Social Media in Pedagogical Context: A Study on a Finnish and a Greek Teacher’s Metaphors

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ABSTRACT

This study discusses the meanings underlying a Finnish and a Greek language teacher’s pedagogical integration of social media. As the research spans across the physical and the virtual pedagogical meeting, our review of the literature is also based on a two-level approach. The first level links metaphor with the pedagogical thinking, being the set of values and purposes underlying teachers’ decisions. The second examines the meanings of the digital deriving from arguments that seek to explain the relationship between pedagogy and technology. In this study the authors view metaphors as research vehicles and apply content analysis to draw upon the Finnish and the Greek language teacher’s speech and make their meanings visible. To this end, the authors analyze and discuss findings of data resulting from two semi-structured interviews. The patterns arising from the discussion of digitally enhanced learning experiences indicate that metaphors can be shared, reflecting overlaps in notional categories (e.g., sociality and action). More powerful metaphors relate to context-dependent situations. These powerful metaphors emerge when issues characterizing the local school culture are tackled in the teachers’ talk.

Keywords: Metaphor, Pedagogical Integration, Social Media, Teachers, Teachers’ Speech

INTRODUCTION

In the educational domain, the ability to network permits a shift in perspective when social media environments are integrated into the teaching-studying-learning (TSL) process. According to Uljens (1997, p. 250), the TSL process is

DOI: 10.4018/ijopcd.2014040101
ence teachers’ understanding of aspects of their work: the ways teachers plan pedagogical action; how they act; how they reflect upon that activity; and how they work and make decisions jointly with colleagues and students.

The dynamics of the integration of social networking tools for pedagogical purposes mobilizes the social aspect of teacher personality and transforms professional identity. To track these changes researchers need to shift towards analytical tools based upon a socially grounded approach to cognition (Barsalou, 2008). This encourages an expansion in theorizing connections between the mind and discourse activity. In this way, research centered upon analytical tools, such as the practical argument (e.g., Vesterinen et al., 2010) that unveils the underlying reasoning of action- and moral-related decision-making of teachers, can be expanded.

Research targeting teachers’ pedagogical thinking (e.g., Kansanen et al., 2000) has been an asset for the development of Finland’s secondary educational system. Insights from such endeavors have resulted in a deeper understanding of practices and the design of teacher education and training programs aiming to sustain professional growth. In order to enhance these dynamic developmental processes, however, research in teacher education needs to be enriched with approaches that broaden the domain perspective.

In this article, we apply metaphor and content analysis to the dataset resulting from the semi-structured interviews of a Finnish and a Greek language teacher. We do so in order to draw upon the teachers’ discourse activity (Cameron et al., 2010b). Through the analysis of the teachers’ speech, we aim to identify and interpret the metaphors underlying the integration of social networking technologies for pedagogical purposes. Considering the patterns that arise during the analysis process, we group the metaphors in semantic categories. Overall, these reflect shared and context-dependent metaphors.

The study spans across both the physical space of the pedagogical meeting (i.e., where students’ and teachers’ intentions meet), and the virtual space of the digital learning experience. In other words, the teachers’ speech, being the expression of their pedagogical thinking, focuses on situations where learning activities in the conventional classroom environment blend with learning activities performed in social networking environments. Within this framework, the teachers’ metaphors as ‘extensions of meaning’ (Ricoeur, 1976) emerge. According to the Ricoeurian theory (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 50), metaphorical interpretation requires a kind of stretch, a transformation of the literal in order to make sense.

To further clarify the conceptual bases of our research, below we discuss the relevant literature in relation to the aims and purposes of the study.

TEACHERS’ METAPHORS IN CONTEXT

Metaphor in the Pedagogical

Being in a process of continuous decision-making (Kynäslahti et al., 2006, p. 252), teachers integrate digital environments to enhance teaching, studying and learning. Pedagogical decisions are based upon the teacher’s own personal belief system and reflect the intuitive and the rational bases upon which the individual structures a decision, justifies and warrants that decision. The intuitive basis refers to the individual’s own experiences and may be founded on personal needs or tradition. The rational basis includes principles, research findings, scholarly contributions, and examined practices. It may quite easily be broadened into a more detailed structure in which there is interaction between the bases and where the reasons given consist of common elements from both. Justification and argumentation for pedagogical decisions
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