Messing about in metaphors.

Delightful, insight-full and sometimes fright-full depictions of leadership in student support and development services in Australian universities.

Dr. Joanna Peters
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I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we are gathered today, pay my respects to Elders past, present, and future, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and First Peoples from other countries here with us today.
inquiry

What’s it *like*? Re-cognising leadership in student support and development services in Australian universities through survey, phenomenology and metaphor.
voice

Survey  n = 141 leaders  (senior and mid-level)

Interviews n = 14 leaders  (senior and mid-level)

Focus Group  n = 9 leaders  (senior and mid-level)
What is leadership? What’s it like?

metaphors of leadership

survey, interviews, focus group
solicited, inferred
explicit, implied
What *is* leadership? What’s it *like*?

Purposefully chose the term

leadership rather than leader

... process rather than person
metaphor

metaphor /ˈmɛtəfər/ (say 'metuhfuh), /-fo/ (say -faw) noun

1. a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable, in order to suggest a resemblance…
metaphor

simile
but…

WHAT IF I TOLD YOU
SIMILES ARE METAPHORS
subjective

...a fish out of water
entailments

Concepts or mental images that automatically come to mind when you hear the *source* word of phrase, that are projected onto the *target*…

jaws
entailments...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wolf.</td>
<td>Wolf.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survivor.</td>
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reflect for a minute…

What metaphors are commonly used in leadership discourses?

Can you think of a metaphor that captures the essence of leadership in your unit or at your institution?
metaphors...phenomenological view...

- gardener
- life-guard
- house-keeper
- tactician
- property builder
- teacher
- mother
- life-coach
- conductor
- sports-team manager
- choreographer
- script-writer
- researcher
- boundary-rider
metaphors...focus group (Ai)

- *head* (thinking)
- *heart* (emotions)
- *hands* (support)
- *heels* (foothold, strengths/weaknesses)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Participant Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A good marriage</td>
<td>Working out what skill-set you currently have, and what do you think as a manager...what do you want to see...what do you like? How you see a good marriage – create that relationship between those two. To move on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warfare</td>
<td>But it’s more about defending...It sounds a bit like warfare doesn’t it?</td>
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<tr>
<td>A business</td>
<td>I mean, it’s like a business. A business has to have the right owner. If it’s got the wrong owner it’s not going to work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mirror</td>
<td>It’s a great awareness of what my strengths and what my challenges are with myself...because the things that would irritate me as a person (in a line manager) are usually the side of me that irritates me the most. So it becomes a mirror on that. When I am looking at other people and seeing their needs for development that also is a good indication of the things I need to do as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>I tried to make them feel like this is more of a family, and we all work together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masseur</td>
<td>You have to work at massaging staff, and work with their strengths and weaknesses....You’re almost a masseur in a sense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggler</td>
<td>It’s a balancing act...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal wrestle</td>
<td>I want to be part of every decision...I want to hold back on that. So it’s almost fighting with myself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>It’s tricky. Because intervening without either of the parties perceiving that the teacher is taking sides is a hard thing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
six metaphors of leadership

images? gerunds?

preferable to let people form their own subjective mental image a noun that acts like a verb…

*Her defusing of the argument made all parties comfortable.*
wrestling

competition, warfare, argument, battles, boundaries, mastery, defending, harnessing…

Where leadership is WRESTLING, it is about using strategy or tactics or resources to win, defeat or overcome…

Positive entailments: victory, success, mobilising, strategizing, strength, spoils, alliances and collective force

Negative entailments: cunning, defeat, exile, debilitation, surrender, harm, weakness and bullying
wrestling...

Other times I think...a test cricket metaphor. The game is long. There are slow periods when nothing appears to be happening when it actually is. There can be periods of high drama. The whole team is needed to get a good outcome. An honourable draw can be a decent outcome; but winning by an innings is better.
care-taking

family, mother, farmer, parent, marriage, friend, masseur, gardener, tending…

Where leadership is CARE-TAKING, it is looking after, looking out for, caring for and about others and ideas.

Positive entailments: intimate connection, care, nourishment, maintenance, bonding and support…

Negative entailments: neglect, abuse, dysfunction, being unsupported, emergence of weeds, dependency, and burn-out
care-taking

In a way it’s like being a parent – you try to give your kids the resources, values and support to be able to grow and test the boundaries.

You take pride when they fly high, and try to catch them and patch them when they fall. And accept it when they take credit for their achievements and you get blamed for the failures…
fertilising…

teacher, coach, guide, mentor…

Where leadership is FERTILISING, it is about facilitating development, growth and/or learning – of others, of the unit or institution, of the self…

Positive entailments: unveiling, showing, explaining, expansion, improvement, illumination, maturing and adding value.

Negative entailments: stunting, limiting, stymieing, starving, denying…
fertilising...

The best leadership is good teaching – bringing out the best of people and creating the conditions for the best work to be done; it requires care, rapport, support, communication and empathy, and leads to personal development and fulfilment.
translating
actor, dancer, script-writer, choreographer, orchestra conductor, playing mid-centre and passing messages to the team.

Where leadership is TRANSLATING, it is deciphering the language of one group to another, or interpreting something - a vision, a set of rules…

Positive entailments: multi-lingual, skilled, creating understanding, portraying messages, elucidating…

Negative entailments: capacity for “lost”, diluted or confused messages, middle positioning…
Leadership can be like conducting an orchestra. The conductor sets the music and the pace but must listen to support those who need to play louder or softer or who may need more practice. Everyone has their instrument of choice and should be provided opportunities for a solo but is working together to create a whole.
voyaging...

exploring, walking, travelling, driving, diving into the unknown, pitfalls, potholes, obstacles, uneven ground...

Where leadership is voyaging it is about being on a journey, moving towards something and away from other things, past and future...

Positive entailments: arrival, departure, movement, novelty, advancement, paths, signposts, progress, souvenirs, destination and horizon...

Negative entailments: barriers, interruptions, stagnation, fatigue, derailments and dead-ends.
Leadership is a journey. You need to take on the guise of an explorer. You are going into unchartered waters every day, you never know what the day will bring!

You have to be prepared for all situations, be well-trained for the journey (qualifications/training), be open to new experiences, guide your crew, and finally, at the end of it all, hope to find the hidden treasure!
galvanising…

catalyst, lightening rod, conduit, electricity conductor, stimulus, solvent, trellis, undercurrent…

Where leadership is an AGENT, it is galvanising activity or making something work or happen, and /or acting on behalf of others

Positive entailments: energy, reaction, action, stimulus, spark, vector, force, catalyst

Negative entailments: inertia, dormancy, torpidity, paralysis, alchemic…
galvanising...

I depict my leadership as a trellis – enabling and supporting managers and staff to develop – both up and across the system. My role is to be stable and consistent and be high enough for the tall poppies to feel they are challenged to grow higher, and to not limit this growth above my own capability.
fit with wider study…

Frames of leadership
Bolman & Deal (1991)
fit with wider study...

Human Resource
- people & relationships
- motivations & rewards
- personal & professional development
  (Family)

Political
- competing interests
- contested resources
- strategic coalitions
  (Jungle)

Structural
- planning & products
- structures & systems
- policies & procedures
  (Factory)

Symbolic
- collective narrative
- crafting & promulgating vision
- culture & climate
  (Temple)

**effective leadership = capacity to draw on appropriate frame or frames ie multi-frame**
fit with wider study

- Human Resource care-taking fertilising
- Structural galvanising
- Political wrestling
- Symbolic translating voyaging
one metaphor

...embodied all of the six metaphors (voyaging, fertilising, care-taking, wrestling, translating, galvanising) with an exquisite mix of irony, humility and humour, not to mention multi-layered and multiple entailments.

*We think we’re Gandalf, but we’re actually Frodo.*
and from another franchise, the final word…
Thank you.