

Using Metaphors, Analogies and Similes as Aids in Teaching Pathology to Medical Students

Rani Kanthan, M.D. and Sheryl Mills, M.Ed.

Colleges of Medicine and Education
University of Saskatchewan
Room 2868 "G" Wing
Royal University Hospital
103 Hospital Drive Saskatoon, SK S7N0W8 CANADA

Phone: (+)1-306-655-2158

Fax: (+)1-306-655-2223

Email: rani.kanthan@saskatoonhealthregion.ca

ABSTRACT

Metaphors, analogies, and similes bridge the known to the unknown, and alter the conceptual system of existing knowledge by modifying and strengthening its associations. Although the use of metaphors, analogies, and similes is pervasive in our language, not much has been written about its use as a potential active teaching strategy in medical education to explain complex or abstract concepts. Metaphors, analogies, and similes were used intentionally in two consecutive years of an undergraduate pathology course for medical and dental students for two purposes: a) to communicate and understand complex concepts such as those related to acute and chronic inflammation, thrombosis, embolism and infarction; and b) to provide practice for students to become better communicators of complex medical concepts using these strategies. Students found that working with metaphors, analogies and similes enhanced and aided their learning, and challenged their communication skills. The unexpected impact of creating visual metaphors had a unique potential for improving recall of information. The discussion and negotiation of metaphors can be used in medical education as an effective teaching strategy to augment communication skills towards a better understanding of complex medical concepts. This, in turn, may aid students in becoming effective communicators with their prospective patients.
