CHAPTER 21

LINKING THE THREADS: CREATING CLEARER CONNECTIONS

Lindy Abawi

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia

Address: Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland, West Street,

Toowoomba, Queensland 4350, Australia

Telephone: +61 7 4631 1680

Fax: +61 7 46312828

Email: lindy-anne.abawi@usq.edu.au

Joan M. Conway

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia

Address: Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland, West Street,

Toowoomba, Queensland 4350, Australia

Telephone: +61 7 4631 2350

Fax: +61 7 46312828

Email: joan.conway@usq.edu.au

Robyn Henderson

University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia

Address: Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland, West Street,

Toowoomba, Queensland 4350, Australia

Telephone: +61 7 4631 2692

Fax: +61 7 46312828

Email: robyn.henderson@usq.edu.au

INTRODUCTION

Creating connections in teaching and learning is both what we do as educators and what we aspire to do. The chapters of *Creating connections in teaching and learning* have shown many profound and creative ways in which authors/educators have attempted to do just this, across diverse landscapes and with varying degrees of success. The range of research findings and conclusions emit a cross-chapter resonance that creates powerful messages about the role of educators. In a world of change, connections matter more than ever. This means that there is a need to make links across time, space, cultures and contexts and to consider new forms of pedagogical practice. In "seeking to illuminate the here and now," as Connors so eloquently phrases it in the Foreword, the contributing authors have accepted the challenge of change. They have openly shared their insights and research findings, in the hope that their contributions may inform and assist fellow educators who are also seeking to create connections that enhance teaching and learning.

Beare (2001) clearly identified what we all know to be of paramount importance in education today. This is the need to create interconnected webs of knowledge, where information, process knowledge and alternate frames of understanding are synthesized into a whole. Although Beare's ideas were written 10 years ago, his desire to challenge our thinking is as pertinent today as it was at the turn of the century. He provokes us to accept the challenge that faces educators and the teaching profession – to embrace the quandary of deciding what and how to teach the children who are sitting in our classrooms right now, while preparing them for a future world which we can only vaguely envisage. In order to challenge teachers' thinking, Beare presented the imagined musings of a five year old child called Angelica. Angelica is Beare's 'Future's child'. She represents any child sitting in a primary or

elementary school today. Beare's ponderings as Angelica help us to question our current practices in light of the ongoing and future educational needs of students:

> The old way of learning – by steps and stages, by the sequencing of learning into one best path, by the traditional, scientific approaches, by having the curriculum divided neatly into subjects – is already passing. Knowledge for me is a web of interconnections where I access interesting information from many angles. (p. 16)

Regardless of the context within which we (the authors) are facilitators of learning – whether it is in relation to early years learning or learning in a tertiary online context – we act as key players within Angelica's world. Each of us spins webs of interconnections, bridging the learning space for both students as learners and for educators as learners. Connors speaks of the *new thinking* that emerges from these pages. This new thinking paints mental pictures of interconnections, neo-pedagogies, and the traversing of new and diverse educational terrains.

EXAMINING THE THEMES

As the editors of *Creating connections in teaching and learning*, we consciously chose to group the chapters according to the resonances to which we had responded. What has emerged is a collection of chapters that are complementary to the creative processes that were undertaken to bring the contributing authors' initial thinking to life. The authors worked independently and in collaboration in writers' workshops, where thoughts were critiqued and harmonised. Some of the synergies now evident in the book can be attributed to the writing and review processes which occurred.

Although, as a volume of writings, this is in no way an entirely phenomenological collection of work, nonetheless each chapter captures a sense of unfolding lived experiences. Each chapter represents a journey through the developing understandings of its author/s, educator/s and researcher/s. As van Manen (2000) observed:

> By naming and renaming experience, we bring it to awareness, (re)interpret it and come to particular understandings or misunderstandings … finding a language to describe our experience is a critical requisite for addressing and understanding our pedagogical predicaments. (p. 316)

Just as many of the authors have done, we also searched for an appropriate language with which to explore our understandings of the themes and the research findings that are presented within this volume. The reflections in the next section of this chapter draw heavily on metaphor and imagery in an attempt to capture our understandings. Through these reflections, we suggest how the book as a whole helps to make clearer connections for educators, researchers and others with an interest in education.

METAPHORICAL REFLECTIONS

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that "metaphorical imagination is a crucial skill in creating rapport and in communicating the nature of unshared experience" (p. 231). With this in mind, we have used metaphor as a tool to convey our understandings and to create conceptual connections to a variety of author-based experiences. As Lakoff and Johnson emphasized, "metaphor is not merely a matter of language. It is a matter of conceptual structure. And conceptual structure is not merely a matter of the intellect – it involves all the natural dimensions of our experience" (p. 235).

In the first chapter we analysed some of *what was to come*. Now we give credence to a variety of personal interpretations of *what has been*. We have reframed these as visual metaphors, asking readers to keep in mind that "all research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). The linkages we found are highlighted by the key metaphors, words and images that materialized as we pursued cross-contextual meanings within these pages. Using the metaphoric organizers as the basis, representations of core ideas as produced by *Wordle* (Feinberg, 2009) and the visual symbolism created by one of the editors are blended to create a number of conceptual connections.

McNaught and Lam (2010) discussed *Wordle* as a "useful tool for preliminary analysis and for the validation of previous findings" (p. 630). However, we are also mindful of the limitations identified by McNaught and Lam and arising from the way that:

> word clouds treat each word as the unit of analysis. This mechanical manipulation of text is fast but at the same time it can be misleading because it neglects the semantics of the words and also the phrases and even sentences the words are composed of. (p. 641)

With this in mind, we decided to use the word clouds as a validation tool rather than for the purpose of initial linkage analysis. As each chapter was read, mental montages, indicating the journey of 'new thinking' that was being undertaken, emerged.

There was some discussion between the editors as to the validity of presenting critical reflections in this montagic way using verbal and visual metaphors juxtaposed with word clouds. However, the literature provided the resonance and reassurance that was needed. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) proposed that figurative language helps to articulate tacit knowledge, and Cook (1981, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) described montage as using "brief images to create a sense of urgency and complexity. It invites viewers to construct interpretations" (p. 5). Metaphor is seen as one way in which humans make sense of their reality (Jakobson & Halle, 1956; Morgan, 1980; Ortony, 1975). It is often used to simplify the complexities of structures or understandings, thus acting as interpretative paradigms for groups of individuals who are attempting to understand shared multiple realities.

A number of researchers (e.g., Alvesson, 2002; Jacobs & Heracleous, 2004, Kövecses, 2005; Steen, 2008; Visser-Wijnveen, Van Driel, Van der Rijst, Verloop, & Visser, 2009) have suggested that the power of metaphor lies in its ability to communicate shared realities and to create cognitive connections. To date, the importance of metaphor in creating pedagogical understandings has still not been fully explored; yet there are indicators that these cognitive connections can trigger pedagogical understandings which in turn trigger changes in practice Abawi, Andrews, & O'Neill, 2009).

Visual metaphors are all around us and constitute a primary means of conveying messages to large groups of people. Signs and symbols loaded with meaning have become a taken-for-granted manifestation of a shared social language. Gee (1996) suggested that different social languages "make visible and recognisable different social identities, different versions of *who* one is" (p. 8). For Gee, this raised "the difficult question … of what … constitutes our 'core identity', the 'master narrative' that ties our different identities, acted out in different

contexts, together into a story that (at least, we think) is unified" (p. 8). It was this search for a master narrative that would tie together the educator/authors' identities and experiences, that directed our mental journeying and led us to the use of metaphor as a means of linking the threads.

The initial organizers – *Connecting within school contexts*, *Connecting beyond school contexts*, *Making meaning from lived experiences* and *Developing virtual connections* – were used as representative of the main threads that emerged from early work done by the editorial team. Two stages were undertaken to weave the threads together. Stage 1 involved the reading of each chapter and the drawing out of what was considered to be significant points. The most commonly recurrent words and concepts were then placed with individually significant ones (e.g., "a pedagogy of listening") into a visual representation about the significance of the messages within a particular theme. Stage 2 saw the text from each set of grouped abstracts uploaded to the *Wordle* processor as "Wordle seems to be particularly useful for studies that involve qualitative/thematic analyses of written or transcribed spoken text" (McNaught & Lam, 2010, p. 631). The resulting word clouds were then used as points of clarification and verification of the linkages across chapters and then across organizers.

The use of this method to verify initial visual metaphors proved very useful, and McNaught and Lam's insights have pointed the way to a new way of thinking about analysis which is apt in relation to the *new thinking* terrains that our authors have explored. The figures show the synergies between the two forms of interpretation. The messages from each pair were compared, generalized and analyzed according to theme.

CONNECTING WITHIN SCHOOL CONTEXTS

What we understood from the images which related to within-school-contexts of learning and teaching (see Figures 21.1 and 21.2) was a sense of teacher commitment to student-centered learning. We recognized a sense of profound dedication to improving practice, as displayed by teachers who were intent on engaging students in authentic learning experiences. Learning is seen as a powerful positive proactive change facilitator.

INSERT FIGURES 21.1 AND 21.2 APPROXIMATELY HERE

The repetition of key words that have places of prominence within this group of chapters and are visible in Figures 21.1 and 21.2 can be seen as representative of three main within-school-context metaphors:

- The opening of minds to learning captured by the open pages of Figure 21.1 and by words such as *remove barriers*, *action*, *re-engagement*, and *research*.

- A sense of being positive change agents, not in a conscious task driven manner but as a by-product of the requirement to meet student needs is captured by words such as *justice*, *citizens*, *gender stereotyping*, *student voice*, *connection*, *world views*, and *inclusive pedagogy*.

- The evolution of dynamic learning partnerships is well underway and highlights ways of thinking, learning and teaching necessary for education today and into the future. A learning environment built of words and conceptual understandings does not remain trapped within the four walls of a learning space, as learning and teaching are built on learning partnerships that are becoming internationally mobile, collaborative and require different dynamics and changing responses from those currently in use.

These three metaphors capture some of what it means to be a *new professional* and they form the foundations for the kind of supported, collaborative risk-taking that leads to neo-pedagogical innovation (Andrews & Crowther, 2006).

CONNECTING BEYOND SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Much of what emerged from the interpretive planes of the beyond-school-contexts has been echoed in the metaphors already described. With recurrent themes becoming apparent through words such as *global, off-shore, boundaries, connections, students* and *partnerships* (see Figures 21.3 and 21.4), there is resonance with what has come before.

INSERT FIGURES 21.3 AND 21.4 APPROXIMATELY HERE

However, new images are emerging from the beyond-school-contexts which can be captured with the following metaphors:

- As educators we look toward nurturing learning. Before learning can be nurtured it must be created and then consciously developed and sustained. To nurture implies using pedagogical tact (van Manen, 1991). Therefore, a strengths-based approach to the development of learning experiences that *explore, affirm aspirations, recognize similarities* and *value difference* is needed. It is these same words that emerge from this analysis (see Figures 21.3 and 21.4); deficit models are not embraced.

- Contemporary curriculum ecosystems do not look, sound or feel like each other. They do not deliver the same experiences for all students as not all students are the same. Attempts to transpose a package of learning content or a method of learning delivery from one context to another is fraught with danger, as each ecosystem is a delicate

network of dependencies and interdependencies (Barab & Roth, 2006). Awareness of this delicate balance is illustrated with two specific examples: the detailed examination of the complexities of supervising doctoral students and the teaching of Western business practices to Chinese students. The authors recognize that the viability of each ecosystem is dependent upon a sharing of ideas, a building of collegial relationships based on trust and respect, and a willingness to make changes that reflect the valuing of individuals and their prior learning journeys.

- The final metaphor that springs to mind under this theme is that of the diverse educational terrains which, as both learners and teachers, we now traverse. These terrains involve consideration of both physical and virtual terrains both of which impact on learning and both of which have a global aspect to them. This impact is evident by words such as *internet issues, terrains, contextual factors,* and the need for *critical reflection* to inform practice (see Figures 21.3 and 21.4), in order to determine the suitability of the vehicles being used to navigate these terrains.

MAKING MEANING FROM LIVED EXPERIENCES

Van Manen (1997) identified the elucidation of lived experience as the means of making significant meaning of situations and interactions within those situations, the focus being on reclaiming lived experience as it is lived rather than as it is represented in theory. As shown in Figures 21.5 and 21.6, the essence of the authors *Making meaning from lived experiences* raised several metaphors that are interrelated around the concept of communicating meaningful messages between participants in the learning process:

- Multiple pathways signposted by multiple narratives depicts the entanglement of

the lived experiences of educators with how they have chosen to portray their journeys. The narratives form the research signposts captured in Figures 21.5 and 21.6 in multiple ways, such as *pedagogical documentation*, *narrative inquiry*, *listening pedagogy*, exploring *third space*, and articulating *theoretical* and *philosophical* understandings, while the pathways are the learning journeys that the authors have navigated.

- Cultural and intercultural reflections come to the fore when exploring cross-cultural working and learning relationships, whether they are part of a Japanese student exchange program or when teachers develop learning cultures built on a cluster-based learning process aimed at school renewal, or when a researcher captures the lived experiences of Saudi Arabian nursing students studying at an Australian university campus (see Figures 21.5 and 21.6).

- Fundamental to the meaning underlying the previous two metaphors is the need to develop a language of learning which is context specific. As Conway (2008) exposed, such a language is based on *values*, beliefs, *principles* of practice, *community* and *network* shared understandings and is distinctly *pedagogical* in nature and nurture (see Figures 21.5 and 21.6). This language is one that builds shared understandings and is built by shared understandings. It is a language that relies on the willingness of the participants in the cultural exchanges (culture in this context can be nationality-based or education-context based) to *listen* to the voices of others and to take them into account, regardless of the language used.

DEVELOPING VIRTUAL CONNECTIONS

Within this final grouping, the stand out message is one about learning. This is evident in Figures 21.7 and 21.8. The metaphor is about crossing time and space, as well as contextual

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and cultural divides, through the creative use of digital learning and teaching tools imaged as constructing virtual bridges to learning.

INSERT FIGURES 21.7 AND 21.8 APPROXIMATELY HERE

The ability of the online learning format to provide all students with the tools to participate in learning, through giving them *presence* and enabling *engagement, understanding,* avenues of *discourse* and *knowledge creation,* is fore-fronted as a means of facilitating *learning.* As the words in Figures 21.7 and 21.8 demonstrate, learning is paramount.

REFLECTING ON THE METAPHORICAL APPROACH

The use of *Wordle* to make visual links and to show the relative emphases of concepts (see Figures 21.2, 21.4, 21.6 and 21.8) worked well in conjunction with the visual metaphors (see Figures 21.1, 21.3, 21.5 and 21.7), with each highlighting and reinforcing the other. The use of new technologies to create understandings is closely linked to the imaging of educators as neo-pedagogical experimenters. Both relate to the need to mobilize and share intellectual discoveries. As Hargreaves (2003) pointed out:

> In a dynamic knowledge economy, the capacity of organisations to mobilise intellectual capital in the process of knowledge creation is critical, for the production of new knowledge feeds successful innovation. Linked with this is the process of knowledge transfer or knowledge sharing. (p. 4)

For us, metaphor – both visual and verbal – became integral to the transference of knowledge within this book.

By weaving the varying metaphorical threads together – the opening of minds; being positive change agents; dynamic learning partnerships; nurturing learning; contemporary curriculum ecosystems; educational terrains; multiple pathways signposted by multiple narratives; cultural and intercultural reflections; a language of learning; and constructing virtual bridges to learning – we now possess a montage of images which in its entirety suggests the presence of the *new professional* at work.

THE 'NEW PROFESSIONAL' FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

To seize the 'instant pudding' opportunity of a description of the *new professional* as being that of the teacher reimaging the professional 'look' would be unfair and irresponsible to the depth of meanings that have been presented in the chapters of this book. Further, to adopt the description of *new professional* would surely give rise to questions about *old* and *new* professionals and about *new* in relation to which particular period of time. However, as has been obvious throughout the chapters of this book, the contributing authors have presented a wide diversity of ideas about the teaching and learning field and the concomitant challenges for educators.

The metaphors presented in earlier sections of this chapter have clarified connections in teaching and learning in a range of complex contexts. Many of the contributing authors have emphasized the key role of educators and how they are adapting, changing, and transforming pedagogies to meet the needs of learners. Thus, it is fair to say that there is the emergence of the new professional at work, even though some clarification of the intended meaning is necessary. As a result, we have devoted the latter part of this chapter to discussing a number of issues related to the new professional.

Meaning making has a barbed tail when one considers the limitations of specific perspectives, so we are presented with the challenge of presenting a multiperspective viewpoint. A study which adopted the multiperspective analysis of teachers' work (Conway, 2008) observed that "participants were engaged in a unique experience of recognising the complexity of making significant new meaning of their pedagogical work for the enhancement of student achievement" (p. 190). In so doing, teachers took responsibility for their professional development, resulting in the image of the professional as "one who collaboratively works confidently and creatively in recognition of responsibility for their part in the whole" (p. 190). In the vein of collaboration, several of the chapters within this volume are in line with the claims of Andrews and Crowther (2006) that:

> the power of teachers' collective engagement in processes of holistic school development and the realisation in their workplaces of their talents and gifts as individual professionals [give rise to] a significant cadre within the teaching profession ... *teacher leaders* ... poised to transform the image and status of the teaching profession. (p. 18)

These are the new professionals who are leading with pedagogical responsibility. They are confronting, challenging and helping change the workplace of teaching and learning with ethical autonomy and the courage to act upon it (Palmer, 2007).

From a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, the work of Conway (2008) further pressed "the need for re-imaging the professional teacher as a character of proactive confidence, creativity and responsive connection with others" (p. 228). By upholding a

trusting and respectful culture, the professional educator can generate new ways of thinking and projecting new levels of working juxtaposed with the risks and demands of complex systems. Such phenomena must surely herald "a future of new hope and confidence [and] the need for a new form of leadership and management" (Conway, 2008, p. 228). The varied contexts of the chapters of this book have challenged us to consider the importance of the new professional as one who develops the capacity for thinking and acting with simultaneous individuality and collectivity in learning organizations. As Conway emphasized, it would appear that organizations must recognize the interdependency of individual and collective, value the context, celebrate diversity, and acknowledge the collective as more important than the collection of its parts.

Of further significance in the collection of chapters in this book is the revelation that professional educators – from a range of different contexts, cultures and aspirations, recognized for their value orientation and their personal skills and talents, and linked through a commitment to improving pedagogy – suggest an image of the teacher professional. The question of whether or not this is a *new professional* image is muddied, but the crystal view is that the new image of the teacher professional "highlights the multidimensional nature of value orientations and individual personality types within any single workplace" (Conway, 2008, p. 235). Hence, we recognize and reinforce the importance of the trusting and respectful culture of collaboration and the valuing of the key role of educators.

In keeping with the multiperspective viewpoint in defining the new professional, it would be remiss not to cast a critical perspective perhaps most eloquently upheld through the work of Paolo Freire (2004) and his challenge for the educator "to unveil opportunities for hope" (p. 3). Recently, Giroux (2011) troubled the teaching profession to remember that:

They also provide the knowledge, skills, social relations and modes of pedagogy that constitute a formative culture in which the historical lessons of democratization can be learned, the demands of social responsibility can be thoughtfully engaged, the imagination can be expanded and critical thought can be affirmed.

Giroux's ideas are further explained through the connection of learning to fulfilling capacities for self and social determination. Giroux (2010) posed that educators have a role to play in "connecting truth to reason, learning to social justice and knowledge to modes of self and social understanding," with a commitment on the part of educators to acknowledge the marriage of education with politics and matters of social responsibility. Overall, a sense of hope for a better future begins to emerge if new professional educators build capacity for a heightened consciousness of social responsibility. We are not let loose before considering the role we have to play as responsible educators. As Wrigley (2003) explained:

Teaching is a profession of hope. We are driven by desires – for our students to discover a taste for learning, a feel for justice and care for each other. We aspire to turn children into thoughtful, creative and concerned citizens. Inspirational teachers are motivated by their dreams of a better world. (p. 1)

In this sense, hope is interpreted beyond the confines of wishful thinking, dreams, or expectations of something desired. It manifests in passion and confidence played out with conviction by professionals demonstrating that they can create something better in their own lives, their students' lives and their broader worlds (see Conway, 2008). So, we are left to mull over the role and responsibility of self in any meaningful adoption of the term *new*

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professional and we might do well to be reminded that, in order to change, one must first take stock and consider the necessary transformations of self.

CONCLUSION

The initial call for chapters in this book was most certainly a leap of faith by us, the editors, as prospective authors were asked to consider some of the many ways of creating connections in teaching and learning. Did we really envisage that such a rich array of creative connections was available? We have learned much from our colleagues and are confident that discerning readers might now be ready to critique their own educational settings with the following set of questions:

- Which factors help to facilitate and/or restrict the possibilities for creating connections in an educational context?
- What implications or outcomes with regards to learning and/or teaching arise from the connections created?
- What realizations have emerged for educators and researchers working to create current connections to guide future directions?
- What contributions do/can connections make to broader society?

Finally, we are in debt to the authors of the chapters of *Creating connections in teaching and learning*, as they have unveiled opportunities for enhancing new ways of thinking and acting for the new professional. The capacity for making links, crossing divides, forming relationships, building frameworks, and generating new knowledge in a range of diverse educational contexts is certainly a reality for sustainable pedagogy.

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Figure 21.1 The visual metaphor for the *Connecting within school contexts* chapters

Figure 21.2 The *Wordle* word cloud for the *Connecting within school contexts* chapters

Figure 21.3 The visual metaphor for the *Connecting beyond school contexts* chapters

Figure 21.4 The *Wordle* word cloud for the *Connecting beyond school contexts* chapters

Figure 21.5 The visual metaphor for the *Making meaning from lived experiences* chapters

Figure 21.6 The *Wordle* word cloud for the *Making meaning from lived experiences* chapters

Figure 21.7 The visual metaphor for the *Developing virtual connections* chapters

Figure 21.8 The *Wordle* word cloud for the *Developing virtual connections* chapters