Dominance Theater, Slam-a-Thon, and Cargo Cults: Three Illustrations of How Using Conceptual Metaphors in Qualitative Research Works

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Although a metaphor is often viewed either as a literary device or as the distinguishing characteristic of figurative language, taking a conceptual view of metaphor enables delving into the research process itself. Specifically, the authors address how a metaphor is both reflexive of a researcher's worldview and potentially generative of new research directions previously unconsidered. To illustrate this, the authors examine three case studies that exemplify how a conceptual metaphor can greatly facilitate the researcher's understanding of an emerging topic and its defining issues. They conclude by suggesting some premises and steps researchers should consider if interested in using conceptual metaphors as an analytic tool.

A metaphor is often viewed either as a literary device or as the distinguishing characteristic of figurative language (Lakoff, 1986a, 1986b). However, a number of linguistics scholars have sketched a broader view of metaphor, one that connects metaphor use to ordinary, everyday language and shows how our thinking is influenced by metaphor use. To distinguish this difference, and after Lakoff (1986a), we refer to this broader interpretation as a "conceptual" view of metaphor. A conceptual view of metaphors highlights how a metaphor can indicate and predict a researcher's thoughts and perceptions, as well as serve a generative or catalytic purpose. We will argue that using a

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conceptual metaphor as a heuristic device can serve as a powerful tool in refinement of the issue being investigated and its analysis.

METAPHOR USE IN QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

Metaphors as literary tools, used to create imagery and generated during the "writing up" phase, are relatively common in qualitative research. However, the issue of how metaphors might be used conceptually during qualitative research has been discussed much less frequently. Vasconcelos (1997) provided two examples in her work, one related to her methodology, the other to her data. She described how Velasquez's painting *Las Meninas*, which depicts a painter within his painting, guided her ethnographic approach. During her interpretative work, this image heightened her sensitivity to the fact she was depicting herself even as she depicted others. In Vasconcelos's research on a master teacher and her kindergarten, she used the metaphor of King Arthur's Round Table to help her explore how the teacher's regular gathering of students around a large table for discussion, planning, and sharing served as a way to build classroom community and share power.

Henri and Hay (1997) also used metaphors as indicators for conceptual schema in their data collection phase. They asked respondents to finish the phrase "a teacher-librarian is like a . . . " and explain what they just wrote. Subsequent content analysis allowed the researchers to identify the root images and understandings their respondents brought to their jobs and use it as a way to understand the structural and cultural barriers inherent in trying to have librarians become teacher-librarians. Similarly, Manning (1979) likened organizational analysis to searching for behavior patterns and structured assumptions. He argued that metaphors could help the researcher in this task because they enable one to see things "as if they were something else" (p. 661).

Oldfather and West (1994) applied a metaphor to the qualitative research process itself. They described how aspects of jazz music and musicianship differ from qualitative research. For them, jazz serves as a rich metaphor for thinking about the nature of qualitative research because of its deft combination of predictable strategies and improvisation.

Turning from educational research for a moment, the social science traditions of anthropology and sociology have long included the practice of using a principal metaphor to develop the analysis. Richardson (1994) described how the social science tradition relies on both literary and conceptual metaphors to communicate. She further pointed out that what social scientists understand theorizing itself is and how they might go about making a contribution to a theory is based on variations of a conceptual metaphor: that theory is a building, that a framework supports reasoning, and that an argument needs to be constructed.

Goffman (1959) provided an excellent example using a conceptual metaphor: He relied on Shakespeare's observation that "all the world's a stage" for the framework of his breakthrough work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Using much the same strategy in *Asylums* (1961), he argued that a number of "total institutions" rely on all-encompassing myths and rituals to carry on. Likewise, Foff-Paules (1991) constructed her ethnography of the work life of waitresses on the multiple meanings afforded by the American colloquialism "dishing it out." She solidified the root metaphor further by using it as the title of the book. Finally, in developing an analysis of public school desegregation as a ritual of healing, LaMagdeleine (1996) mined the metaphoric nuances contained within this long-established anthropological concept. He did so, however, in reapplying those nuances to a context much different than the usual usage of the concept, that of late 20th-century America (1996).

In summary, researchers' data sorting and analysis and how it is aided by the development of a well-chosen metaphor grounded in inductive data collection is well established in the qualitative research traditions of the social sciences (c.f. Becker, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This article contributes to that tradition by describing two defining characteristics of conceptual metaphors and then illustrating how they play out in three different studies. We also provide suggestions to others for how to go about employing conceptual metaphors in inductive qualitative research.

TWO DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

Reflexive of Researcher's Experiences and Worldview

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) described how we store our perceptions, thoughts, and actions as a conceptual system, as well as how metaphoric language is a key tool in expressing that conceptual system. Furthermore, Lakoff (1986b) has demonstrated that although it is often contrasted to literal language, a more accurate definition of metaphor likens it to "a structural mapping from one domain of subject matter (the source domain) to another (the target domain)" (p. 294). He argued that metaphor is not just a figurative expression we choose after we perceive and think about a situation; rather, how we describe some situation or thing indicates how we are viewing it, storing it, and linking it and that this occurs in terms of knowledge we already have. That is, the concepts we already know influence what we will notice in a situation (Lakoff, 1986a; Perrin, 1987), and the metaphor we choose in a situation reveals implicit belief systems (Marshall, 1990; Schon, 1993). Following this interpretation, Perrin (1987) described metaphors as a "mnemonic ves-

tige of prior experiences"; in effect, more a "figure of experience" than a figure of speech (p. 255).

Recognizing that metaphors are an alternative, analogical form of a concept allows us to better appreciate how they store information in a richer way than linear formulations can. Furthermore, it helps us understand how their multiple dimensions are actually better "containers" for storing the richness of experience than are purely rational signs. Moreover, their interconnected layers are linked to an entire system of meaning. These characteristics can be put to research use when enlisted to enrich our own emerging understanding of the key themes documented in the data. For example, if a metaphor is evoked by a set of experiences in the field, an exploration of why the metaphor came to mind and our understanding of its meanings can deepen our realizations of what we are beginning to understand about those encounters.

Put differently, intentionally using a metaphor to mine data forces us to recognize that the metaphor we choose to represent data is illustrating the values, assumptions, and practices that we associate with what we are investigating. By highlighting and providing a structure of certain aspects of our investigation, metaphors communicate our emerging understanding and interpretation of the research. Thus, using metaphors—and thereby acknowledging how we are accessing their ontological and epistemological features as researchers—heightens the researcher's awareness of his or her subjectivity. This outcome is certainly helpful to the research process itself because it forces the researcher to come to terms with personal assumptions that might otherwise color the analysis.

For example, a researcher studying the student subcultures associated with various extracurricular activities might notice and value different activities, roles, and outcomes depending on whether they were formerly a "jock," a member of the theater crowd, an academic club member, or someone who never partook in any extracurricular activities at all. One researcher might see positive group interactions and think of a metaphor such as "family" or "community." To another researcher with negative associations, metaphors such as "gang," "show off," or "group think" might come to mind.

The reflexive character of conceptual metaphors can also produce unsettling moments, particularly if the researcher is uncovering surprising, or even unsettling, dimensions of the place or group being studied. For example, "insider" research—in which the investigator already plays a recognized role within the group being studied—is particularly fraught with the potential for assumption toppling (c.f. Anderson & Herr, 1999; Anderson & Jones, 2000).

Generative of New Lines of Investigation

Some argue that all thought is metaphorical in that we treat the world as if it is a certain way, as viewed through a particular framing or lens (Wheeler,

1987). If so, it becomes possible to purposefully mine a metaphor as a potentially apt analogical package for exploring much of one's data. In this way, the metaphor can serve as a support in the explorations of those similarities, perhaps even generating completely new lines of investigation. Because of its analogical structure, a metaphor can stimulate inferences, perceptions, explanations, or inventions that otherwise might not get made (Schon, 1993). That is, metaphors can handle situations that seem related somehow but for unclear reasons. Hence, we can purposefully use them as catalysts or vehicles for thought and clarification of a topic. A common result is the development of a much deeper understanding of the data along lines that otherwise might seem tangential or perhaps even frivolous.

If a researcher likens organizational life to a well-oiled machine, much as Frederick Taylor did, apparent anomalies like displays of brute grabs for power seem superfluous. For just this reason, they have often been relegated in the literature to the status of anecdotal evidence; a code word in some research circles for blind alleys. If, however, as Douglas (1987) and a number of others have noted (Coser, 1974; Simon, 1976), organizations are held together as much by collective myth and taboos as they are by hardheaded rationality, then a researcher's looking for all sorts of other phenomena makes sense. Such interactions as ritualistic purges or unit lionization/vilification apparently independent of actual performance can materially contribute to, or perhaps even form the centerpiece of, an analysis.

This is why purposeful mapping of a conceptual metaphor onto an investigation can generate new, even novel, directions to explore during data collection and analysis. They do so by guiding the researcher along the logic of the metaphor across more dimensions than might become evident by focusing on what is normally considered the relevant literature. If, for example, the researcher is likening a closed high school campus to an asylum, such as Goffman (1961) suggested in *Asylums*, she or he might begin to look for quasi-asylum activities (e.g., hall monitors and difficult to obtain passes) or technologies (e.g., weapons detectors) that total institutions often share. The result, a study that looks into nooks and crannies often far removed from the research literature on the topic of high school as treated in the commonly defined relevant literature, might be particularly insightful in examining the situations of students who do not fit in.

These directions would have become analytically interesting for the researcher as a direct result of the asylum metaphor's capacity for inferring associations other than those with which the researcher began. In effect, the metaphor could help to problematize previously taken-for-granted practices and beliefs that dictate most of what happens in schools or any other enduring organization. This is no small feat. On the contrary, we think that using metaphors in this way is a very effective method for assisting researchers who are intimately familiar with the setting under investigation to defamiliarize themselves enough to see previously unexamined patterns.

However, we must mention one caveat. Metaphors' nonlinearity is, of course, their most defining characteristic. Using them as we are describing lends a degree of unpredictability to the research process that is simultaneously daunting and exhilarating. Although most qualitative research traditions espouse inductive analysis, we think it is more often honored in the breach. The use of conceptual metaphors, however, renders the research process truly jazzlike. The research begins with some basic chords and a provisional rhythm, but the rest is improvisation based on how the other data "plays." The investigation goes where the fusion of metaphoric nuance and data occurs. Here we should note that we have basically paraphrased the somewhat tongue-in-cheek comments along these lines made almost a decade ago by Becker (1990), an eminent sociologist and ex-jazz musician. We think some of the jazzlike character of this process is demonstrated in the following section.

DATA AND METHOD

We used three sources of data for this article. First, we conducted semistructured interviews with two recently minted doctoral students (Tom and Jim) who used conceptual metaphors in their dissertation research. In addition, the second author (Don) interviewed the first author (Sara), who also used a primary metaphor to guide her dissertation research. Don served as the dissertation committee chair for all three of these studies. His experiences and recollections of these authors' dissertation experiences are another source of data. Finally, the completed dissertations themselves serve as a third data source.

The interviews were transcribed. We analyzed them with a coding scheme loosely developed from the provisional theoretical framework with which we started. We then refined and clarified our understanding of the two characteristics described above and started another iteration of analyzing the dissertation authors' experiences with metaphor while doing the research. In combination, the interviews and written data illustrate the impact of conceptual metaphors on both the process and product of qualitative research.

We selected these three studies because we think each author's experience illustrates a characteristic of conceptual metaphors as research tools. Each of the first two cases illustrates one of the two characteristics and how metaphors can assist the research. The third departs from this pattern somewhat. We use this third case to show how the two characteristics discussed—metaphors' reflexive and generative qualities—can be explored together to refine the logic of the analysis. Because Don served as the dissertation chair for all three cases, was involved in the metaphor development for each, and oversaw its use as an analytic tool, he serves as the first-person voice for the first two cases we present here. Sara presents the third (her own) case.

DISCUSSION

To help illustrate how metaphors are both reflexive and generative and that their selection and usefulness has much to do with the researcher, we begin by briefly describing the author and how she or he began the process of defining a research topic. Because the focus here is on the aid the metaphor provided these authors during research and not on their findings, we then include just a quick overview of the eventual study's content. The focus of our analysis immediately follows each case description. There we analyze how the core metaphor influenced the researcher's conceptual and investigative processes.

Metaphor as Reflexive of Researcher's Experiences and Worldview

Tom, the author of the first study (McCarthy, 1997), is a community college professor of communications. He has also been a longtime theater buff, active as both actor and director. His research topic concerned the dynamics of bullying behavior as incorporated within the context of K-12 education. One of the initial triggers for his interest in the topic was a series of very interesting responses to a subject he asked students to write on in one of his classes. The assignment was to describe an instance in which the author had felt like a victim.

Although the "victim" topic was only one of many the students could select to complete for the assignment, Tom told me (LaMagdeleine) he was always surprised how many chose it. He was also intrigued by the amount of passion they showed in their writing. He consulted with me while selecting a topic and preliminarily decided to examine the role of victim, hoping to construct a methodology that would enable him to continue to focus on mature adults' experiences. The more he looked into the topic, however, the more it became clear to both of us that examining the victim's experience alone was tantamount to observing only one side of a seesaw. The bullies all attained their status in tandem with some victim; someone they successfully defined in that way. Somehow the victims all felt trapped by this casting, as if powerless to redefine things. This discovery stumped us for quite a while. Although it was obvious that Tom should not broaden the focus of the study needlessly, he also now knew that he needed to capture both sides of the victim-bully dynamic.

Tom's breakthrough came one day at the end of a class session of my research analysis course. I had been working with the members of the class to unearth the symbolism hidden in their data. Tom grabbed me when class was breaking up. He was quite perplexed because he could not seem to create a way to capture the relationship between bullies and their victims that his data

were illustrating. We talked at the back of the room, sketching and jotting at the blackboard. In his interview, Tom recalled how one key phrase that emerged was the genesis of the key metaphor in his dissertation:

> I remember the day when it all came together. I remember that we were in the back of the room, and we were at the blackboard. I can remember that you were talking about cats playing, something you'd read about how cats play by fighting one another. It is their way of learning [their roles with each other]. I don't know how the phrase came up, but it was "Dominance Theater." I don't know . . . it just stuck. That was the idea, that you could see this [victim-bully relationship] as kind of an audience-centered thing.

What I saw "stick" for Tom was the juxtaposition of Gregory Bateson's early research on how animals often playfully fight with the basic theatrical notion of staging. In addition, I had been directing him to read about the dynamics of secular rituals. Once he saw how to combine the kinds of social theory he had been reading—most of which concerned the relationship between rituals and their social contexts—with the kind of everyday rough-and-tumble that can easily turn into a traumatic experience of victimization, Tom suddenly felt unblocked. He began writing; so much so that he became infamous among other students for the alacrity—and apparent ease—with which he wrote his dissertation.

Implications for Case Development

Tom's research experience is an excellent example of how the right metaphor can provide an indicative moment—an "ah ha"—that suddenly illuminates a puzzle by pointing to its association with something familiar yet evocative. I saw when he fit the victim-bully relationship within the context of the theater he was instantly able to resolve what had been his most difficult conceptual dilemma. The metaphor resonated with his background and interests so well that he was almost immediately able to recognize how each incidence of victimization in his data was structured as a performance intended for an audience of the bully's choice.

> Yes, I definitely think I brought [susceptibility for the metaphor] with me. I guess I would say that the whole idea of "metaphor" is that half of it is already inside you, and it's what you connect it [to the research topic] with. For a metaphor to work there has got to be something there already. If you're comparing the known to the unknown, something has to be known first. . . . I've always had this "double field" [set of interests] because I teach speech but I DO theater outside of my academic job.

Tom explained that he found the theater aspect of the metaphor helpful not only because he was so familiar with theater but also because it squared

with how he saw all social interactions as connected to their social context. He recognized this one day in particular when another student—a practicing psychologist—cut short his contribution to the "fish bowl" exercise in my research analysis class, in which he later had the epiphany about dominance theater. Tom had been sharing some data about the bullying that an interviewee had been subjected to when she rode the bus to high school years ago. She reported that all the kids sitting alone in seats would move to the aisle side as soon as she entered the bus so she could not sit down. Meanwhile, her bully would loudly yell a nickname he had given her. She was humiliated on a daily basis in this way.

Tom recounted in the interview that the psychologist's reaction was "well, why didn't she just tell them to move over?" He recalled that it was then that he realized he could not just conceive of bullying as pure victimization because he did not think of humans' experiences as removed from their social setting. It also involved others in collusion with the bully, even if only as willing audience (or an active one, as in this instance). The victim could not just resolve the situation in isolation because it was inherently social.

> It was bugging me because she [the psychologist] was so unsympathetic to this poor girl, saying it was all her fault [that she didn't get the kids to move over]. . . . First of all, I thought about how personally I take more of a sociological perspective about things than a psychological one. . . . It really made me realize how first of all I look at the event in the context as what drives us and motivates us more than the individuals operating within it. . . . The other major aspect [of understanding that bus incident] was all the other kids contributed to that, they actually participated in the bullying itself, not just watching it but also actually being a part of it. . . . So that was one of the biggest intellectual "aha's" was that piece. We had just done that in class and when we [Don and I] went to the back of the room after class and were talking about the idea that they're doing this as a way of establishing hierarchy, of showing dominance and finding the leader of the pack sort of thing. That is when that phrase "dominance theater" came up.

The metaphoric phrase "dominance theater" had allowed Tom to access his identity as a director, something he both understands well and treasures. This view was also congruent with his view of human interaction in general, that it was conducted within a staged set, the roles generally clear. The metaphor made Tom question two assumptions he held during his early data collection and analysis. The first was his definition of bully as a static identity, a view he had been seduced into while reading the heavily psychological trait theories that underpin most of the existing literature on the topic. Second, he had accepted the everyday assumption that a school bus's potential uses are limited to transportation. What he discovered was that a bus can also serve as a forum for staged debasement. The metaphor certainly helped him with his data analysis, but it also communicated a fair amount about him, indicating how he saw the world.

Metaphor as Generative Engine for Exploring Themes

Jim, the author of the second case we will discuss (Lee, 1993), had a background much different than Tom's. At the time of his dissertation work with me, he was a school business officer of one of the largest districts in the state and a former secondary computer teacher. Earlier in his past, he has also been a teacher union president and small-town basketball star. I would characterize him as a very unassuming but reflective educator. At the point described here in his dissertation research, he had just sold off his successful bee-keeping hobby business to begin another as a used bookstore owner.

When I became his chair, what Jim originally thought he wanted to do with his dissertation research was develop the foundations for a "magic bullet" district budget finance model. He described to me the appeal of the exactitude of his job: its reliance on numbers and the straightforward, rule-bound calculation required by the state's rules for computing student funding. Moreover, he considered his orientation toward his job a highly educative, rather than corporate, one. Whenever he had the chance, he would stress the importance of planning with the education of children foremost. By all accounts, Jim is a straight shooter, the kind of financial expert you would feel very comfortable advising you on your personal finances.

Despite his preference for a rational approach to the budget process, he was feeling battered in the series of mandated district budget meetings that especially heated up in association with the legislature's biennial educational funding bill. He badly wanted to construct the "perfect" budget model—one that no one could argue against because of its mix of simplicity and unassailable logic. However, with my encouragement, he was coming to see that the model was not the key issue in his budget conflicts. The specter of higher taxes and an inscrutable state funding formula were. Still, Jim could not understand how it is that although a business manager's job is ostensibly about straightforward budget management, he kept serving as a bull's eye for local public ambushes. A metaphor helped him to conceptualize these negative experiences in a new way, and this eventually became his topic of study.

One day, we were having lunch in a local restaurant. I do not remember why, but suddenly the conversation moved from finances to the wide world of wrestling. In the interview for this article, Jim recalled that moment for us and why the wrestling metaphor captivated him:

> I actually know exactly where it happened. We were in [a local restaurant] having lunch and . . . Don said something about professional wresting, which I knew nothing about so I thought, "Well, there might be something about wrestling." . . . Wrestling [concerns] struggle and, essentially, winning. But then if you look at professional wrestling, it has an aura of maybe something being faked, or something being acted, or posturing. . . . The real issues [in district finance conflicts] I felt, and still feel, are about struggle and emotions, certainly something

> like wrestling or grappling. Someone's always trying to get hold of something that is slipping away. And then [there's the chance that] the thing might just really be a game.

Implications for Case Development

Jim was obviously intrigued by the wrestling metaphor. He began to look for aspects of the biennial budget-planning cycle that contained an element that he had previously been unaware of, or perhaps epistemologically blinded from. The missing element he eventually described as programmed conflict, which he discovered occurred in various ways depending on the stage of the budget process and the audience. His dissertation cogently argued that the budget process—most steps of which are closely constrained by either state statute or collective bargaining agreements—consists of a series of "contests." These struggles figuratively "match" various district officers such as the finance officer (but also the superintendent and/or board members) against a series of changing opponents before varied audiences.

Jim's original yearning to create the unassailable budget model became his opening data chapter, in which he presented ethnographic notes on himself as the pin-striped business officer whose numerous slides and studied presentation are jettisoned in the opening minutes as angry taxpayers protest the state-mandated tax increase. He outlined three other major contests that together constitute the budget cycle "Slam-a-Thon." In each case, he was able to document the opposing sides and the audience, in addition to how each side tried to curry the favor of the local newspaper editor. He also identified a "tag team" aspect of the opening "truth and taxation" hearing, in which various officers take turns facing the wrath of irate taxpayers.

> Looking at the dissertation in that [wrestling] context, it became easier to break it down into chapters. There were events—excuse me, matches [that occurred]. One match might be the truth and taxation hearing. How do you make it through there when taxes are going up and you have this complex system that you just can't explain, and finally you figure out that most people are just mad because their "damn taxes" are going up. . . . I thought people wanted to hear about school district budgets, and how we were responsibly spending their money, and so on. Well, they were just pissed because their tax statement was high. So I had been overfocusing on [the technical matter of the budget].

I would like to note that the professional wrestling metaphor was not indicative of Jim's outlook on his work; in fact, Jim is now a much-respected superintendent known for his insistence on inclusive decisions. During his interview with us, he recounted how he would have preferred an agricultural metaphor: "The whole idea of farming and agriculture and so on probably contains something that is more of a true feeling for me because it is about growing and planting seeds." What the global metaphor of professional

wrestling provided for him was an avenue for seeing K-12 budget-setting processes—whose dynamics within the arena of recent American politics embody the premise of doing ever more with fewer resources—in an unfamiliar but sense-making way. He could look for orchestrated conflicts where he had once seen only mystifying breakdowns of rationality. He sought and found grapplers and audience members, but he also discovered orchestrators for many of the events. Topping the list of the latter group, and tantamount to match promoters, was the state legislature itself. Much of Jim's dissertation's implications chapter discussed that very point.

Metaphor Mapping to Clarify the Analysis

We now shift to Sara's point of view, in the dual roles of first author and dissertation writer (Dexter, 1997).

At the time of my dissertation work, I was a former secondary science teacher. About 1 year prior, I had taken a new job as the sole technology integration specialist for a district about to embark on a major technology infusion initiative. I decided to make my district's technology initiative the subject of my study.

Almost as a requirement of my new job, I had become a strong proponent of the initiative. I had done a lot of reading on the use of computers in instruction and used them in support of instruction and felt I knew what could, and should, happen once the computers were placed in classrooms. However, as my dissertation research got fully under way, I increasingly discovered problems in the implementation process. I also discovered that the principals in the buildings I was studying did not seem to know much about the overall instructional goals for the new technology nor did they find it easy to ensure that the teachers would be adequately familiarized with how to best use it. Because budget cuts had curtailed the level of technical support available and schools were given limited funds for the new training needs, only teachers who were highly motivated or already knowledgeable were taking interest in using the new hardware and software. However, to do so, they were obliged to unbox and set up the computers themselves and then do the same for other teachers who were less technologically capable than they were.

I became increasingly frustrated and then alarmed because I had lost a conceptual handle in the ongoing research. It did not look like I could study my original topic of how teachers integrate new tools into their mental models of effective instruction, and I was not sure what else the study could be. In a meeting with Don, I lamented that I was not going to have any data at all because of all the things that were not happening according to the implementation plan. Don then commented that this pattern reminded him a bit of a cargo cult.

His familiarity with the term was out of the anthropology literature where it was coined to describe the myths and rituals some 20th-century South Seas Islanders developed after being visited by European cargo ships or planes. For the islanders, most of who had little knowledge of the West or its manufacturing capability or technology, such visits were times of excitement with apparent windfalls of goods. Anthropologists characterized the goods as of questionable value in the Islanders' day-to-day lifestyle, but, nonetheless, they were highly desired for their exotic appeal. In some places, cultlike behaviors began to surface in which members would try to evoke the next ship or plane with ritual acts (for example, by building an ersatz "landing strip" in the middle of nowhere).

Implications for Case Development

What Don explained was that some of the initial administrative decisions made in the district's technology infusion reminded him of cargo cult behavior because they seemed only slightly more grounded in the specifics of getting any innovation fully implemented and accepted. The administrators just seemed to assume that new technology would make the district better. I had not heard the term before, so I listened to his brief explanation of it and went to the library and began digging. I did a thorough search in which I mostly came across the more millenarian-like connotations associated with cargo cults (i.e., that when the gods delivered these goods it would bring a better world for the Islanders, even though the Islanders knew of no real use for the cargo items). Although the general cargo cult pattern of a lack of a poor, or even nonexistent, implementation plan seemed to fit my data, I disliked other parts of the literature's depiction of cargo cults. My discomfort with the paternalistic assumptions of cargo cults and how indigenous cult members were portrayed as irrational, or even mad, came across clearly when Don interviewed me for this article.

> I got a couple of articles [on cargo cults]. I think the first ones I encountered went at the millenarian angle. I read that stuff and thought, "No, I just don't see that." It was so disrespectful, in a way. It casts the people who want the cargo as so ignorant of what is going on. That just didn't sit right with me. I saw larger forces out of their [the actors', or in this case, the teachers'] control impacting them.

But because parts of the cargo cult story line did seem to apply to the case (for example, that there was seemingly a desire for equipment but not as much detail about what to do with it), I continued to investigate the cargo cult phenomenon:

> Mapping it [the district correlates of the metaphor's components] out, like in memos to myself, really helped me. I was checking out if it would work as the metaphor but that also helped me think about it. Like, a key premise of the cargo

> cult is [the issue of] why they want the cargo and what they think it's going to bring, what it's symbolic of. That made me think about why is [the district] interested in technology? What do they think it's for? . . . So, it was helpful in getting me to explore what was going on by teasing out the metaphor line by line.

In digging around for further interpretations of the term—ones that might allow me to capture the rational, even intelligent, actors being swamped in the technology implementation messiness as well as those who seemed to be causing the messiness—I learned that the term had undergone a postmodern deconstruction just like a lot of other social science premises in recent years. The deconstructed interpretation construed the actors to be depicted as smart victims of a flawed system; they knew why they desired the goods (cargo) but were unsure how to obtain them. The cult leader was to have the secret to the cargo yet he employed only the traditional means—in the case of the Islanders, these were rituals to their gods—despite desiring new, never before seen ends. The interview for this article pushed me to deeper metacognition about this version of the metaphor, with its emphasis on the means to the end and how the leader chooses them, and how the metaphor had helped me in my investigation and analysis:

> It [the deconstructed interpretation] worked with what I was realizing was more and more the issue, which was the role that leaders play in all of this. The individuals [teachers] aren't going to fabricate out of nowhere, without impetus, the notion that "Oh, this [technology] could open up my instructional world." It would be silly [to assume] that they would come to that conclusion completely on their own. So, who is supposed to [enable] that for them? How about the people that don't have to teach all day, who DO have time to think about these things, who have it cast as part of their jobs, who have RESONSIBILITY for the millions of dollars that were spent? So that [new version of the metaphor] was compatible for me. Those two ideas [that teachers could be unaware of how to implement technology but were not incompetent because of this] could fit together inside the same metaphor. A cargo cult was where people were going to look at a situation with what they've got [e.g., processes, concepts, and knowledge]. You can't blame them for not having more than what they've got to go on unless there's some sort of mediation that occurs. Individuals are not in charge of making their own mediation occur. . . . Someone is supposed to help them see it.

I eventually crafted the dissertation as a study of the implementation of an innovation and how the district leaders' failure to provide effective communication and training severely curtailed how much the teachers could learn about, and integrate, the technology. I concluded that the only option the leaders left the teachers was participation in a cargo cult that only dimly approximated what might have been.

My investigation of this metaphor during the research is an example of the generative "boost" conceptual metaphors can provide during analysis. Where Don saw a classic Eurocentric version of a cargo cult, I could not. Mapping the characteristics of the metaphor, particularly the more recent (postmodern) explanation of cargo cults, out onto my data helped me to rec-

ognize and explain why not. Overall, exploring the metaphor's nuances in both a reflexive and generative way helped clarify my empathy for the teachers I encountered in the school sites. It also helped me to surface my expectations of what was reasonable for anyone to expect from any specific actor during implementation, particularly what I expected of the various district administrators who were involved in it.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

As illustrated through these three examples, when capturing the analogical potential of qualitative data, metaphors can play a major role in clarifying research directions. They can fine-tune or create inferences, insights, and hunches not commonly associated with "the topic" as it is treated in most research literature. All of these effects are especially key when someone is studying a familiar group or social phenomenon, an increasingly common occurrence in many professional fields (for instance, education and nursing).

It is important to recognize, however, that just as metaphors can without parallel illuminate some features of emerging data, there is also a potential downside to relying heavily on them. Precisely because they so effectively capture our imaginations, conceptual metaphors can narrow our perceptions by leading us along the story line of the metaphor whether or not it is entirely appropriate to the analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Put slightly differently, once we identify a metaphor, it can narrow our thinking and keep us from considering rival explanations (Perrin, 1987). Paradoxically, this potential problem is a direct consequence of conceptual metaphors' tremendous ability to embody the complexities of a researcher's previous experiences and spawn new insight. In short, using a conceptual metaphor as a lodestar during the research process must be handled as if one is working with any powerful tool: with respect and caution.

To minimize the potential risk of conceptually "cooking the analysis" when using conceptual metaphors, a researcher should use a variation on the traditional mode of triangulating various types of data to strengthen confidence in the trends being uncovered and to constantly seek for specific examples of the metaphor in the data. One ought to constantly return to the data previously collected to check for misinterpretations and further illustrations of the types of interaction getting highlighted under the guidance of the metaphor. Thus, using such metaphors means keeping the timeline and parameters of data collection very open. As ambiguities in previously interpreted data emerge, or new lines of investigation become clear, the researcher has to be willing to go with the new lead. This is true even if it means a new series of observations or interviews.

Such open-endedness is, of course, not uniquely required of qualitative researchers using conceptual metaphors. Such assumptions should be intrin-

sic to all qualitative research because of its inherently inductive character. Perhaps it is more correct, then, to state that a sense of open-endedness is even more important when using the method we are proposing. For example, as was the case with Sara, the researcher may need to tease out some very specific types of definitional issues to see if the root metaphor works. Clarifying these issues requires the willingness to look at old data with different questions. It may require a new line of analysis that distinguishes actors in ways not previously considered, even a new type of data heretofore seemingly irrelevant.

Toward the goal of heightened powers of discrimination available to the researcher, we echo Bogdan and Biklen (1992) in their recommendation of frequent usage of "observer's comments." Although the tactic of noting the researcher's associations and questions is standard practice in qualitative research—particularly in preparing field notes—we are underscoring its importance in all aspects of the research process, including the construction of interview transcriptions and unobtrusively gathered data. Such comments are not only helpful in clarifying the researcher's assumptions at a particular point in time but also often provide another data point for analysis in themselves.

Our last set of observations concerning the implications of the approach we have presented here focuses on the importance of the researcher's engaging in dialogue with others during the research process. Dialogue in qualitative research is a topic usually limited to methods courses' discussions about the desirability of sharing transcripts, and perhaps codrafting the analysis, with those studied. We certainly do not disagree with these premises but are addressing something quite different.

In all three of the cases we discussed here, the researcher hit on the guiding metaphor during conversation about the research with an interested Other (in this case, Don, in the role of dissertation chair), who was knowledgeable about the inductive nature of qualitative research. This is noteworthy because until the metaphor was suggested, these researchers were stumped, or at least thoroughly frustrated, about how to make sense of their data. This kind of researcher anxiety is attendant to the ambiguity of qualitative research and is a standard component of the literature on it. The fact that the ambiguity is probably best resolved in dialogue with someone else, however, is not often mentioned.

We think that conceptual metaphors can facilitate dialogue if the metaphor selected is "big" or evocative enough. That is, if the metaphor represents a whole concept, an activity, a relationship, or an enterprise with sufficient complexity, it can raise the discussion to the abstract level and perhaps "unstick" the researchers' thinking, as happened in the cases we discussed here. In addition, using conceptual metaphors virtually requires such dialogic moments because of their inherent multidimensionality. Because they can be interpreted in multiple ways, holding conversations with people

of various backgrounds about a conceptual metaphor becomes a good way to quickly generate alternative avenues of thought. This is particularly true if the researcher is operating in a familiar site. Then she or he might be the last person capable of "unhooking" from the data enough to generate some divergent thinking about it. That is why we recommend that every qualitative researcher establish an ongoing pattern of conversations with someone not directly related to the data collection or topic under study.

However, such dialogic activity, although a good start, is probably insufficient. We are also making a somewhat more controversial suggestion. We think the researcher should engage in dialogue about emerging data with someone who knows only tangentially about her or his topic, or perhaps is even predisposed toward downright skepticism about it. Furthermore, she or he should encourage the interlocutor to pose alternative interpretations and metaphors, whatever strikes her or him as the researcher describes what has been uncovered so far. Our thinking regarding this step reflects the considerable extent to which a qualitative researcher is influenced by her or his previous experiences, personal investments, and epistemologies. Often what is required to develop enough distance to see something else is somebody there who asks hard questions and demands that the answers resonate with the most telling elements within the data.

We are advocating, then, for clearly identified discussions with a consistent interlocutor who has been encouraged to "keep us honest" as researchers. Put another way, the dialogic Other is an important resource whose activities as sounding board enable the researcher to maintain perceptual and analytic flexibility.

Perhaps a bit more elaboration is helpful here. When Don noticed that the lunch discussion with Jim had turned to wrestling, and that Jim seemed both curious and repelled by the apparent similarities between it and finance squabbles, his ears perked up. He guessed that the notion was probably repugnant to how Jim worked; hence, it was one that he would probably never pursue on his own. Ditto with Sara's case. Don knew that she had been working to promote "best practices in technology usage" among teachers and that she was a strong supporter of the new technology initiative. So Don purposely mentioned the totally alternative perspective of cargo cult for Sara's consideration.

This brings us to another suggestion for qualitative researchers who would like to mine the considerable potential of conceptual metaphors. Seek out someone different (in the postmodern sense) from yourself for this dialogue. Because metaphors are so context dependent and multidimensional, and because using them as analytic tools is so jazzlike, the Other in the conversation needs to have a serviceable array of experiences, literatures, and, most important, metaphors at hand. For instance, a potential Other's background of formal education in the humanities is an especially big advantage because of these disciplines' innate appreciation for symbolic discourse. This

is not to suggest that a scientific or a business background is not also potentially helpful in the Other. We also include under the canopy of "difference" every other variety usually mentioned in literature on multiculturalism or postmodernism. A researcher's ongoing discussions with someone who is not of the same gender, sexual preference, race, class, profession, or national identity will be potentially richer to the extent that such characteristics are not shared with the partner in dialogue.

As with life, so with qualitative research that intentionally enlists conceptual metaphors during the research process: Be sure you take a buddy, preferably a playful, broadly experienced one. Then *pay attention*.

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