

Found Metaphors: A strategy of applied creative thinking

As English professors in general and creative writing instructors in particular, we have used the technique of found poetry to convince students that the printed word abounds with more poetry than most people are cognizant of. We assign students to read typical print sources (e.g., newspapers and magazines) as well as atypical print sources (e.g., advertisements and soup-can labels) in order to locate some examples of poetry (e.g., free verse or metered) or poetic technique (e.g., metaphor, metonymy, and caesura).

Now, in teaching applied creative thinking we've adapted the found poetry assignment into one involving found metaphors. As we say in *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking* (Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press, 2012), a metaphor "is an effective creative strategy for learning about the unknown and gaining a perspective on it" (67). In *Borrowing Brilliance* (New York: Gotham Books, 2009), David Kord Murray elaborates that "a creative idea begins, either consciously or subconsciously, with a metaphor or analogy. By using a metaphor, a comparison of one thing with another, you intellectually connect the two things" (110). A found metaphor, then, begins by discovering an object (creativity theorists often refer to it as the "vehicle") that elucidates a subject (something creativity theorists call the "tenor").

Specifically, we ask students to locate on-campus objects that convey some of the fundamental and powerful concepts of creativity (e.g., perception shifting, collaborating, and piggybacking). To prime the pump we utilize our building. When the Noel Studio for Academic Creativity was constructed in the very center of the University's Crabbe Library, two synchronistic events occurred, or maybe the construction of the Studio sensitized our own creative thinking. First, as plaster walls, stacks, and lofts were torn down, two covered-up skylights were found in the ceiling/roof. The cover of *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking*, in fact, depicts a student with an iPad standing below one of these windows to the outside world. For us that complete concrete image suggests the tenor of creative thinking.

As the Noel Studio moved from concept to reality, a wooden spiral staircase was installed in the middle of the location. In the beginning, the spiral staircase suggested to us the tenor of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy and the movement up it the progress from lower-order thinking to the higher-order thinking. The more we went up and down the spiral staircase, however, the more we began to see another found metaphor. Our University's SACS-necessitated Quality Enhancement Plan is that it "will graduate informed critical and creative thinkers who communicate effectively." The spiral staircase suddenly seemed to look like the double helix used in biology to describe the structure of DNA, but for us the two strands envisioned were the inter-related critical and creative thinking.

Because found metaphors abound, the assignment can be adapted by any discipline.

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