

Metaphors of University Educators: The Expectation Gap with Implications for Educator Wellbeing

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Abstract

Generalised moves to online and more flexible delivery modes of teaching have challenged the perceptions and expectations of university educators worldwide. Congruence around educator role expectations, held by both the educator and their students, therefore is central to educator wellbeing, and by default, student success in a changing university environment. Metaphorical analysis is a way to understand perceptions, expectations, and the realities of university teaching. Extending the work of Saban et al. (2007), this mixed methods study of metaphors of university educators from student and educator perspectives found that while educators and students were aligned in conceptualizing teachers, there were increasing expectations on educators to demonstrate higher levels of humanistic personal qualities while at the same time being experts, accredited teachers, and engaging content creators. Educators however saw themselves as something different to how students see them, pointing to a vulnerability for educator wellbeing. The implications suggest more institutional support is needed for the ‘being and doing’ of teaching and to find better ways to align the expectations of students, universities, and educators. For early career educators, recognising the tension between the reality and aspiration of being a teacher, will go some way towards maintaining educator wellbeing.

Keywords: Educators; metaphors; online teaching; wellness; student; teacher.

Introduction

The close links between student success and the wellbeing of students (Henrich, 2020) and educators (Hobson & Maxwell, 2017; James et al., 2019) have been clearly established in previous studies, but there has been little research into educator wellbeing at the tertiary level as a discrete topic. A keyword search using these terms on Google Scholar over a date range from 2010 to 2023 in September 2022 identified only 29 results. Of these, 28 articles mentioned ‘tertiary’ only in reference to the experience of authors or in the context of required qualifications for educators at other levels, e.g., early childhood professionals (Jackson, 2020).

University educators have long been seen as the ‘sage on the stage’ (King, 1993) imparting their knowledge and wisdom verbally to a physically present and attentive student audience. Technological advances and social change—expedited by the appearance of COVID-19 in 2020—now mean that more students than ever want to be able to access learning resources when it suits them. Many teachers are no longer physically in front of a class of students and are having to acquire a range of new teaching skills that facilitate student learning in this rapidly changing environment. The volatile environment has therefore changed both the context, and potentially the expectations, related to teacher roles. Thomas (1981) argues that wellbeing, or



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absence of wellbeing, is related to “the congruence between what is expected as appropriate and what the person doing the expecting perceives as happening” (p. 404). Therefore, congruence around educator role expectations, held by both the educator and the students, becomes central to educator wellbeing, and by default, student success.

As an initial step towards extending the literature on educator wellbeing as it relates to student success, this article reports on a pilot study on metaphors of teachers in a contemporary university environment. Metaphors are conceptual devices that both reflect and shape reality and understanding, and can act as a guide and prophecy for future form and action (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This research uses metaphors to explore the contemporary reality of being a university teacher in a rapidly changing environment from the perspective of students and educators, particularly considering the move of many university programs to online only delivery (perhaps permanently) during the COVID-19 pandemic. From a student perspective, metaphors of educators and education give insight into the expectation and reality of a teaching and learning setting, based on what they experience and what they expect from their teachers. However, little research has been done to understand more contemporary metaphors of teachers and how this relates to existing or aspirational expectations by students and, as importantly, by educators. In particular, this current article seeks the insights offered by these metaphors into the factors that affect the wellbeing of university educators.

This article begins with an overview of the extant literature on wellbeing among tertiary educators to provide a context for the current study.

Wellbeing Among Tertiary Educators

Wellbeing—defined as an individual’s positive perceptions of their life, including work (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009)—has long been recognised as an important factor in reducing workplace turnover and improving task performance. For tertiary educators, the impact of their wellbeing also extends to the wellbeing of their students. Research by Hobson and Maxwell (2017) argued that the wellbeing of educators, including those at the tertiary level, impacts their teaching effectiveness, which, in turn, impacts the wellbeing of their students. James et al. (2019) also articulated a causal relationship between teacher wellbeing and that of students. Similarly, an inference drawn by a review of empirical studies on academic wellbeing (extending beyond but including those relating to educators in the tertiary sector) was that “psychological well-being among academics is foundational to educational quality with conditions that undermine their well-being also having a negative impact on their students” (Salimzadeh et al., 2017, p. 15). Salimzadeh et al. (2017) further concluded “that job-related stress and specific types of experiences adversely impact academics’ psychological wellbeing by making them vulnerable to psychological distress, negative emotions, depression, and burnout” (p. 13).

One of the most significant impacts on educator wellbeing has been the generalised move to online delivery modes for teaching—wholly or in blended mode—and the associated need for teachers “to enable [student learner] self-direction, knowledge building and autonomy by providing options and choice while still supplying the necessary structure and scaffolding” (McLoughlin & Lee, 2010, p. 33). The demand for flexible learning and courses, from both market and institutional forces, has seen teaching settings shift from traditional face-to-face settings to virtual or online settings, defined as a situation where a course has more than 80% of content delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2007). Averill and Major (2020) found innovation—including the use of new technologies—to be an enhancing factor in tertiary educators’ wellbeing. Further, they concluded that “a complex interplay of aspects of educators’ wellbeing and their perceptions of their students’ wellbeing can exist when educators strive to teach in innovative ways” (Averill & Major, 2020, p. 156). Backhouse (2013) noted that tertiary educators who chose to adopt innovative approaches to their teaching—including the use of online content and delivery—“are asserting themselves creatively and claiming a more positive positioning in the challenging landscape of modern higher education” (p. 345).

Achieving this outcome has also challenged educators to acquire expertise in the application of technologies in a rapidly changing environment in which institutional resources are not always keeping pace (Averill & Major, 2020). In addition, educators feel pressured to help online students avoid a sense of isolation and allow them to feel connected to their peers and resources (Cockerham et al., 2021). These potentially negative impacts on educator wellbeing were magnified when many courses were shifted fully online with little notice or preparation because of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in early 2020. Educator wellbeing suffered particularly badly at this time as they had to cope with uncertainty, illness, and a lack of training in the technology they suddenly had to use in expert ways (Choe et al., 2022).

Previous research (such as Garrison & Kanuka, 2004) identifies the need for educators in the 21st century to acquire technological skills and considers how these skills impact the student experience. However, little attention has been paid to the implications of the move to an online setting for the role of ‘educator’—permanently or temporarily, wholly or in blended

mode—and what this means in a virtual classroom, particularly as it relates to educator wellbeing. Such conceptualisations are significant for the insights they provide into the perceived requirements of this role, and by implication, the expectations this has of the educators themselves.

A Metaphorical Approach

Conceptualisations of an educator are often encapsulated in the metaphors used to represent them by students and educators alike. A metaphorical approach to understanding and exploring the nature of teaching and teachers was first used by Tobin (1990). From a teaching perspective, metaphors give cognitive insights into a teacher's professional thinking (Saban et al., 2007). Metaphors are also used to help student teachers articulate what they think about teachers and teaching (Hamilton, 2016). Metaphors can therefore demonstrate the perceptions students and teachers have of educators and their role in creating and enacting a teaching and learning environment.

Some studies have explored metaphors as a means of understanding and exploring the roles of teachers from the perspectives of teachers (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003; Fenwick, 2000; Prendergast, 2008; Saban et al., 2006; Tobin & Lamaster, 1995). Tobin (1990), for example, identified several metaphors that teachers used to convey their perceptions of themselves and their roles. These metaphors included teacher as entertainer (humour, interactive, tolerant of student noise, and socializing with students) and teacher as captain of the ship (assertive and business-like, authoritarian, in charge and structured in approach). Tobin (1990) noted that the teachers used different metaphors to reflect the different ways in which teaching was carried out. Tobin also concluded that individual teachers used multiple metaphors to capture the varying approaches to, and consequently, the methods used in their teaching.

A subsequent study of Israeli high school teachers by Ben-Peretz et al. (2003) found context had a significant influence on teachers' images of self and role. Fenwick's (2000) study of images of self by educators generated four metaphorical themes of teaching practice: adventure guides, outfitters, fire starters, and caregivers. Saban's (2006) studies of schoolteachers' self-reported metaphors of their professional identities found a balance of both teacher- and student-centred perspectives across more than 20 metaphors, with differences reported by gender and experience (Saban, 2006; Saban et al., 2006). They found that schoolteachers saw themselves as 'mothers' and 'law enforcers' among other metaphors, and advocated for similar self-reflection exercises to be incorporated into teacher training programs. Alger (2009) conducted a study of the changing perceptions high school teachers have of their role over the span of their careers. Alger (2009) identified metaphors early career teachers used to describe their role when they first entered the profession. They found teachers used more student-centred metaphors at the start of their careers and presented differences between current and desired or aspirational practice metaphors at the later stage of careers.

While extant literature shows how teachers use metaphors to describe expectations of their role and techniques in the classroom, limited studies have explored student perspectives of teacher roles. Those that have are inclined to seek student-teacher perceptions of their own role as developing teachers, and their expectations of their role in future employment (see, for example, Nikitina & Furuoka, 2011). For example, Saban et al. (2007) investigated metaphorical conceptualisations of "teacher" among prospective teachers with findings identifying more than 63 valid personal metaphors across 10 conceptual themes. These metaphors were presented in a standard format (a teacher is like ... because ...) that encapsulated the ways in which participants conceptualised 'teacher'.

Very few studies have used metaphors to understand university educators' perceptions of their roles. Wegner and Nückles (2015) elicited university teachers' ideas about their work through personal metaphors (such as building a house) and related them to one of two overarching conceptual metaphors from the literature (knowledge acquisition and participation in communities of practice). There are even fewer studies on student perceptions of university teachers, expressed through metaphors (Cortazzi & Jin, 2020 provide one notable exception). The lack of research in this area is particularly significant given the increasing calls for university teachers to better respond to student expectations of their educational experience.

Metaphor expression and analysis is an effective technique to investigate the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of learners (Beijaard et al., 2004; Saban, 2010). Metaphors provide insight into expectations of teachers and offers unique opportunities to understand student and teacher reality. Metaphor based research can identify the expectations of the role of teachers from a learner and teacher perspective, through co-orientation (Broom, 1977), to enable teachers to meet the needs and expectations of their students. Using metaphors to understand perceptions of contemporary teachers and students, more importantly, gives vital insights into the changes required to meet the expectations of the student experience and the impact of transitioning to the virtual environment. To date, no studies have explored how an online teaching environment influences conceptualisations of teacher roles, and what the implications of these roles are in an online teaching environment. Applying metaphor analysis

(Lakoff & Johnson, 2003), this study explores metaphorical conceptualisations of an academic teacher from student and teacher perspectives and considers whether/how these conceptualisations differ in an online learning environment.

Based on the preceding literature, three research questions guide this study:

1. *How are university teachers conceptualised metaphorically by students and teachers?*
2. *Are there any differences in how students and teachers conceptualise the role of ‘teacher’?*
3. *Does an online teaching environment influence conceptualisations of ‘teacher’?*

The next section presents the research design to answer these questions. Following this, the findings are presented.

Method

This study adopted a mixed methods approach based on metaphorical exemplars of teachers found by Saban et al. (2007). In Saban et al.’s (2007) qualitative study, 1142 teacher-education students responded to a prompt “A teacher is like.... because....”. They found 63 metaphorical images from which they developed ten conceptual categories of teacher metaphors. Eight metaphors from Saban et al.’s (2007) original exemplars were deleted due to pre-tests indicating they did not relate to a contemporary environment and two items were added to the entertainment category.

Procedure

Participants were asked, using a seven-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree), to agree or disagree with each metaphor describing a teacher. A question relating to the learning environment – that incorporated current changes to online teaching, was also asked. Two additional open text questions were also asked. The first question asked participants to provide five ‘single’ words to describe a university teacher. A final free text question then asked participants to complete this phrase: “I want a teacher to be like....”. Demographic information was also collected, including gender, age, country, role, and length of time as a teacher or student.

For reliability and quality, this study implemented two stages of pre-testing. First, to build the survey, the ten categories of teacher metaphors were modified for the survey instrument ¹and the current research context. Using convenience sampling, five current university students completed the survey and provided feedback on the clarity of wording, metaphor descriptions and duration to complete the survey. Following this, modifications were made. For example, “A teacher is like a book because s/he is the main source of knowledge. (CT, 2, F)” was modified to “A teacher is like a book - as the main source of knowledge”. It was also noted that some metaphors (adjectives as descriptors) were not meaningful for non-English native speakers which presents as a limitation for this study. The survey was then distributed to a group of five university educators who completed the survey and provided feedback on word choice and sense making around descriptions. No further modifications were made. Second, the items’ construct reliability was measured using coefficient alphas. The Cronbach’s Alphas of the 55 metaphor items was .941, suggesting a high level of internal consistency.

Participants

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants by posting a link to the survey information and consent form on popular professional network social media sites of the authors – including Linked In, Twitter and listservs. The link was then shared amongst these networks. Ethics approval was granted by the university ethics committee.

Participants recruited were current students or educators in a university and over 18 years old. A total of 94 participants attempted the survey, resulting in 64 useable responses. Participants were predominantly female, and age was equally distributed across the sample. While recruitment for the study was undertaken internationally, most participants were from Australia. More than a third of participants had 10 years or more experience teaching or studying in a university environment while a quarter of participants had less than 3 years’ experience. More than a third of participants indicated they held a teaching qualification, ranging from formal education degrees to industry recognition by formal teaching institutions. Table 1 summarises the sample demographics.

¹ Available from first author on request

Table 1*Sample Demographics*

		Number (N=64)	%
Gender	Male	9	14.1
	Female	46	71.9
	Not disclosed	9	14.1
Age	18-24	11	17.2
	25-34	13	20.3
	35-44	10	15.6
	45-54	11	17.2
	55 and over	11	17.2
	Not disclosed	8	12.5
Country	Australia	55	85.9
	New Zealand	5	7.8
	Singapore	1	1.6
	UK	1	1.6
	USA	1	1.6
	Not disclosed	1	1.6
Role	Teacher	38	59.4
	Student	25	39.1
	Missing	1	1.6
Length of time	< 1 year	2	3.1
	1-3 years	12	18.8
	4-6 years	12	18.8
	7-10 years	7	10.9
	10 +years	23	35.9
	Missing	8	12.5

Analysis

The data collected included open-ended (qualitative) and closed-ended data. Data from the open-ended questions were analysed using thematic analysis to identify, interpret and report themes (Babbie, 2015; Rubin & Babbie, 2016) to answer research question one – RQ1: How are university teachers conceptualised metaphorically? Single word responses were thematically analysed using NVivo12 software. One researcher coded all data. Following Richards (2005), data were coded by topic, category and then theme. The quantitative data were analysed via descriptive statistics and correlations using SPSS software (IBM).

Findings***Research Question 1: Conceptualisations of a University Teacher***

The first research question asked, How are university teachers conceptualised metaphorically by students and teachers? Data were analysed from the two open questions in the survey. Participants conceptualised university teachers based on two dimensions: the personal qualities a teacher possesses and their behaviours while teaching.

The most dominant personal quality shared amongst nearly all participants reflected a teacher as being knowledgeable: that is, they possessed knowledge and were intelligent. The words here encapsulated the sentiment that to be a teacher, individuals need to have a high level of knowledge, with two secondary themes pointing to being qualified or a legitimate expert. Concepts aligned with knowledge were that they needed to be experienced and educated. Being curious and/or being a thinker was the third most used descriptor.

Behaviours while teaching were dominated by the idea of being a guide. Descriptors in this category included coach, facilitation, and supporter. A range of other themes emerged within the sample that incorporated the idea of a teacher as an

entertainer who also needed to be friendly, helpful, caring, professional and polite. The focus on relational qualities (understanding, involved) and personal qualities (energetic, inspirational) highlighted the close interpersonal connections that teachers potentially have with students. Figure 1 illustrates the dominant descriptors used by respondents, with the size of the words indicating the relative number of responses containing that word.

Figure 1

Word Cloud Representing the Dominant Themes to Emerge from Respondent Descriptions of a Teacher



While the sample was limited in size when compared to Saban et al.'s (2007) original project, many of the metaphors align with the metaphors suggested at that time. Saban et al. (2007) identified nine categories—a knowledge provider, moulder, curer, or repairer, change agent, entertainer, facilitator, nurturer, counsellor, and leader. These attributes were supported in the results of this pilot study, however, this study found more of a focus on the legitimizing qualities of a university teacher (expert/holder of knowledge) that was not clearly expressed in Saban's (2006) study. Further research is needed with a larger sample to understand this more fully.

Aspirational statements about how a teacher is conceptualised were analysed from the second open text question that asked participants to write a phrase, sentence, or use words that describe or express how they "would like" a teacher to be. The 64 responses received reflected similar themes identified in responses to the first question asking for five single words, but from a learner-centred perspective. Responses here were found to be from a learner perspective or the learning aspect of the student, and the need for a teacher to support the learner on their learning journey. Therefore guide/guiding and learning dominated the responses, followed by mentor, teacher, facilitator, and support. In summary, there were five categories relating to the aspirational view of a teacher. These aspirational qualities include a teacher:

- As a guide (guiding, mentor, coaching, teacher, facilitator, support, journey, direction)
- As knowledgeable (knowledge, discipline, professional, useful, recognised, skilful)²
- As a motivator (progress, expectations)
- That inspires (passionate, animated, excited, spark)
- Who is trusted and caring

The aspirational qualities identified in response to this question are presented in the word cloud following, with the size of the words illustrating the relative number of responses containing that word.

² We recognise that knowledgeable reflects the application of knowledge and knowledge reflects information acquisition. Future research is needed to provide more clarity and how these differ in intent.

The *change agent* category found students more aligned with a teacher as a scriptwriter (M 4.72 SD 1.45) than teachers as fashion designers. Teachers, however, viewed both metaphors in similar ways but with less agreement across the sample for designers (SD 1.74).

In the *facilitator* category, both students and teachers did not support the concept of taxi driver (M 3.11/3.7 SD 1.71/1.32) with the higher SD in teachers suggesting less agreement. While further differences were found across the category, generally both teachers and students were aligned in most of the remaining metaphors.

In the *entertainer* category, teachers did not support the movie actor metaphor (M 2.95 SD 1.83) however a stage actor was more strongly supported (M 4.73 SD 1.80). The higher SD suggests less agreement in the sample. Students did not differentiate between movie and stage actor. The remaining responses were similar between both groups.

In the *counsellor* category, teachers agreed more strongly than students across all metaphors in this category with psychologist (M 4.97 SD 1.56) being the strongest in this category held by teachers. Friend was the least supported metaphor by students (M 3.68 SD 1.77) while teachers were more likely to describe a teacher as a friend (M 4.37 SD 1.44). Both teachers and students were similar in the view of teacher as parent (M 4.22/4.35 SD 1.53/1.56).

In the *nurturer* category, both students and teachers reported similar views towards the role of teacher as nurturer. The least preferred metaphor was a farmer (M 3.91/4.00 SD 1.34/1.53) for both groups. Teachers were more likely to describe a teacher as a gardener, or as soil (M 5.21 SD 1.56). Chameleon was strongly supported by teachers as a metaphor (M 5.46 SD 1.44) suggesting teachers need to adapt to blend in with their environment.

As shown in Table 2, the correlations of teacher and student shared significance at five metaphors (Book, Movie, Train, Brain, and Pen Note) in categories reflecting knowledge provider (2), Superior/Authoritative (2) and entertainer. These findings reflect the qualitative findings around actual and aspirational teaching. For teachers, there was a significant relationship between three of the counsellor metaphors (Psychologist, friend, companion) suggesting teachers saw their role in this way. Moulder as a category featured in both students and teachers (gardener for teachers and factory worker for students) suggesting that both saw a role in shaping a mind through teaching but in different ways.

Table 2*Correlation of Metaphors*

Metaphor	Category		Student	Teacher
Book	Knowledge Provider	Pearson Correlation	-.462**	.319*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	0.011
		N	62	63
Psychologist	Counsellor	Pearson Correlation		-.288*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.022
		N		63
Movie	Entertainer	Pearson Correlation	-.300*	.292*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.018	0.020
		N	62	63
Friend	Counsellor	Pearson Correlation		-.273*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.030
		N		63
Train	Superior/Authoritative	Pearson Correlation	-.438**	.322*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	0.010
		N	62	63
Chameleon	Nurturer	Pearson Correlation		-.308*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.014
		N		63
Brain	Superior/Authoritative	Pearson Correlation	-.381**	.339**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.007
		N	62	63
Companion	Counsellor	Pearson Correlation		-.300*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.020
		N		60
RoadMap	Facilitator/Scaffolder	Pearson Correlation	-.272*	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.037	
		N	59	
PenNote	Knowledge Provider	Pearson Correlation	-.420**	.335**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	0.009
		N	59	60
Factory Worker	Moulder/Craftsperson	Pearson Correlation	-.304*	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.019	
		N	59	
Gardener	Moulder/Craftsperson	Pearson Correlation		-.289*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.028
		N		58
Flashlight	Facilitator/Scaffolder	Pearson Correlation		-.274*
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.037
		N		58

Research Question 3: Comparison of Learning Environments

The third research question asked if an online teaching environment influences conceptualisations of teachers. Correlations (see Table 3) show significant relationships between responses about learning environments with participants suggesting that classrooms (CR) offer more opportunities, and that students miss out in an online environment (OLE). A preference for teaching online was found to be negatively correlated with CR offers more opportunities and students miss out in an OLE.

Table 3*Correlation of Learning Environments*

Correlations		Student	Teacher	CR offers more learning	Students miss out in OLE	OLE offers more support	OLE offers more teacher access	Prefer teach/ learn OL	Teacher is not relevant in OLE
Teacher	Pearson Correlation	-.819**							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000							
	N	62							
CR offers more learning	Pearson Correlation	-.185	.023						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.173	.865						
	N	56	57						
Students miss out in OLE	Pearson Correlation	-.076	-.053	.889**					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.577	.694	.000					
	N	56	57	57					
OLE offers more opportunity	Pearson Correlation	.081	.040	-.299*	-.271*				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.551	.768	.024	.041				
	N	56	57	57	57				
OLE offers more teacher access	Pearson Correlation	.029	.076	-.310*	-.314*	.690**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.832	.573	.019	.017	.000			
	N	56	57	57	57	57			
Prefer to teach/ learn OL	Pearson Correlation	.137	-.002	-.588**	-.559**	.652**	.682**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.315	.989	.000	.000	.000	.000		
	N	56	57	57	57	57	57		
Teach not relevant in OLE	Pearson Correlation	-.128	.160	.271*	.253	.133	.154	.065	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.348	.235	.041	.058	.324	.254	.632	
	N	56	57	57	57	57	57	57	
OL teaching requires different skills	Pearson Correlation	.141	-.253	.086	.045	-.096	-.107	.017	.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.299	.057	.526	.740	.478	.430	.902	.936
	N	56	57	57	57	57	57	57	57

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Preferences for teaching online were negatively correlated with views that classrooms offered more learning opportunities and that students miss out in an online environment. Teaching online was positively correlated with views that online offers more learning opportunities and more teacher access. There was also a positive relationship that teachers were not relevant in an online environment with views that classrooms offer more learning opportunities. Views toward an online learning environment are reported below for both teachers and students.

As shown in Table 4, teacher and student responses recognised teachers' relevance in an online environment (M 2.03/2.64 SD 1.33/1.84) however there was greater variation in student responses. Both teachers and students reported a non-preference for online teaching and learning (M 2.68/2.80 SD 1.96/1.54) with greater variation across the student group. While students somewhat believed an online environment provided more direct access to a teacher (M 3.27 SD 1.66), both teachers and students believed students miss out on learning opportunities online (M 4.95/4.97 SD) and that there are different skills needed to teach online.

Table 4

Learning Environment

	N	A CR environment offers more opportunities for learning	Students miss out on many learning opportunities in an OLE	An OLE offers more opportunities for learning	An OLE provides more direct access to a teacher
Student	25	5.50	4.95	3.23	3.27
Std Dev		1.626	1.558	1.445	1.667
Teacher	35	5.26	4.97	3.23	3.06
Std.Dev		1.578	1.654	1.285	1.494

	N	I prefer to learn or teach in an OLE	A teacher is not relevant in an OLE	Online teaching requires different skills and teaching approaches to those required in a classroom setting
Student	25	2.68	2.64	5.27
Std Dev		1.961	1.840	1.638
Teacher	35	2.80	2.03	5.89
Std.Dev		1.549	1.339	1.022

Discussion

This research contributes to understanding the pressures faced by university educators in their day-to-day work that have the potential to impact their wellbeing, and consequently that of their students. Set against a background of administrative pressures to move to online delivery, exacerbated by the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the research for this study gathered data from students and educators about how they perceived the role of university teachers in reality and aspirationally. Drawing on metaphors to describe both the actuality of teaching and its desired forms provides empirical evidence of the expectations of both educators and their students, and therefore the pressures educators face to meet those expectations. The identification of gaps between those expectations and the reality of university teaching suggests the existence of constraints on the achievement of aspirational forms of education, leading to impacts on educator wellbeing.

Expectation gaps between educators and students in higher education are not new. Three decades ago, Trauth et al. (1993) identified an expectation gap based on rapidly changing information systems and found despite a shared vision, the gap created pressure on academics to change what they taught and universities to change how they supported academics. More recently, Koerner (2017) outlined a case that involved former students or preceptors as catalysts for change and exemplars of a standard of performance. Using preceptors, Koerner (2017) suggested, was a way to navigate and reduce gaps in expectation between the educator and the student.

This study extended, operationalised, and measured the ten conceptual metaphorical categories used in Saban et al.'s (2007) qualitative study and contributed two additional entertainment categories. While this study also points to the existence of an expectation gap, there is a new key finding: educators see themselves as something different to how students see them, or want to see them, and this suggests a vulnerability for teachers generally and for their wellbeing. As noted in the research by Averill

and Major (2020), “enhanced feelings of educator competence [are] again linked closely to educator wellbeing” (p. 157). Conversely, therefore, educators who feel they are not demonstrating competence as evaluated by student expectations might experience a negative impact on their wellbeing. Some educators see themselves as failing to meet student expectations of not only how they teach, but what they do above and beyond this to facilitate student learning. This shortfall has the potential to place considerable stress on educators, requiring them to undertake significant shifts in the performance of their role and acquire new skills and knowledge to support those shifts.

Shifts in education practice to a more humanistic model of education suggest a greater focus on advising (Delante, 2020, p. 56) for educators. This aligns with students’ aspirational expectations of a teacher in this study and their desire for educators to move beyond being a discipline expert to being a supporter/mentor with characteristics that support a learner beyond just the transmission of knowledge. The provision of personal support by educators to students is also an expectation teachers have of themselves, often because of their experience as a student for decades while gaining qualifications to be a university educator. The stewardship role of an educator, with an emphasis on mentoring, guiding, and facilitating echoes Saban et al.’s (2007) earlier findings. However, the current research shows there is now even more emphasis on, or maybe the need for, teachers to demonstrate high levels of humanistic personal qualities. The dichotomy of personal qualities or characteristics a teacher ‘needs to possess’ to be a teacher, and the behavioural aspects or the ‘how’ a teacher behaves provide a conceptual extension to Saban’s (2006) earlier metaphorical categories. The ‘being’ and ‘doing’ of teaching allow new teachers to identify and work on those skills both as skill-based (i.e., legitimacy of a PhD/expert) and perception-based (a guide/mentor/energetic) attributes. It also suggests a hierarchy of metaphors, in that some may be regarded as requiring higher level skills: for example, a teacher must have legitimacy (be a qualified expert) as a basic requirement but might also need to work to become inspirational or energetic through building student relationships. Further research could explore a potential hierarchy of metaphors.

The duality of the educator role can be achieved by maintaining high levels of academic expertise in their discipline and educational expertise in their teaching. Discipline expertise is usually demonstrated by the achievement of advanced academic qualifications, such as a PhD. Maintaining discipline expertise requires university teachers to stay connected to, and involved with, emerging developments and research in their areas. This is shown when teachers have a good track record in academic publications and securing research grants. Teaching expertise has traditionally been positioned as something that could be learned on the job and acquired through experience. However, in the last decade, there has been a move toward requiring university academics to undergo formal training as teachers, and to study for recognised qualifications or to seek membership of teaching accreditation bodies. The metaphor study in this article indicated the existence of tensions between educators’ teaching practices and their aspirations, perhaps because of a lack of support for making this change. The next iteration of this study could involve a more focused consideration of how university educators conceptualise, through metaphors, the training and support they receive as they transition from subject experts to educators with skills in teaching in engaging and interactive ways.

A separate challenge to the wellbeing of tertiary educators was apparent in the metaphors used around the provision and adoption of digital technology, made urgent due to the pandemic. Prior studies have suggested the enhanced capabilities and opportunities offered by the availability and ease of access to new platforms and content management systems are proving very attractive to universities who see it as a way to better engage with their students. However, the findings in this study suggest that neither teachers nor students felt that online delivery provided a better educational experience. This reticence goes beyond what could be interpreted as a lack of enthusiasm for change generally: there are real concerns about the impact of this move on the quality of the interaction between students and teachers that is central to education and expectations around being a teacher. Lawrence (2017) in their thesis research on online school teaching in the US found that online teachers generally described their teaching around communication and dialogue, and formulated a culturally responsive online pedagogy (CROP) for online teaching: that is, the expectation of online students is similar to classroom students for interaction and communication. She argues the success of this dialogic model “rests upon the ability and willingness of the online teacher to engage in frequent communication with students and stakeholders” (Lawrence, 2017, p. 230). Like Lawrence, the findings of this current study suggest that students perceive an online experience as a deficit model of education, requiring educators to provide higher levels of personal interaction and interpersonal communication, placing teachers under additional stress. For educators, finding ways to do this online remains a challenge. Of particular concern is the non-negotiable requirement by universities for educators to make the move to online teaching, even though this might conflict with their personal and professional pedagogical preferences. The pressure this dissonance has on educators’ emotional wellbeing and consequently on their relationships with student learners deserves further consideration.

University teachers in the third decade of the 21st century are having to work harder than ever to meet the changing expectations of their students as well as their universities and their own professional ideals. In summary, findings from this study show that

university educators are required to fulfil at least three roles: first, as a discipline expert who is not only deeply familiar with the basics and foundational concepts in the field but is also conversant with—and perhaps even contributes to—the latest developments. Second, the university educator is required to deliver this content in ways that are engaging, interactive, and entertaining for students, but which do not conflict with the authenticity of the teacher’s academic knowledge and the authority this should give them. Third, university educators are having to work as *de facto* counsellors, providing their students with personal, emotional, and often mental health support during difficult times. The growing spread and complexity of the educator role seem tied to the commodification of tertiary education, such that universities now position students as customers who pay fees for services and therefore expect a level of support and engagement that goes beyond what the ‘sage on the stage’ could ever deliver. In addition, it is worth noting that many aspects of the current expectations of the ‘being and doing’ required of university educators cover elements that would previously have been covered by administration staff and/or specialist professionals employed by the university, such as counsellors and mental health practitioners. However, in the current cost-cutting neoliberal approach to university management, there have been significant cutbacks in funding for such staff. The mental and emotional pressures this puts on educators are suggested by the findings of this study and indicate a potential source of considerable negative impacts on teacher wellbeing. And in turn, this has wider implications for universities as “psychological wellbeing among academics is foundational to educational quality with conditions that undermine their wellbeing also having a negative impact on their students” (Salimzadeh et al., 2017, p. 15).

The findings of this current study provide a clearer understanding of tertiary level student and academic expectations of a “teacher”, both in a traditional classroom and in an online setting. As in previous studies (Wan et al., 2011), the current research uses metaphors as mirrors to not only reflect participants’ perceptions but also to identify misalignments between them, and potential changes in teaching practices required to address them. Responses to the negative impacts of the current and emerging role of the tertiary educator might therefore focus on how to support them as they transition to better match the expectations of their ‘clients’ (that is, students) and their employers (universities). But perhaps there is a wider question to be addressed first: is it right and fair to expect these subject area experts to become something they perhaps do not see as matching *their* expectations of a tertiary educator? Could this be the source of the harm to mental and emotional wellbeing being suffered by these educators, as indicated in this research? Might it not be fairer to all involved to also consider how to change the expectations of students and universities to reflect those of the educators as expressed in their choices of metaphors—current and aspirational—about themselves and their work?

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Please cite this article as:

Johnston, K. A., & Lane, A. B. (2023). Metaphors of university educators: The expectation gap with implications for educator wellbeing. *Student Success*, 14(3), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ssj.2620>

This article has been peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *Student Success*. Please see the Editorial Policies under the ‘About’ section of the Journal website for further information.

Student Success: A journal exploring the experiences of students in tertiary education.



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Appendix

Knowledge Provider Based on Saban et al. (2007) Metaphor Categories

Knowledge	N	Book	Rain	Sun	Tree	Flower	Television
Student	25	5.32	3.91	3.74	4.04	3.74	4.78
Std.Dev		1.145	1.345	1.389	1.306	1.214	1.445
Teacher	38	4.08	4.20	4.14	3.82	3.51	4.37
Std.Dev		1.761	1.232	1.141	1.858	1.539	1.573

Knowledge	N	Spring Water	Computer	Fountain	Pen/note paper	Shop Keeper
Student	25	3.52	4.17	4.39	3.70	3.22
Std.Dev		1.344	1.642	1.340	1.550	1.445
Teacher	38	3.23	2.97	3.89	2.35	3.14
Std.Dev		1.477	1.524	1.568	1.338	1.556

Moulder Based on Saban et al. (2007) Metaphor Categories

Moulder	N	Cook	Painter	Sculptor	Worker	Miner	Potter
Student	25	3.60	4.08	3.92	3.22	2.78	3.70
Std.Dev		1.581	1.412	1.470	1.380	1.126	1.550
Teacher	38	3.82	3.61	3.53	2.27	3.22	3.49
Std.Dev		1.706	1.717	1.704	1.407	1.750	1.557

Moulder	N	HBee	Jeweler	Carpenter	Baker	Builder	Architect
Student	25	3.78	3.65	4.00	3.57	3.96	4.48
Std.Dev		1.166	1.229	1.243	1.343	1.461	1.310
Teacher	38	3.81	3.81	3.54	3.00	4.03	4.31
Std.Dev		1.647	1.578	1.483	1.414	1.723	1.451

Curer and Repairer Based on Saban et al. (2007) Metaphor Categories

Curer/Repairer	N	Mechanic	Medicine	Doctor
Student	25	4.00	3.48	3.61
Std.Dev		1.348	1.310	1.469
Teacher	38	3.66	3.31	4.29
Std.Dev		1.571	1.323	1.545

Leader Based on Saban et al. (2007) Metaphor Categories

Leader	N	Shepherd	Train	Guide	Brain	Conductor	Captain	Coach
Student	25	4.36	3.88	5.04	4.84	4.26	4.65	4.76
Std.Dev		1.753	1.453	1.296	1.491	1.322	1.369	1.535
Teacher	38	4.63	2.76	5.30	3.58	4.51	3.94	4.89
Std.Dev		1.460	1.324	1.614	1.795	1.387	1.662	1.783

Change Agent Based on Saban et al. (2007) Metaphor Categories

Change agent	N	Script Writer	Fashion Designer
Student	25	4.72	4.09
Std Dev		1.458	1.411
Teacher	38	4.18	4.19
Std.Dev		1.522	1.745

Facilitator Based on Saban et al. (2007) Metaphor Categories

Facilitator	N	Torch	North Star	Taxi Driver	Road Map	Light
Student	25	5.00	4.57	3.70	5.09	3.74
Std Dev		1.291	1.532	1.329	1.164	1.484
Teacher	38	4.79	4.46	3.11	4.73	4.38
Std.Dev		1.742	1.325	1.712	1.347	1.552

Facilitator	N	Ladder	Traffic Sign	Flashlight	Light House	Compass
Student	25	4.39	4.74	3.91	4.13	4.61
Std Dev		1.644	1.421	1.621	1.392	1.234
Teacher	38	4.83	4.23	4.51	4.29	4.69
Std.Dev		1.361	1.308	1.245	1.363	1.367

Entertainer Based on Saban et al. (2007) Metaphor Categories

Entertainer	N	Movie Actor	Rock Musician	Comedian	Stage Actor
Student	25	4.16	4.44	3.48	4.13
Std Dev		1.625	1.530	1.592	1.290
Teacher	38	2.95	4.13	4.41	4.73
Std.Dev		1.830	1.848	1.739	1.805

Counsellor Based on Saban et al. (2007) Metaphor Categories

Counsellor	N	Psychol	Friend	Companion	Parent
Student	25	4.08	3.68	3.87	4.22
Std Dev		1.382	1.773	1.486	1.536
Teacher	38	4.97	4.37	4.84	4.35
Std.Dev		1.533	1.441	1.608	1.567

Nurturer Based on Saban et al. (2007)

Nurturer	N	Gardener	Farmer	Soil	Chameleon
Student	25	4.04	3.91	4.68	4.64
Std Dev		1.430	1.345	1.574	1.578
Teacher	38	4.89	4.00	5.21	5.47
Std.Dev		1.388	1.534	1.562	1.447