It is necessary to know a lot to pass the knowledge to the students	It is necessary to be authoritarian to be able to teach	It is necessary to pass the content to the student
teacher = content	teacher on one side, student on the other	student = recipient

Synthesis of the Themes

He/she looks for courses because he/she believes that knowledge of English = good class	Model, authoritarian / unemotional, he/she believes that the students should leave their problems at home; he/she ignores the student when he/she is ignored	He/she polishes the student with content; repetition prevails in the class and pronunciation is applied to the student.

← Themes

"I'm very interested in learning more so that I can give a good class."	"I'd like to be more authoritarian (demanding). More organized. I'd like to fulfil the objective established at the beginning of the year"	"I work with reading, interpreting and understanding the text."

Thematic contents

Figure 1: The Gate Keeper Metaphor

The most important characteristic of this metaphor is the emphasis on the content. However, as described in Figure 2, the way content is described by the teachers follows different directions. In their point of view, content may be grammar, textbook, authentic text, skills and themes connected to the students' reality. However, it is always a teacher-centered approach, since he or she is the one in charge of choosing the "right" direction. We can also see that grammar points and the book are still the most important things in the teachers' practice.
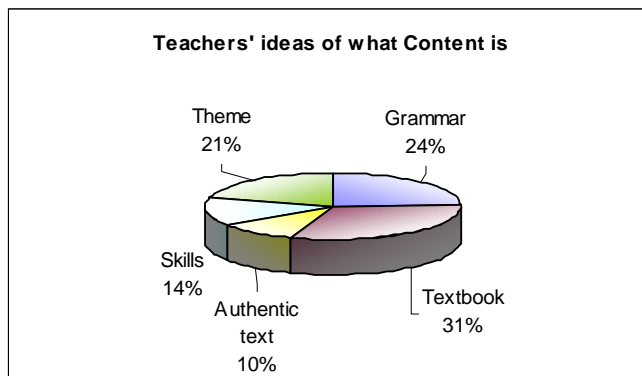
Teachers' ideas of what Content is

Theme 21%
Grammar 24%
Skills 14%
Authentic text 10%
Textbook 31%

Figure 2: Teachers' ideas of what content is

2. The partner

According to the data analysis, we can say that the Partner Teacher considers that his/her role involves having a good affective relationship with his/her students, allowing the emergence of a close relationship by means of behaviors that involve dialog, as well as considering his/her student as an active participant in the teaching-learning process, that is, a voice that must be heard.

The metaphor of the Partner Teacher was considered by us based on the teachers' representations of their own role and of their students' role. The teachers believe that knowledge can only be built in a harmonious atmosphere between students and teacher, and this is the most important characteristic of the Partner Teacher.
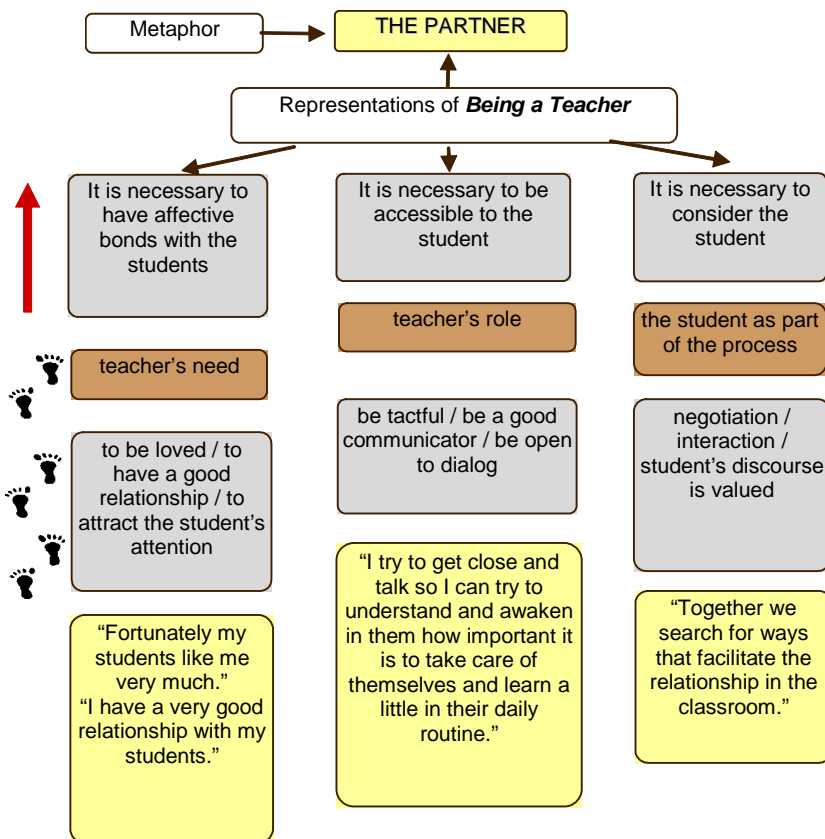
Figure 3: The Partner Metaphor

3. The Researcher

A possible question here would be why we named the metaphor "researcher" if being a researcher is an attitude a teacher should have anyway. We decided to do this because the analysis of the data revealed that the teachers attend courses, seminars and workshops, read books and magazines and talk to colleagues about their jobs. They do these things to become better professionals and that is why we decided to give the name of "researcher" to this attitude of pursuing knowledge.

However, the teachers never mentioned the word "researcher" and we could observe that when they go to the events they mentioned, they look for the results of other people's research. We believe the teachers should and can be real researchers themselves, which means they would start having their own ideas, studying them and creating a new tacit knowledge based on their own findings.

Besides, we believe that if they start having their own ideas, they will become more confident on themselves and less dependent on others' recipes: the right, perfect and ready answers for their difficulties in the classroom. Figure 4 illustrates the researcher metaphor.
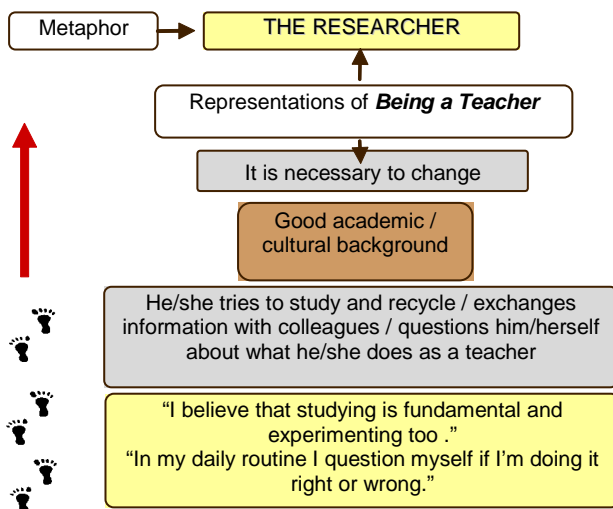

Figure 4: The researcher metaphor

4. The Guiding Star

The guiding star metaphor helps us view a unique quality in the teachers: the image they have of themselves as guiding stars. We believe, and we include ourselves in the statement that follows, that we teachers hope to make a difference in our students' lives. In our study, the teachers mentioned they would like to be the door to their students' future, meaning that the English language would help their students achieve a better future. They also mentioned the wish to be the key to the students fulfillment of their professional goals. Figure 5 pictures the situation:
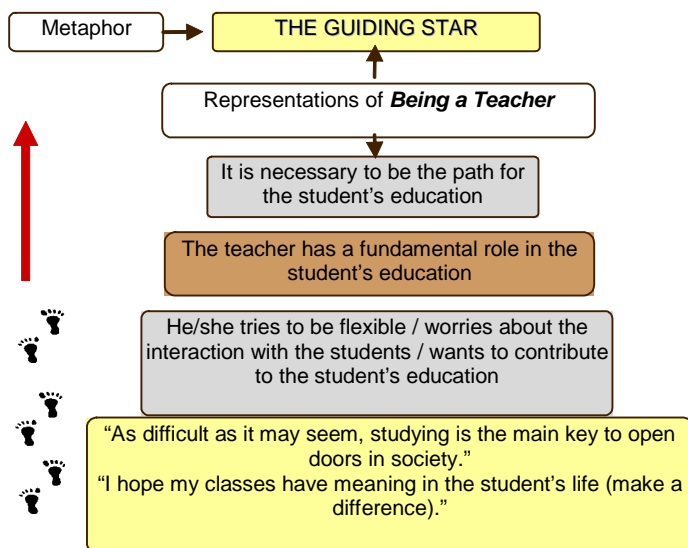
Figure 5: The guiding star metaphor

5. The if teacher

We decided to name the metaphor as the IF TEACHER based on what GRAVES (1996, p. 12-38) says about the "if only syndrome". She explains it by saying that "effecting changes requires both recognizing what can be changed and accepting what cannot. Some examples of the If only... syndrome are: if only we had technology, if only we had quieter classrooms, if only our student were motivated. This syndrome can obstruct change as firmly as the Yes, but... syndrome, for example: yes, but that will never work in my setting."

In our findings, we could observe that the idea present in what the teachers said was "If I had this, I would be able to do that." For this reason, we decided to label our metaphor the IF TEACHER. Some of our examples are: If I could photocopy these activities, I would give better classes. If my students were more polite, I would be able to teach better. If the director were tougher, I would have more silence in the class.

Organizing the data about the if teacher, we could separate the information we had as follows:
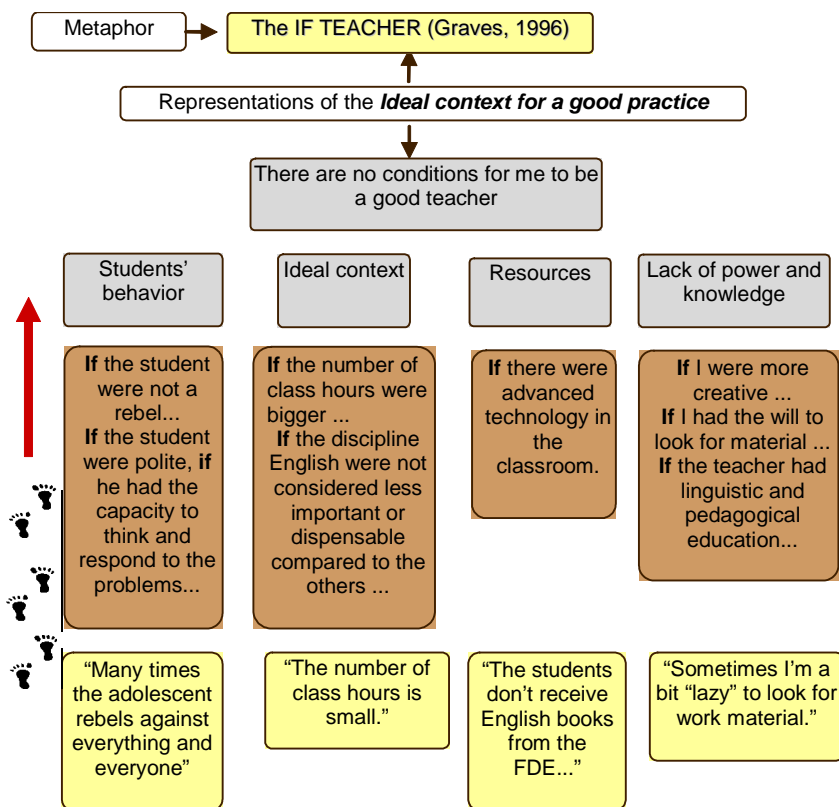
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Metaphor  →  The IF TEACHER (Graves, 1996)
                        ↕
Representations of the *Ideal context for a good practice*
                        ↕
There are no conditions for me to be
          a good teacher
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Students' behavior	Ideal context	Resources	Lack of power and knowledge
If the student were not a rebel... **If** the student were polite, **if** he had the capacity to think and respond to the problems...	**If** the number of class hours were bigger ... **If** the discipline English were not considered less important or dispensable compared to the others ...	**If** there were advanced technology in the classroom.	**If** I were more creative ... **If** I had the will to look for material ... **If** the teacher had linguistic and pedagogical education...
"Many times the adolescent rebels against everything and everyone"	"The number of class hours is small."	"The students don't receive English books from the FDE..."	"Sometimes I'm a bit "lazy" to look for work material."

Figure 6: The If Teacher Metaphor

In general, we can picture the teachers' metaphors of their representations as follows:

The teacher's profile

Guiding star 7%
Researcher 13%
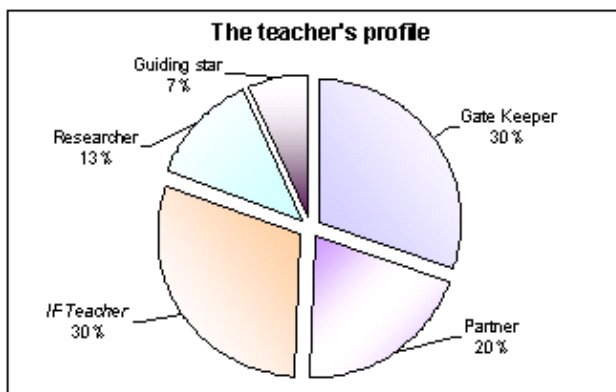IF Teacher 30%
Gate Keeper 30%
Partner 20%

Figure 7: The Teacher's profile

The metaphor mostly present in the teachers's discourse were the Gate Keeper and If Teacher. The least applied was the Guiding star. With this result in mind our final comments are presented.

CONCLUSION

Bearing in mind that "Metaphors lived by teachers, the way they construct their own work and the stories they retell signify more deeply to us about what is happening in their professional lives than any other measurable behavior is able to reveal" (Eisner, 1991), we tried to construct some meaning based on the teachers' metaphors in order to reveal part of the landscape they live in.

Figure 7 shows that teachers are concerned about considering the students as part of the teaching-learning process and about reflecting on their practice. But they also think they must be a package of knowledge and they must make the students become another one; they believe they lack many things to succeed in their teaching movement. As for this last comment, we can reveal part of the teachers' role by taking as point of departure an analysis carried out by MENEGHETTI (2001) when interpreting the entrepreneurs' practice.

According to MENEGHETTI (2001), when entrepreneurs start to reflect on their administrative or financial problems, most of the time they start doing it by analyzing things the government does or does not do. Next, they start complaining about their employees and finally they say they cannot work and make the business improve because they have many problems concerning their families.

When the entrepreneurs make such an analysis they become an object in the situation and are not able to solve the problems themselves. This idea can be seen in the figure below:
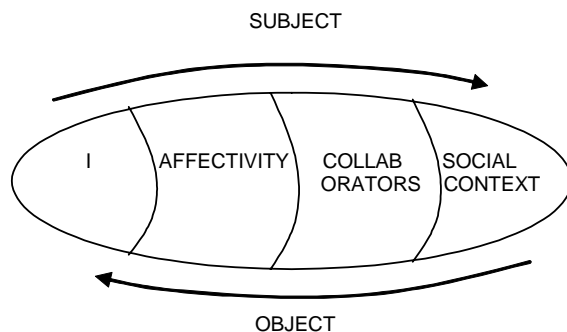
SUBJECT

| I | AFFECTIVITY | COLLAB ORATORS | SOCIAL CONTEXT |

OBJECT

Figure 8: Reflective movement

MENEGHETTI (2001) proposes that the first questions have to be addressed to the entrepreneur and only after solving the problems concerning

him/herself is it possible to go to the other levels. If he/she does so, then he/she becomes the subject of his/her action, which is eventually open to changes.

By using the same criteria, we tried to analyze the teachers taking into account mainly the data from the If teacher metaphor. When the teachers analyze their practice having in mind that the problems they face are related to other people's business, and say "this happens because of the principal, students, government, lack of technology, etc.", they become an object in the action; thus, they are unable to decide and promote changes. This can be seen in the Figure that follows:
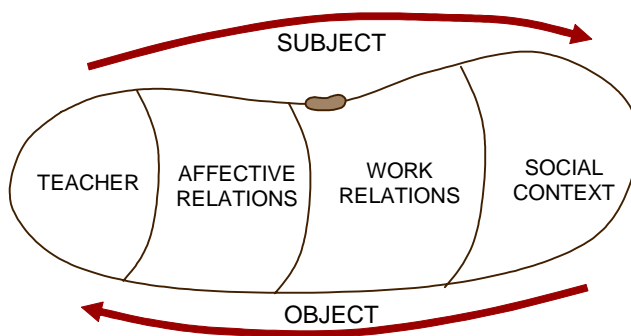
DAMIANOVIC, MELLO, NININ (2002)

Figure 9: Teacher's reflective movement

We would like to end this paper by saying that if the teachers are mostly the GATE KEEPER and the IF TEACHER, it is not their fault. According to MAGALHÃES & CELANI (2000), Brazilian teachers in the late '90s reflect the educational picture of the country in terms of lack of preparation deriving from the type of pre-service courses offered in most universities, the different type of student that they have to deal with, the change in institutional support, etc.

As we finish this work, it seems possible to perceive relevant aspects related to the teachers' education, particularly regarding the course *Reflection on and in Action: The English Teacher Learning and Teaching*.

We could observe that the work we developed enables the teachers-educators to distinguish a new starting point for the reconstruction of their practice, since the knowledge of the representations the teachers-students have of their own roles and of the roles of their students points to specific needs of these teachers. As shown by the figures and charts presented above, these needs are related not only to instructional aspects or knowledge acquisition aspects, but above all, to personal aspects, as these teachers, in this stage of the work, feel they are objects of the educational system.

Thus, teachers-educators will be able to re-establish the routes of the course, emphasizing aspects directly related to the constitution of the social

subject, based on the reflective sessions that take place at the beginning of the course.

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