The Metaphor Approach

The key to accessing the hidden meaning of addiction symptoms

Juan Blea, M.ED. LADAC

Contents

Introduction

The materials presented within this document represent my fundamental beliefs that: 1) Symptoms of an addiction are meaningful (Martignetti, 2012); and, 2) Awareness of a situation leads to transformation (Freire, 2002). While these concepts are neither new nor cutting edge, the manner in which the detailed building of a metaphor this document presents mines the symptom and will lead to the needed awareness. The "metaphor approach" is a novel method to accessing the hidden purpose of addiction-related behaviors.

The purpose, then, of this document is to:

- Introduce the Author as a means of providing the background to the material contained herein
- Introduce Critical Pedagogy and how it fits within an addiction treatment model
- Introduce the Metaphor Approach and how it fits within the reflective journaling component of Critical Pedagogy
- Provide a framework for applying the Metaphor Approach

In addition, this document seeks to add to the body of literature within the addiction treatment domain by framing the problem of addiction within a personal empowerment model and establish two (2) key definitions:

1. **Meaning:** A person's knowledge about the significance of a person, place, thing, behavior, and/or emotion
2. **Substance abuser:** A person who meets criteria for a substance use disorder as defined by the DSM IV.[1]

Both definitions will be used throughout the document.

Background

The reality is that there are hundreds of ways to treat a substance abuse problem. The challenge for practitioners is which is the best? For me, approaches that focus on client empowerment and establishing meaning through the client's perspective tend to work the

---

[1] The rationale behind this definition is that terminology within the addiction field is not neutral. Rather than engage in an argument about the necessity of identifying terms such as, "addict" or "alcoholic," the Metaphor Approach seeks to eliminate any potential negative connotation of any identifying terms.

best. Therefore, this program details an approach to gathering that meaning by having clients look inward in an attempt to understand their behaviors using their own language and knowledge. The intent of this approach is for clients to gain power over their addiction: First through gaining awareness of the meanings underlying their symptoms; and, second, through then understanding the meanings such that they can then act upon them. Applying metaphor construction techniques provide the basis for deriving meaning because metaphors turn the abstract into something concrete.

I have been teaching this material in one way or another for approximately eleven (11) years. Its current state has emerged from: 1) seeing its impact within several distinct contexts; and, 2) my own evolution as a writer and as a teacher.

Though over the years I have taught in several different domains, two (2) circumstances have shaped this material more than any others: 1) teaching a poetic devices workshop through the Southwest Writers; and, 2) teaching a, Writing for Empowerment, workshop in the Rio Arriba Detention Center through Cedar Tree Inc.

The reality about my life is that, regardless of anything else I have done and continue to do, writing has been the one constant theme. In 2006, my novel, Butterfly Warrior, hit the streets. When I was young and dreamt of writing a book, it never even occurred to me that there could be a difference between writing a book and selling a book. Though writing it was a challenge, selling Butterfly Warrior proved to be among the most difficult endeavors I've ever undertaken. Readings, book signings, panel discussions, and seminars all proved to require energy and focus that I didn't even know I had. Writing become less about expression and more about maintaining the level of focus needed to push a book.

The path of selling Butterfly Warrior (Blea, 2006) led me to places I never even knew I wanted to go. For example, the Southwest Writers Workshop asked me to lead a workshop about the lyricism within my novel. While I agreed, I didn't know at the time just how much that one

4

workshop would change my life. The gist of the workshop was that, for me, lyricism naturally flowed from the meaning of the topic carried throughout the novel. While the book is "sci-fi mystery," it is heavily-laden with Chicano/Aztec Mythology. The meaning of my culture was where the lyricism lived. Therefore, I taught the attendees that if they could find something meaningful on which to base their work, the lyricism and poetry should follow.

I learned more about the power of writing during that one workshop that I had in all the years before: There was an elderly woman of Japanese descent attending the workshop who wanted to understand "poetic methods." She did all the exercises and once we had completed the workshop, she allowed me to read what she had written: A story about how she and her family were loaded into a truck and placed in the Japanese Internment Camp on Alameda Street in Santa Fe. It was heartbreaking, but for her, it proved to be cathartic and she thanked me for having led her through the process of releasing the pain she had carried. The meaning of her heritage ripped through the pain of internment and carried her through some very dark days. However, it wasn't until she saw her meaning of the internment camp that she was able to transform it from a symbol of oppression to a token of pride. She was then able to write a compelling story using the internment camp as the symbol to express the power of her heritage.

The second incident involved a nineteen (19) year old Hispanic male who was incarcerated for possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance. He wrote about a needle and how he both hated it and loved it. He hated it because it enslaved him within the shackles of addiction, but he loved it because it provided the heroin that took him away from his life. He preferred being in jail; for him, it was the only place where he had any type of structure. He never had the chance to have any type of structured life: His uncle shot him up when he was twelve (12) years old. My student never had a chance: His whole life had been lost to an addiction he didn't choose. The needle in his poem represented the pain he pain he felt as well as the means to escape from the pain.

Therefore, the internment camp and the needle were powerful metaphors that taught me the capability this material provides the learner. So much so, in fact, that these two encounters provided the motivation for me to become an addiction counselor and teach writing tools as a means of empowerment. The metaphor, to me, is the most powerful tool there is.

Critical Pedagogy (CP) Overview

Wink (2005) describes critical pedagogy as a way for people to become aware of their own contexts and their respective roles within those contexts. Critical pedagogy calls for people to name their reality in their own terms, to reflect critically upon those terms, and then act upon the resulting knowledge (Wink, 2005; Freire, 2002). This process provides the formula for true empowerment because "until each of us owns our own power (negotiates our own identity), we cannot be a part of empowerment" (Wink, 2005, p. 172).

In addition, Wink (2005) puts forth an interesting observation that, "to empower is not a transitive verb; it does not take a direct object. Think about it: if you say that you empower someone else, who actually controls the power" (Wink, 2005, p. 115). The fact that there is no object in the verb to empower indicates that a people can only find out what their power is through the process – name, reflect critically, and act. This process allows people to navigate their own contexts through their own terms and understandings. The way is through naming, reflecting, and then acting over and over again until people understand their own role in creating their own reality. When a person does not, and has not ever, been an agent in the creation of his or her own reality, there is no power.

Power differentials and more importantly, resolving them, is at the core of Freire (2002). This work discusses a group of peasants who lived outside of a large city and, "rather than being encouraged and equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, they were kept submerged in a situation in which critical awareness and response were practically impossible" (Friere, 2002, p. 30). This submersion created an oppressive situation because, "any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his and her pursuit of self-

affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression" (Freire, 2002, p. 55). The way that the rich maintained their power was through prescription of what the peasants within this community could or could not do or say. Freire (2002) says that, "one of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness" (Freire, 2002, 47). The mental state created by oppression and its main tool, prescription, is a living death. In terms of addiction, twelve-step groups tend towards powerlessness between the person and the substance. In other words, the substance has power of the individual.

Also, these people had no options or opportunities to see beyond their miserable situation. The subject of Freire (2002) was "a person who does not perceive himself or herself as becoming; hence, cannot have a future to be built in unity with others" (p. 173). However, in order to disrupt the living death, those who live under a powerful leader's prescribed reality must have enough within themselves "to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (Freire, 2002, p. 49). These limits are nothing more that temporary constraints. A real leader is a humanist and, "a real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favor without that trust" (Freire, 2002, p. 60). Finally, Freire (2002) states, "the fulfillment of humankind as human beings lies in the fulfillment of the world. If for a person of the world of work to be totally dependent, insecure, and permanently threatened, if their work does not belong to them…it ceases to be a fulfilling pursuit and becomes an effective means of dehumanization" (p.145). What "owns" means in this context is that a person cannot know the meaning of the work he or she performs and is dehumanized in this lack of ownership. The opposite of this statement is that work that an individual owns is liberating, and therefore, truly empowering.

Reflective Journaling (RF) Overview

Hubbs and Brand (2005) describe three types of reflective journaling: (1) the dialogue journal which provides a means for the student and instructor to maintain a private dialogue with one another around any number of issues; (2) the class interactive (team) journal in which the student shares his or her written reflections with classmates and then receives feedback, and subsequently constructs a written reflection considering classmates' input; and, (3) the personal journal. Each of these types of journaling leads to a common goal which, "is for the student's writing to demonstrate progress toward reflective and inwardly focused entries" (Hubbs & Brand, p. 5). Furthermore, this piece of research describes ways and means to implement reflective journaling practices that can lead to more and more complex meaning structures. Hubbs and Brand (2005) conclude, "students who master the skills of reflective journaling gain an ability to connect their internal processes with their external realities. The connecting of inner and outer world experiences is a process that demands self-awareness and self-knowledge necessary for the practice of counseling, as well as other professions" (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 5).

Cyboran (2005) examined the influences of reflection on the self-perception of empowerment in the workplace. The research group consisted of non-management knowledge workers at a software company headquartered in the United States. The experimental group kept guided journals of their learning activities for three months. Immediately prior to and following the journaling period, both groups completed Spreitzer's Psychological Empowerment Scale. Between-group analyses revealed that participants who kept guided journals were able to maintain a high level of psychological empowerment, while the psychological empowerment of the control group worsened. The results suggest that reflection through guided journaling may sustain the perception of empowerment for individuals who already possess a fairly high level of psychological empowerment.

This study provides more evidence that reflective journaling can provide a measure of psychological empowerment. The implications that Hubbs and Brand (2005) and Cyboran

(2005) put forth are in keeping with the body of literature contained within this section: The road to true and real empowerment is through an individual's own meaning systems.

Addiction Overview

Really, addiction is a multi-layered disease per the American Society of Addiction Medicine's definition, "Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors."

The pathological pursuit involved in using substances is evidenced in the three "C"'s of addiction:

1. Continued use despite adverse **C**onsequences
2. Lack of **C**ontrol when using substances
3. **C**ompulsive seeking and using of substances

The key component, and in my opinion, the most difficult to understand aspect about addiction is Compulsion. A good definition of compulsion is, "An uncontrollable impulse to perform an act, often repetitively, as an *unconscious mechanism* (sic) to avoid unacceptable ideas and desires which, by themselves, arouse anxiety" (2007, American Heritage Medical Dictionary). I added the bolded font to emphasize that a compulsive behavior is an unconscious mechanism.

An unconscious mechanism is one that affects, "the part of the mental function in which thoughts, ideas, emotions, or memories are beyond awareness and rarely subject to ready recall" (2009, Mosby's Medical Dictionary). Therefore, if we work our way backwards from our three formal definitions, a person caught in the throngs of addiction is suffering with a brain disorder of which they are unaware that is impacting them upon every facet of their life. Physical, financial, emotional, and spiritual health are all adversely impacted as a result of a behavior performed without awareness.   The brain of an addict is rutted towards using a substance and becomes ingrained and automatic.

If we look closer at the source of compulsion, anxiety, it becomes apparent that compulsion is protective. It "feels better" to use than to experience the anxiety caused when not using. Therefore, the automatic nature of using a substance must be disrupted before there is even a chance that the behavior can change. That is, someone has to become aware of the compulsion to use, then has to feel the adverse consequences of using, and then has to see not using as a preferred path. If we do not strip the veil off of the compulsion, we cannot elicit change.

Further, in substances that contain a physical component such as alcohol or opiates, the fear of withdrawal is sometimes so strong that just thinking about withdrawal causes such anxiety that even if the user is not physically ill, they need to use. Really, addiction is complex and layered and I do not foresee a "magic bullet" from which a simple solution will emerge. Recovery from an addiction requires patience, commitment, support, and emphasis of strengths rather than amplification of deficits.

Relationships between CP, RJ, and Addiction Treatment

As seen in the previous sections, addiction treatment requires awareness of the situation in which a Substance abuser finds himself. Rather than opposing symptoms, reflective journaling provides a mechanism through which a person can see his or her situation in his or her own terms and understanding. It is through the lens of CP that the challenges of addiction can be addressed.

Power differentials within treatment exist within two separate levels: 1) the power differential between non-abuser and abuser and, 2) the power differential between the abuser and the substance of abuse. CP teaches that, in order to disrupt those power differentials:

1. Prescription must be eliminated
2. A person must name the situation, reflect upon its meaning, and then act upon the situation

When family and friends confront a substance abuser during traditional "interventions," the Substance abuser's initial response is often defensiveness and resistance. From my experience, this response is the correct response. Too often, the non-abuser's stance is one of prescription of consciousness: My way for your life is the right way. By definition, the Substance abuser is mired in a state of non-awareness. Therefore, he or she cannot possibly understand the prescription offered by the non-abuser. As evidence of this prescription, for example, is the requirement of twelve-step programs for its member to identify themselves as "addict," and/or "alcoholic." These labels are not neutral terms. Rather, they are in and of themselves terms of prescription. They lead to self-fulfilling cycles of substance abuse: An alcoholic drinks and an addict uses.

CP would rather propose that the Substance abuser: 1), name some aspect of his circumstances in terms from his or her contextual frame of reference; 2) reflect on the meaning of this aspect, also within terms of his or her contextual frame of reference; and, 3) devise a behavior such that the meaning can then be fully understood.

A treatment professional can be instrumental within this process. Not by being another agent of prescribed consciousness, but through guiding the process of: Name, Reflect, and Act.

The Metaphor Approach

The Metaphor Approach, then, will allow substance abusers to discover the hidden meanings about their symptoms. The reasons are that metaphors:

- Demonstrate the Substance abuser's frame of reference.

- Communicate that frame of reference in a meaningful way.

- Take the abstract and make it concrete.

- Show instead of tell.

- Provide a way for substance abusers to understand their own knowledge.

Metaphors demonstrate substance abusers' frame of reference because only they know the symbols in their world and what they mean. While people may share knowledge about certain objects, they can mean something different to each of us. For example, Cuban revolutionary

Che Guevara has become a fashion symbol: His face adorns many tee shirts. While it may be fashionable to wear Che, to someone within the Batista regime, he could have represented the ultimate evil. However, for a Cuban rebel, he could've been viewed as a hero.   So, depending on many factors, Che Guevara could be a fashion statement, a killer, or hero. Also, we all know things, but sometimes have a difficult time expressing that knowledge. Through the material presented within the Metaphor Approach, a person can become familiar with what he or she knows. The constructed metaphors will provide a way for to understand knowledge.

Necessary Brief Definitions

Before we begin the actual work, we must understand our terms. Therefore, the three necessary brief definitions are: 1) the definition of a metaphor; 2) the definition of case structure grammar; and, 3) the definition of a semantic net. Each definition represents a concept that will be useful as we move through the material.

The definition of a Metaphor

A metaphor is a symbol system between a tenor and a vehicle. A tenor is the abstract thing (person, object or concept) and the vehicle is the representational mechanism. Whereas a simile uses "like" or "as" to take a thing and compare it to another thing, a metaphor sets a direct relationship between a thing and its representation. Two interesting concepts associated with a metaphor are the ground and the tension of the metaphor. The ground is the similarities between the tenor and the vehicle, while the tension is the differences between the tenor and the vehicle. Both are useful tools used in creating meaningful narratives.
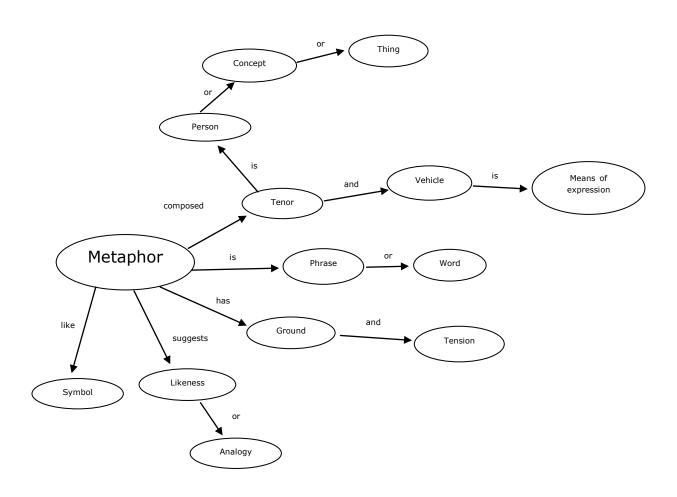
The definition of Case Structure Grammar

Case structure grammar is a way for a sentence to be broken down for semantic analysis. The reason that the verb is central to this analysis is because, while nouns have representational ability, it is the relationship between the action (verb) and the agent which establishes semantic meaning. For example, the sentence: A rock laughed is grammatically correct; however, it is not possible for a rock to laugh because only humans can express the emotional content contained in laughter. There is a finite set of relationships between verbs and their agents and objects and so therefore, the verb becomes the most important component for psycholinguistic understanding. Verbs express action, occurrence, state of being

and condition. For purposes of metaphor construction, I will use action verbs. The formula for case structure analysis is: Action (agent, object, instrument, time, and place).

The definition of a Semantic Network

A Semantic Network is a graphical way to represent the meaning of words that are connected via their definitions. Representing the network of words allows for a graphic representation of the knowledge of the words. Below is a semantic network for the word: metaphor.

Metaphor Semantic Network

The Metaphor Approach

The method for discovering your metaphors is a three-phase approach that employs the seventeen (17) exercises that follow. Each exercise will contain a brief preface describing its purpose.

Phase I – Language

This phase is the first step in creating your metaphors. Its purpose is to bring into focus the topic and your language concerning the topic and contains seven exercises.

Exercise A

What is the topic under consideration? The purpose of this exercise is to begin to focus your thoughts upon the topic. Please write the topic in the space provided:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise B

Why did you select this topic? This question is meant for you to begin to frame meaning around the topic. Please write your answer in the space provided:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise C

       Is there anything about the topic that contains symbolic meaning to you? In your response try to find what the topic may represent to you, as a whole.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise D

       Is there anything about the topic that triggers a response from you? In other words, does the topic prompt you to feel or act a certain way?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise E

      Please list 3-5 areas within the topic of special interest to you:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise F

Please list 15 actions verbs that come to mind about the topic (Hint: try and write this list as fast as possible; write the list as quickly as verbs come to mind[2])

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

---

[2] If you need help with coming up with the lists, I recommend employing a semantic network. Using the example on page 4, develop a semantic network by using the dictionary definition of the topic. Using a semantic network will allow you to flesh out your knowledge about the topic.

Exercise G

Please list 15 attributes that come to mind about the topic (Hint: try and write this list as fast as possible; write the list as quickly as attributes come to mind.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Phase II – Knowledge

The purpose of this phase is to begin to flesh out the topic by seeking out any processes and rules (real or implied) within the topic. Also, this phase will bind the verbs and attributes into complete thoughts. By the end of this phase, you should have a pretty good idea of your symbols and their meaning concerning the topic.

Exercise H

Using case structure: Action(Agent, object, instrument, time, place) write sentences using words collected in Exercises F and G. For example, the sentence, Joe kicked the ball, would look like this: kick(Joe, ball, foot, in the past). This exercise should bind the lists of verbs and attributes.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise I

Are there any rules within the topic? Please describe any rules, real or implied; that limit behavior.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise J

Are there any processes within the topic? In other words, does the topic contain any methods of accomplishing tasks? Please describe:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise K

      Does the topic contain any problems worth solving? Please describe any problems within the topic that you consider important:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise L

      Please describe any evidence that demonstrates your responses to Exercises I, J, & K. If there is anything concrete that shows the rules, processes and problems within the topic, please describe it here:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Phase III – Metaphor Representation

This is the final phase and requires the synthesis and application of the previous phases. There are three exercises in this final phase.

Exercise M

Please review the Phases I & II. In looking at the language and knowledge, please define a symbol (vehicle) and the thing it represents (tenor) and describe how you came to this representation:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise N

Please define an opposite symbol (vehicle) and representation (tenor) for the metaphor you created in the previous exercise and describe how you came to this representation. This opposite metaphor will be the can be used to create tension:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Exercise O

   Using the metaphor, the knowledge, and the language you created, please write a story, poem, or other work in the space provided:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Conclusion

I hope this workshop has proved a useful means of discovering and employing metaphors of meaning and value. Meaning is self found and self created. Metaphors provide the means of representing and communicating that meaning. Thank you for your participation and I hope the techniques and tools described in this workbook become second nature for you.

References

Cyboran, V., (2005). The influence of reflection on employee psychological empowerment:

Report on a exploratory workplace field study. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*.

18(4), 37-50.

Depree, M. (1989). *Leadership is an art*. New York: Dell Publishing.

Drucker, P. (2001). *The Essential Drucker*. New York: Harper Collins, Inc.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum International.

Houghton, J., & Yoho, S., (2005). Toward a contingency model of leadership and psychological

empowerment. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*. *11*(4), 65-84.

House, R., Wright, N., & Aditya, R. (1999). Cross-cultural research on organizational leadership:

Critical analysis and a proposed theory. In C. Earley (Ed.)**,** *New perspectives on

international, industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 535-625). San Francisco: The

New Lexington Press.

Hubbs*,* D., & Brand, C., (2005)*.* The paper mirror: Understanding reflective journaling. *The

Journal of Experiential Education*. *28*(1), pg. 60-72.

Knowles, M. (1992). *The adult learner.* Burlington, MA: Elsevier.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities*. New York: HarperCollins.

Luger, G. (2002). *Artificial intelligence.* Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited.

Martignetti, A. (2012). The symptoms of addiction. Talk delivered at Harvard conference on

   addiction treatment.

Maxwell, J. (1998). *The 21 irrefutable laws of leadership*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Oakes, J. (2005). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality*. Boston: Yale University.

Spreitzer, G. (1995). Psychological empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement,

   and validation. *Academy of Management Journal*, *38*(5): 1442-1465.

Spreitzer, G., Quinn, R. (2001). *A company of leaders: Five disciplines for unleashing the power*

   in your workforce. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

Sroufe, L., Egeland B., Carlson, E., & Collins, W. (2005). *The development of the person: The*

   Minnesota study of risk and adaptation. New York: The Guilford Press.

Wink, J. (2005). *Critical pedagogy: Notes from the real world*. Boston: Pearson.

Zinn, H., (2004). *Howard Zinn on democratic education*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.