

## Politics as Shaping: An Approximation to Students' Metaphorical Understanding

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- Metaphors may help achieve a conceptual reconstruction in social science education.
- Metaphors reveal people's political narrative.
- Students use metaphorical language to understand and express their idea of politics.
- Metaphorically politics is shaping, passing upwards, guidance and foundation.
- A Grafiz can help to make students' metaphors useful in social science education.

**Purpose:** Teaching social science might benefit from using students' metaphorical understanding. Metaphors help people to better understand abstract concepts by breaking them down into more familiar ones. This essay attempts to approximate students' metaphors of politics to improve social science education's efforts in shaping politically mature citizens.

**Method:** Taking three single interviews with students attending senior classes in high schools in Hamburg, Germany, this paper analyses metaphors they use to describe politics. It categorizes them and puts them into a larger context in the form of systematic metaphors providing an approximation to the students' metaphorical understanding.

**Findings:** The findings suggest that students understand politics as shaping society, participation as passing upwards people's interests, governance as guidance, and human life as the foundation for society. However, more research is necessary, such as analysing more students' metaphors or using issue-related drawings.

**Practical implications:** Teachers can use these findings to initialize a conceptual reconstruction. They could ask students to draw a *Grafiz* using the terms suggested above and having a better access to students' metaphorical understanding of a topic. That helps the teacher to select appropriate material for their teaching units.

**Keywords:**

metaphors, politics, Grafiz, students' ideas

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### 1 Civic educational need for students' metaphors

Teaching politics in a student-oriented manner is difficult. Politics is a very abstract idea although omnipresent in people's lives. Metaphors facilitate making more abstract ideas more familiar. That especially applies to politics, as it is "a distant realm for many people, and politicians use metaphorical expressions to translate abstract topics into more familiar ones, which people can understand and connect more easily." However, politics is not such a distant realm as Negrea-Busucioc (2017, p. 311) suggests. It takes place in everyday life when individuals transform their interests into common decisions (Lange 2008). Students experience politics in their everyday life. Those experiences help teachers to connect civic educational content with students' ideas and enable a conceptual reconstruction. Achieving a conceptual reconstruction in a more practical and student-oriented manner necessitates a look at metaphors. Not only do they occur in politicians' speeches but also in everyone's language. People's knowledge is widely filled with metaphors.

When people try to understand (political) reality, language plays a crucial role. Language is our coordinate system; it is omnipresent in life. "Everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen. An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life" (Berger/ Luckmann, 1966, p. 51 – 2). People use language to express their experiences. Language is full of metaphors based on and influencing our perception because "the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor" (Lakoff/ Johnson, 1980, p. 3).

A common example is ARGUMENT IS WAR. According to it, people understand arguments as a fight. When arguing, they act in a way of, for example, winning, losing, defending, attacking, and demolishing. "We talk about arguments that way because we conceive of them that way – and we act according to the way we conceive things" (Lakoff/ Johnson, 1980, p. 5). If we had not understood argument as war, we may have had a very different idea of arguments. Metaphors influence our mindset. Since metaphors are quite dominant in everyday life, our choice of words and actions go together. They are mutually dependent which is also the case for our political mindset. "Because so much of our social and political reasoning makes use of this system of metaphorical concepts, any adequate appreciation of even the most mundane social and political thought requires an understanding of this system" (Lakoff, 1995, p. 177). In using a systematic choice of metaphor, people make reality understandable to themselves – and so do students of civic education. In understanding students' metaphors, teachers better understand their students' political perception and prior knowledge.

Students perceive everyday politics, express their experience and make it understandable by *picturing* it, that is, using metaphors to understand it. This, for instance, is shown in teacher beliefs research. "[E]xisting metaphor collections about teaching constituted an important starting point for educational researchers to study the beliefs that future teachers bring with them to teacher preparation programs" (Szukala, 2011, p. 61). Metaphors also facilitate learning as "conceptual metaphors enable insightful learning due to their experiential basis" (Niemeier, 2017, p. 674). As social science education always deals with technical terminology, metaphors may be helpful, too. Niemeier (2017, p. 675) states in context of English didactics that "[c]onceptual metaphors help learners to retain vocabulary more easily, as learners are enabled to systematically expand on their prior knowledge and use already known words in extended senses." Metaphors help improve educational purpose by better understanding students' perception.

To sum up, teachers need a better understanding of students' systematic choice of metaphors. Their metaphorical concepts reveal their political understanding based on everyday experiences. They are vital to initiate a conceptual reconstruction. There might be misconceptions teachers have to work with (Reinhardt, 2015, p. 51). If social science education improves its idea of students' metaphors, it may come up with new ideas on initializing a conceptual reconstruction deepening students' knowledge. Thus this essay aims at approximating students' metaphorical understanding of politics and giving suggestions on practical implications and further need for research.

The essay first asks for an educational understanding of politics (chapter 2) and provides a theoretical framework of metaphors (chapter 3). It then analyses students' metaphorical understanding of politics by



using three single interviews (chapter 4). It finally suggests further research and practical implications (chapter 5).

## 2 What is politics in social science educational context?

As politics is in the centre of the upcoming analysis, the term requires a scientific and especially educational definition. Its meaning, though, is scientifically hard to grasp and even more challenging if politics is put into an educational context. The latter requires an understanding addressing not only scientific findings but also students' everyday ideas. As stated in the introduction, politics is not only a distant realm but takes place in everyday life.

From a scientific point of view, Colomer (2011), for example, connects politics with public goods, cooperation, conflicts, and competition, whereas Ryan (2012) associates politics with the question of how people govern themselves. This question centres his overview on political thought, knowingly narrowing down the debates about the essence of politics to governance. Slightly differently, Easton (1953, p. 128) discusses politics in terms of political life. Political life refers to activities of authoritative agents as well as the making and execution of policy relevant to values in society. However Easton (1953, p. 126) also stresses that politics has always been a search for the good life, making it hard to find a universally-accepted solution. In this context Haywood (2007, p. 5) summarizes the problem well by pointing out that the question *what is politics?* “exposes some of the deepest intellectual and ideological disagreement in the academic study of the subject.” Nevertheless, understanding politics as solving conflicts might be a useful compromise in the science of politics as “the heart of politics is often portrayed as a process of conflict resolution, in which rival views or competing interests are reconciled with one another” (Haywood, 2007, p. 4). However, achieving conflict resolution is quite hard in societies. Conflicts originate from diversity and scarcity ensuring “that politics is an inevitable feature of the human condition” (Haywood, 2007, p. 4). Conflict resolution, though, might be a good starting point as scientific consensus.

Politics as conflict resolution is only suitable for social science education if it does not refer to apolitical resolutions. Instead of narrowing down politics to conflict resolutions in institutional contexts and expanding to apolitical events, Lange (2008) defines politics as a process which transfers individual interests into common solutions explaining why a family decision on the next weekend trip or students' decision on class rules are political. If two nine-year-olds, for example, argue about classroom disruption and the teacher orders them to be silent, there is conflict resolution but not a political one. However, if the two nine-year-old ones and their classmates discuss how to prevent classroom disturbance and decide on a set of rules, they turn their individual interests into common decisions. They have a political conflict resolution. This definition focuses conflict resolution on politics since it aims at decision-making by connecting individual interests with each other. This process, though, is far more complex. Kegel's (2018, p. 457 – 8) didactic term of politics expands Lange's everyday understanding: The transformation regulates the relationship between society and each individual by referring to the four concepts *participation, plurality of opinions, social justice, and living together in everyday life*. Justice, integration, positive attitudes between individual and society, autonomy, and the connection between moral and law intertwine those four concepts.<sup>1</sup> This term is didactic because it is based on students' everyday understanding and deepened by similar scientific ideas of politics. In the case of the example with classroom disturbance, students face questions such as, how their resolution is participative (*who decides: students and teachers?*), diverse (*how to account for many interests?*), socially just (*what is a suitable, just rule?*), and effective (*how do the rules provide equal opportunities?*). Thus, understanding politics as conflict resolutions if individual interests become common decisions is a useful definition for social science's educational purpose. Kegel's didactic term helps better understand to what extent this process is conflictive.

However, Kegel's didactic term of politics is far too complex for students of civic education and would be over demanding to them. Using their metaphors as starting point, though, might be helpful – especially because metaphors are omnipresent in politics. Not only do politicians make use of metaphors (Negrea-Busuioc, 2017, p. 312) but also use them “to translate abstract topics into more familiar ones, which people can understand and connect more easily” (Negrea-Busuioc, 2017, p. 311). Thus students need to



understand metaphors to be less vulnerable to being manipulated as well as to raise their consciousness to the existence of metaphors in political settings. A good, primary approximation is to understand their systematic use of metaphors as starting point.

### 3 An approximation to metaphors

Analysing students' metaphorical understanding first necessitates understanding metaphors. In doing so, this chapter is divided into two parts: The first one takes a look at what metaphors are and how they influence people's knowledge of reality. The second one shows how metaphors reveal people's perceptions

#### 3.1 The meaning of metaphors

First of all, what is a metaphor? People perceive reality based on their experience. They make reality understandable using metaphors as frames for more abstract ideas such as time and arguments. Those ideas refer to more concrete ones. People have less direct access to more abstract ideas making it difficult to understand them. "The domain of experience that is used to comprehend another domain is typically more physical, more directly experienced, and better known than the domain we wish to comprehend, which is typically more abstract, less directly experienced, and less known" (Kövecses, 2015, p. 2). By framing more abstract experiences with more concrete ones, people make them more understandable. More concrete concepts are – as source domain – helpful donators to understanding more abstract ones – as target domains. A metaphor hence connects two ideas with each other to provide understanding. "[T]here are two distinct ideas involved and that we use one idea to better understand the other" (Cameron, 2010a, p. 3). A metaphor is figurative language and can "be understood as a global term meaning a comparison between two unlike things which serves to enhance our understanding" (Bowman, 1998 – 1999, p. 1; Bartel, 1983, p. 3). Metaphor bridges two mental frames distinguished by more or less accessibility to people's experience. That is why a "metaphor is a set of correspondences, or mappings, between two elements of two mental frames" (Kövecses, 2015, p. 2). Framing more abstract concepts like comparing argument with war or time with money help people make them more accessible to themselves and their fellowmen (Lakoff, 1994, p. 251).

Metaphors not only help make reality comprehensible. They also influence people's thinking and actions as it is the case, for instance, in education and politics. Metaphors are "not just reflecting attitudes but shaping our perspectives and our actions" (Bowman, 1998 – 1999, p. 1; Szuluka, 2011). Metaphors therefore limit our perspective on life and foster facts. Metaphors highlight aspects but also hide other aspects resulting in a biased perception. If teachers, for instance, metaphorize learning as a journey, learning not only is exploration and discovery but also has a destination (Wade, 2017, p. 776). However, reaching the destination also completes or rather finishes learning. Learning then may no longer be the storage of knowledge; you pass a place on a journey and may not come back. "There is the risk that it becomes a fragmented itinerary of sporadic episodes in the learning experience" (Wade, 2017, p. 778). If learning is metaphorized as a container, though, learning is "a process of knowledge accumulation and storage" (Szuluka, 2011, p. 67).

As providing a biased perception, metaphors cause a narrative. The choice of metaphors influences our perception of reality. Lakoff (1991) proves how Bush's narrative of the Gulf war aims at presenting the USA as heroic by going to a just war against Iraq (the villain) that attacked Kuwait (the victim), although it was also perceived by some as a war defending US interests in oil. From that point onwards, the public no longer focused on economic interests which eased US government's efforts to convince everyone of a (just) war against Iraq (Lakoff, 1991, p. 5). Obama similarly attempts to convince the American public of engaging in climate change. He frames climate change as a war to allow "the public to infer that climate change is an enemy, albeit an invisible one, that still needs to be fought against" (Negrea-Busuioc, 2017, p. 338 – 339). He also frames climate change as a race to stress US leadership and teamwork as well as to secure victory (Negrea-Busuioc, 2017, p. 337). Metaphors make life more comprehensible, but also aim at convincing people. Metaphors provide a biased perception. They are based on "a coherent network of



entailments that highlight some features of reality and hide others. The acceptance of the metaphor [...] leads us to view the entailment as being *true*” (Lakoff/ Johnson, 1980, p. 157). The choice of metaphors creates a biased picture of an event and thus provides a far-reaching narrative.

### 3.2 Metaphors as spatial and cultural understanding

An analysis of students’ metaphors requires an understanding of where they originate. This necessitates a look at people’s spatial and cultural experience, that is their interaction with their environment and fellow people.

Basically Lakoff/ Johnson (1991) discriminates between different contributors to metaphors such as orientational and ontological metaphors as well as personification, metonymy, entities and similarities. Those examples usually have in common their reference to human body and activities interacting with the physical environment. Spatial experience is a vital contributor to our metaphorical understanding. “In other words, the structure of our spatial concepts emerges from our constant spatial experience, that is, our interaction with the physical environment. Concepts that emerge in this way are concepts that we live by in the most fundamental way” (Lakoff/ Johnson, 1991, p. 56 – 7). Since people’s physical abilities are omnipresent in life and directly perceivable (like, for instance, to look up and down, to move forward and backward), they help everyone make more abstract concepts better understandable. Taking the example “John grasps the idea”, Cuccio/ Fontana (2017, p. 108) concludes, “we comprehend the abstract concept of “understanding” (the target domain of the metaphor) resorting to the physical action of grasping (the source domain of the metaphor).” As physical abilities do not depend on language, metaphors can have a universal meaning no matter what language is in use.

Metaphors also originate from cultural influence. Cultural influence is pre-condition to make metaphors workable. Metaphors originate from social negotiations making knowledge of the world the result of a broader understanding. Knowledge is based on our interaction with other people and only works if we make ourselves comprehensible. That is why language only works if people understand each other (Berger/ Luckmann, 1966, p. 51ff) – and so do metaphors. If I, for example, understand argument in terms of defending and attacking, my counterpart needs a similar understanding to find my conceptual metaphor argument is war comprehensible. We understand fairy tales as black and white stories to identify good and bad more easily – as shown above in the case of the Gulf war. The American people were more willing to accept the Gulf war as just and necessary because it was compared with a fairy tale having a clear role allocation: the US as hero, Kuwait as victim, and Iraq as villain. In other words cultural influence is predominant because “all experience is cultural through and through, that we experience is our “world” in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself” (Lakoff/ Johnson, 1991, p. 57). To sum up, metaphors originate from our spatial experience, that is when our human body interacts with the environment, but also from cultural experience, that is how we experience our environment when interacting with fellow people.

### 3.3 A systematic choice of metaphors

Students’ biased pictures of politics and thus their political narratives occur in their systematic use and choice of metaphors.

Metaphors are comparable with a map giving a more familiar overview on a more abstract idea, as Negrea-Busuioac (2017, p. 315) points out in the context of Obama’s speech on climate change. “Figurative language and thinking, especially metaphors, play a crucial role in mapping climate change onto more familiar, more tangible aspects of human life that people find easier to relate to and use in their everyday life.” In referring to everyday life, the human mind makes use of a source domain referring to the target domain. In this case spending money is a source domain used to make the value of time more understandable. If people *lose or spend money literally*, they perceive time as something they *lose or spend metaphorically*. Time is the target domain. The same applies to learning as a journey or argument as war. Those conceptual metaphors reveal a biased perception. Several single metaphors reveal a systematic understanding.



Cameron (2010b, p.91) suggests the term “systematic metaphor” meaning “an emergent discourse phenomenon that is produced when discourse participants, over a discourse event or longer period of time, use a particular set of linguistic metaphor vehicles in talking about a particular topic, or closely connected topics.” Systematic metaphors are a set of closely related metaphors – and so are conceptual metaphors. Both share “the idea of connected patterns of metaphors as important tool in understanding and talking or writing” (Cameron 2010b, p. 91; Lakoff, 2014, p. 131). In other words “[a] conceptual metaphor typically has a number of linguistic manifestations (metaphorically used words and more complex expressions) to talk about the target domain” (Kövecses, 2015, p. 2). As these linguistic manifestations share a similar perception, they refer to a systematic perception. They “therefore motivate a system of associated metaphorical terms that appear on the “surface” of language. They are symbolic frames (“schemes”) that provide an inferential base for understanding more discrete attitudes and behaviour and thus capture an underlying word view or frame” (Szuluka, 2011, p. 61). Those conceptual metaphors are not random, for they depend on their cultural context and are common experience. “Basic conceptual metaphors are part of the common conceptual apparatus shared by members of a culture. They are systematic in that there is a fixed correspondence between the structure of the domain to be understood (e.g., death) and the structure of the domain in terms of which we are understanding it (e.g., departure). We usually understand them in terms of common experience” (Lakoff/ Truner, 2001, p. 51). People use their common experience and revert to a systematic approach – no matter where they come from. Similar or even the same conceptual metaphors exist in different languages as, for instance, spatial experience does not depend on people’s whereabouts. “[C]ommonality in human experience [...] gives us many of the conceptual metaphors that we can take to be near-universal or potentially universal” (Kövecses, 2015, p. 6). That is why similar spatial and cultural experience (as stated in the previous part) make metaphors understandable between people (like between an interviewer and interviewee).

Conceptual metaphors reveal people’s systematic approach to more abstract concepts like politics when using common experience. Such an understanding can help teachers to better understand students’ political understanding and find access to their ideas. This access is important to work with and through their (mis-)conceptions – as stated in the introduction.

#### **4 Searching students’ metaphor**

As this article aims at students’ metaphorical understanding, this section is divided into two parts: As an analysis requires a methodical approach, the first section outlines the method. The second one presents the findings of how students understand politics metaphorically.

##### **4.1 Method: how to analyse students’ metaphors**

As pointed out above, metaphors as figurative language aids understanding and – in a larger context – map more abstract ideas in a more familiar way. To analyse students’ systematic use of metaphors, the interviews analysed here are considered as discourse event and discourse dynamics taking place between an interviewer and a single interviewee aiming at a better understanding of the latter’s ideas of politics. Taking such a “framework for analysing metaphors in discourse builds on the premise that different dimensions [...] of metaphor in use are interconnected and they can be reflected across the discourse event and across discourse participants” (Negrea-Busuioc, 2017, p. 323). Such interconnectedness, assuming metaphors are used in linguistic, cognitive, affective, physical, and cultural dimensions, helps identify metaphors within the discourse context, discourse events, and in societies over time (Cameron, 2010b, p. 78; Negrea-Busuioc 2017). This framework as used for the upcoming analysis helps identify metaphors as used in the course of the three interviews but also find connections between students’ metaphors and across discourse genres and over time. This is vital in order to make practical implications for the use of metaphors for educational purposes.

In order to find metaphors methodically, the analysis identifies students’ systematic choice of metaphor vehicles. “Metaphor vehicles are central to the various metaphor phenomena covered by the framework, and can be connected theoretically to other aspects of metaphor at other timescales” (Cameron, 2010b, 79). Hence, each of the three interviews were searched for metaphor vehicles expressing similar ideas of



politics. Similar connections between figurative language and political idea reveal their perception of politics. Their metaphorical sayings are categorized with similar metaphorical ones other students use to metaphorize the same principal topics. Since this study is interested in students' political ideas, it remains close to their sayings and does not assume a scientific understanding of politics first. Otherwise the study would move away from students' ideas.

Searching students' systematic metaphors requires a broad approach to their political ideas and is based on three single interviews conducted for a qualitative approach (Kegel, 2018a). As this thesis aimed at a didactic understanding of politics, it centred single interviews with seven students having a length of about 1.5 hours each. The interviews were problem-centred and divided into three sections. Students who attended senior classes at different high schools in Hamburg, Germany, first talked about how they consider politics today, secondly how they would like politics to be on a different planet (their utopia) and thirdly from where their ideas originate.

Providing a first approach to metaphors, the paper analyses three students with different political ideas. The students have the fictional names Atticus, Alice, and Dorothy.<sup>2</sup> Atticus aims at both, enabling people to participate in politics as much as possible, and ensuring an effective decision-making process. Dorothy, however, limits participation to elections and wants politicians to take care of sustainable decisions and efficient funding. In contrast to both, Alice denies participation; she wants a king as sole decision-maker. Thus the analysis can find conceptual metaphors covering a broad range of political ideas. However, there are still other metaphors.

## 4.2 Students' metaphors of politics

According to the students, people metaphorically use politics to *shape* society and need to *pass upwards* their ideas to their leaders who *guide* them based on human dignity as *foundation*. The upcoming analysis provides a presentation on the students' metaphors (*shaping, passing upwards, guidance, foundation*) and an understanding of what they allude to. Since the interviews took place in German and students' pictures are presented in English, there are no quotations. The analysis rather provides references to the pages and lines where readers can find the metaphors in the interviews, also indicated in italics.

### 4.2.1 Politics as shaping

Students metaphorize politics as shaping. Politics embodies the aim of shaping a sustainable and utopian society giving equal chances, providing human dignity, and balancing people's interests.

Atticus describes politics as its *main goal* being a *fight for principles and utopias* and thus *shaping a better society by regulating different – as he puts it – things via politics* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 2, ll. 45 – 52). Atticus considers politics to be not only a goal of society but also as an opportunity of shaping since it makes people to show a more appropriate behaviour. Politics also enables people to compete for their ideals, turning politics into *a system of stimulation* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 2, ll. 51) and a *scope for design* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 2, ll. 56) forming society. Atticus also illustrates how the new shape of society is supposed to look like in the end: he wants to *bring human dignity into being, stop people's economy from interfering in the environment* and *bring their lives in tune with the environment* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 5 – 6, ll. 175 – 84). As shaping requires people to use a tool, Atticus consistently, but also negatively considers today's referendum as a *direct instrument in the shape of a hammer for upper-class people to form politics* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 23, ll. 815 – 9). Atticus understands politics as shaping society referring to tools, but does not clarify what specific tools society needs.

In a similar way, Dorothy considers politics as shaping. For her, politics has effects on school and working life, as well as how people govern themselves, defining government as an executive branch as well as parties and their individual interests (Kegel, 2018b, p. 208, ll. 47 – 57). Furthermore, she ascribes politics to providing a sustainable life. Politics needs to use resources sustainably because *people must not demolish the planet* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 216, ll. 343). Understanding sustainability as a major aspect of politics, she also refers to the planet as a person because *the planet will experience a growth in housing space*, requiring people to pay attention to *how much the planet can actually carry* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 216, ll. 342 – 4). Hereby she aims at bringing people's and Nature's interests together giving government the



*task of finding a good balance.* In planning political decisions, a government needs to ensure *that the means of funding and the resources of the planet are not exceeded* or – as she says – *outrun*. Such an effective funding requires *a government to either invest into sustainability or build a theme park* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 217, ll. 377 – 81). As a government makes decisions leading to building, carrying, or demolishing and ensuring sustainability, Dorothy understands politics as shaping society.

However, Alice’s society, already living in paradise, requires no changes and hence no shaping. She initially uses production, expressing the aims of politics as *coordinating solutions by trying to produce balance* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 152 – 3, ll. 177 – 86) and to *find solutions producing social justice* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 151, ll. 117). Politics is supposed to satisfy as many people as possible. Later on she distances herself from her initial idea by alluding to a king who embodies politics. Whenever conflicts arise, politics in the manifestation of a king *steps in* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 155, ll. 266). People *take the initiative* by asking the king when they are unable to find solutions (Kegel, 2018b, p. 156, ll. 321 – 2). However, the king provides a *manual* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 160, ll. 468) helping people to cooperate: They *find a good compromise for everyone* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 167, ll. 725 – 6) and have *a foundation on which everything else can be built up* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 169, ll. 788). Interestingly, at the outset of the interview, she understands politics as the production of social justice and balance of interests. Her king, taking action if necessary, then embodies politics. He enables people a life in paradise by providing a manual that helps people to produce social justice and balance interests on an appropriate foundation. Having the king’s manual, people learn how to use politics as means to shape a better social life. Thus politics is shaping. Each interviewee clearly states that they understand politics as shaping society.

#### 4.2.2 Participation as passing upwards

The three students understand participation as passing upwards since there is a hierarchy between leaders and citizens. They want politicians to be decision-makers. The latter informs the former of their interests by bringing them on the next, higher level.

Atticus understands participation as a challenge to ensure effective and participatory decision-making. He connects participation with *an organisational problem, for eighty million people cannot sit in a room to discuss policies*. People need to *draw a line and set up a framework that allows everyone to participate but also to work effectively* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 12, ll. 400 – 6). Effective decision-making necessitates *coming down to a representative system* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 12, ll. 412 – 3) leading to a hierarchical system. Decision-makers are more powerful and are thus on a higher level. Everyday participation begins *on a small scale* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 19, ll. 688) leaving everyone’s participation *on the lowest level* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 19, ll. 692). From there people can start *to pass their opinions upwards on to the next levels* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 19, ll. 692). Hereby *there is quite a lot of elbowroom because referendum can generate participation* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 12, ll. 414 – 5) and *jump over the representative system concerning special issues* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 13, ll. 447 – 8). In jumping over, people can outmatch their decision-makers. As people have to be able to pass their opinions upwards, Atticus fears manipulation. He cautions against *manipulated media telling people what to think* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 23, ll. 834) and *delivering opinions* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 12, ll. 421). He is afraid of a *political system ejecting people unconsciously* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 21, ll. 756 – 7) making people passive figures in politics. Only active citizens have the strength to pass upwards their ideas without being influenced too much.

Dorothy also wants people to pass their ideas upwards although she rejects referenda as a mean of participation. For her, there are different groups with different ideas and each of these groups has an elected person. *Each elected person represents the different ideas to present and teach them to the circle of elected people* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 220, ll. 488 – 479). Like teachers to their students, elected officials are experts and – to some extent – decision-makers for citizens. Furthermore, she wants to see both, *people engaged in politics by writing letters and passing on ideas*, and *elected people pick up ideas and discuss them* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 219, ll. 468 – 470). Although she does not discuss politics in terms of different levels – as Atticus does –, she understands decision-making as a place that is away from the people. This separate place knows people’s interests and is in charge of the decision-making as *it leads society making equality rule people* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 212, ll. 182). Such an understanding reveals lawmakers sitting over



the people. Metaphorically spoken, people, announcing their interests, have to pass upwards their ideas to their lawmakers.

In contrast Alice directly points out that *politicians are on the top* because they make decisions, want changes and are people's elected officials. She wants to put the *people a bit higher* but not on *the same level as politicians* since the *people decide through politicians* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 150 – 2, ll. 107 – 62). Although she later on puts a king in the centre of her utopia, the king remains the decision-maker. Her King *stands above* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 160, ll. 441) and *takes action in case of doubts* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 155, ll. 265 – 6) since people should try to cooperate with each other instead of *stressing ownership like: 'This is my garden'. 'This is your garden'* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 167, ll. 308 – 13). She does not need any politicians on her planet as the *king is like God* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 157, ll. 335 – 6): he is all-powerful and *can therefore read people's thoughts and look into their hearts. He can pass on his energy or spirit to empower people* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 167, ll. 496 – 9). In each of those cases the king as decision-maker remains over the people. God is in heaven and thus over people. As a utopian monarch he is not dependent on the people's will, but rather the reverse is true. However, his decisions are good because he knows his subjects' true interests. Thus he passes their ideas upwards to himself.

#### 4.2.3 Governance as guidance

Understanding politics as shaping and participation as passing upwards leaves unclear who is in charge. For Atticus, Dorothy and Alice, governance is guidance.

Atticus does not talk about ruling as a necessity. He stresses instead the need to empower people to *question as much as possible and see everything from different perspectives* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 5, ll. 156 – 7) which *is not put into their cradle* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 16, ll. 573 – 4). Taking the baker as an example of someone who performs an important service to society, he would like *different paths of life to be more appreciated* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 11, ll. 376 – 9). In each of the cases, difference, hence plurality stands in the foreground requiring people not only to learn it from the birth onwards (= cradle,) but also to understand (= seeing perspectives) and value diverse lives (= paths of life). He underlines the necessity of empowering people by contrasting it with ruling suppression. Today's politicians *bait people with carrots and stick*. Alluding to hierarchy, *if the top does not want it, people need to do it from the bottom* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 27, 961 – 72). *People get blinkered* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 10, ll. 352 – 3) and *do not have the balls* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 29, ll. 1031) to change something. They *cannot think out of the box* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 10, ll. 350 – 4) and need to *broaden their horizon* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 10, ll. 350 – 4). Empowering defies suppression. Therefore, the political system needs to screen opinions by using fewer obstacles. That is why it needs *simpler structures* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 19, 671 – 2) and *lower hurdles* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 20, 716). For Atticus government is closer to people's interests by a society accepting diversity, questioning everything and hindering governing people from pushing through their interests. That leads to government that performs guidance instead of ruling.

Dorothy more directly refers to government as a leader instead of a ruler. *Since rules must not go against human dignity and not hurt people* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 211, 177 – 9), she stresses that a government needs to consist of different people who *lead the system but do not rule the planet and ensure that equality rules the planet* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 211 – 2, 179 – 83). Rules personify authority and put governing people on a lower level. She indirectly underlines this approach by preferring group to political parties. She alludes to her everyday life where she is rather *on the way with a group of friends* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 224, ll. 641 – 2) than with party members. Meeting friends embodies personality and makes everyone more equal although friendships are subject to (unwritten) rules. Leading makes lawmakers and citizens as equal as possible but leaves decisions to the former.

At first glance Alice takes a different approach but has in a fact a similar idea. Her King *sums up everything* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 175, ll. 989 – 90). The people *do everything in front of the king's eyes* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 172, ll. 901 – 2). He provides laws *by which people can live* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 162, ll. 539). Thus the king symbolizes a dictator who controls people's lives. He can *read people's hearts and minds* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 167, 496 – 7), enabling him to *see everything* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 167, 557 – 8). Alice, though,



understands the king differently. Instead of being a dictator, he provides guidance. In fact, he *guides people* (Kegel, 2018b, p. 161, ll. 499). As a guide, the king is not interested in suppressing people – as, for instance, Hobbes’ Leviathan. He instead enables people to have a proper life knowing their true interests and concerns. In a far more democratic understanding, Atticus wants more self-governance by making people discuss needs and concerns but not abolishing an executive branch – and so does Dorothy. She has a more personal understanding of governance, for personal groups are more passionate to their members’ needs and concerns. Instead of giving orders, friends deliberate conflict resolutions as, for instance, where to go for lunch. As in each of the three cases governance is about bringing diverse interests together and not ruling people, each of them would understand governance as guidance.

#### 4.2.4 Human life as a foundation

To have peaceful life, society needs a foundation its members can identify with. Therefore, the three interviewees understand human life as foundation.

For Atticus, politics embodies people’s decision of how they determine their living together (Kegel, 2018b, p.1, ll. 21 – 3). He cautions against the tabloid press that delivers opinions (Kegel, 2018b, p. 7, ll. 238 – 44 and p. 12, ll. 415 – 23) and does not advance freedom. Democratic politics decide on economy (Kegel, 2018b, p. 6, ll. 207 – 9). This enables equal chances and human conditions being the bridge towards economic policy (Kegel, 2018b, p. 8, ll. 259). This bridge appears in different shapes. Economic growth is responsible for exploiting resources and humans. That is why developed countries need to tear down protective barriers to secure human life (Kegel, 2018b, p. 9, ll. 306 – 10). People instead need both, a strong welfare state that – as an entity – enables disabled, young, old and sick people to lead a good life, and a basic income that secures human life (Kegel, 2018b, p. 8, 259 – 77). Human life also necessitates people not to use the economy to turn environment upside down (Kegel, 2018b, p. 5 – 6, ll. 176 – 84). In each case, equal chances and human life are the foundation for civil rights which either suffer abuse (exploitation, economic protection or ecological destruction, media-related manipulation) or need to be more secured. Human life as a foundation prevents people from doing harm.

As already mentioned above, Dorothy underlines the meaning of rules. That is why she understands our politics as founding rules we need to hold on to (Kegel 2018b, p. 209, ll. 70 – 1). Talking about Germany’s basic law, she wants a common foundation that rules society (Kegel, 2018b, p. 213, ll. 225 – 6). Like a person, a basic law ensures that both, people pay attention to what to build, and the same conditions apply everywhere (Kegel, 2018b, p. 226, ll. 716 – 8). Those basic rules personify the true ruler of society, ensuring sustainability and equal conditions (Kegel, 2018b, p. 226, ll. 715 – 8) and providing that rules do not violate human dignity (Kegel, 2018b, p. 211, ll. 177 – 9). Hereby she defines human dignity as something that does not go below human rights (Kegel, 2018b, p. 213 – 4, ll. 252 – 8) and equality as something ensuring that people from other countries with different cultural and traditional backgrounds are not ejected when entering another country (Kegel, 2018b, p. 216, ll. 329 – 32). On Dorothy’s planet, human rights and equality – as founding rules – provide a good life for everyone making them the foundation for any decisions.

Reducing political complexity, Alice focuses on two founding principles that sum up everything, not requiring so many books as in today’s world (Kegel, 2018b, p. 172, ll. 897 – 903). Those founding principles prevent society from having loopholes in law (Kegel, 2018b, p. 170, ll. 814 – 5). Thus Alice explains the advantages of her founding principles by alluding not only to their universality in society but also simplicity. Reading many books demands a lot from people; people’s law is flawless. The founding principles, being: love thy neighbour and the king (Kegel, 2018b, p. 172, ll. 898 – 9), are connected with the king. People look at the foundation and how the king draws conclusions, how he thinks and how he has intervened in order to interpret the principles (Kegel, 2018b, p. 170, ll. 810 – 4). Hereby Alice understands looking as taking the king as model who has pity and love as well as is all-powerful and just. These characteristics make him an authority in Alice’s utopian society (Kegel, 2018b, p. 162 – 3, ll. 534 – 62 and p. 172, ll. 900) and provide human life for everyone. Each of the three interviewees stresses the need for a foundation that enables a good life for everyone by providing equal chances and human dignity.



Understanding politics as shaping, participation as passing upwards, governance as guidance, and human dignity as a foundation is metaphorical. In each case students attempt to bring their ideas across. They refer to their everyday knowledge which is accessible to them and help them to break more abstract ideas into more familiar, even more tangible ones. Such an approximation is vital for metaphorical understanding. As pointed out in chapter 3, figurative language and thinking originate from tangible and familiar aspects of people's everyday life. They therefore result in a biased perception and even in a narrative. Such a narrative is interesting for social science education to deal with a more student-oriented understanding of politics – as pointed out in chapter 2. Students' understanding helps to didactically deepen their understanding of social science and make them more maturely engaged in today's society.

In asking for students' political terminology, a fair, although interpretative deduction of the findings may end up in understanding politics as shaping, which might require a toolbox. The students repeatedly point out the necessity of balancing and producing (Dorothy, Alice) as well as the existence of instruments (Atticus). That may make tools essential for shaping which also requires a foundation of human dignity. Such a foundation ensures that, metaphorically spoken, a ladder, helping citizens to passing upwards their ideas, does not tip over. However, how do citizens shape their social life? If they use tools, what tools do they employ to shape society? What else may they need to pass upwards their ideas and make politicians listen to their needs? How does governance perform guidance? Those questions may be addressed in classes and further research. In either case, students' responses need to be didactically intertwined with a scientific understanding.

## 5 Students' metaphors in civic educational learning and teaching

As the previous section suggested, students have a broad metaphorical understanding of politics. This section now aims at responding to how this metaphorical understanding helps teachers teach politics in a more student-orientated manner. As learning always starts with students' ideas, their metaphors are a good starting point for conceptual reconstruction. Metaphors originate from everyday perception allowing an easier access to ideas. To suggest how citizenship education may benefit from metaphors, this chapter is divided into two parts: It firstly suggests practical implications and then explains further need for research.

### 5.1 Students' metaphors as access to citizenship educational content

Metaphors help both, students to have, and teachers to provide a better access to citizenship educational content. They help initialize a conceptual reconstruction requiring teachers to know their students' learning difficulties. "Knowing about and accepting learning difficulties creates an opportunity for teaching, allowing teachers to facilitate learning processes that include room for misconceptions and that help expand student competencies" (Reinhard, 2015, p. 52). To achieve that, teachers of citizenship education may ask students to do a *Grafiz*. This is a German acronym standing for a combination of graphic and note. The *Grafiz* requires students to draw a picture, choose relevant terms, and write a brief description or draw a mind map (Li Hamburg, 2009, 13; Müller, 2001, 120; Schiller, 2008, 104 – 5). If a lesson unit, for example, focuses on political theory, students may do a *Grafiz* on how they imagine politics as shaping a better place. As finally suggested at the end of section 4, teachers may even learn what tools students have in their toolbox to make society a better place. Such a task might unfold their metaphorical and thus biased perception (chapter 3) of why people do politics and help teachers to choose material for their unit. The *Grafiz* can even be seen as taking a snapshot of their political perception allowing them to subsequently return to their *Grafiz* and assess their learning growth. Teachers could undertake similar approximation on participation, governance, and human dignity aiming at challenging their students with other biased perceptions and offering different ideas.

In each case they may even enable students to have a better understanding of social science content. Those metaphors may go together with the four concepts of the didactic term of politics being everyday life (politics as shaping), diversity of opinions (governance as guidance), participation (as passing upwards), and social justice (human life as foundation) – as stated in chapter 2. Each of the four concepts provides a perspective on transforming individual interests into common-decisions. It may even be



possible to raise questions on the economy, social issues, and international relationships – core topics in German schools. Since Atticus (basic income, development policy for Africa), Dorothy (working conditions), and Alice (social aid) talk about those core topics in the context of metaphors, their metaphors might be a guideline for learning more about, for example, globalisation. Globalisation raises questions on human dignity. Politics need to make the world a better place by, for example, preventing poverty (economy – social justice) and stopping climate change (international relationships – everyday life). Finally, teachers could ask students to find metaphorical understanding in political context comparing it with their comprehension. That may also help students to learn and to make better use of political vocabulary.

## 5.2 Further research on citizenship educational metaphors

Metaphor analysis may have a bigger role in civic educational research. Three single interviews might be a good starting point. However, those conceptual metaphors cannot assume a general statement about students' ideas. Since these interviews offer various kinds of political ideas, these findings refer to the idea of representation in form and content (Merkens, 1997, p. 97 – 100). They may be reasonable. This analysis is nonetheless a first approximation to metaphors of politics making more research necessary to confirm the findings and deepen students' metaphorical understanding. That may help improve both, social science educational understanding of students' learning preconditions, and giving more suggestions on practical teaching units. In this context a didactic reconstruction might be helpful by analysing not only students' but also scientists' metaphorical understanding. Bringing both understandings together may provide fruitful guidelines for teaching and learning politics (Lange, 2007). Integrating institutional and professional knowledge (Grammes, 1997, p. 70 – 90) about politics might even more improve citizenship educational understanding. As pointed out above politicians use metaphors to convince the public of their interests. Governments try to establish a narrative by using metaphors for their storytelling. Students need to be aware of that – and so does social science education by finding, for instance, connections between their metaphorical languages.

Another research approach could be to make interviewees focus on their pictures. Such issue-related drawings help interviewees to define their positions. They need to think about how to draw the pictures and use it as a guideline to explain their positions (Fischer 2013, p. 38 – 40). Haarmann/ Lange (2009, p. 21), for instance, asks students to draw a democracy machine which allows them to transfer a more abstract concept into metaphorical language. Such issue-related pictures are a good starting point to deepen students' understanding when interviewing them. Referring to his machine, one interviewee, for instance, connects election with attraction saying that no one should vote simply based on appearance (Haarmann/ Lange 2009, p. 23). In this case, using *Grafiz* for research may also be helpful. Students not only transfer their ideas into metaphorical language by drawing an issue-related picture, they also choose talking points themselves by writing down relevant terms already suggesting their concepts.

As discussed in chapter 3, the didactic term of politics is based on students' and scientific ideas of politics. Students' metaphors might be close to the didactic term of politics. In simple terms, the concept "participation", for instance, refers to the relationship between public and the political system. The former communicates political problems and the latter solves problems as the lawmaker (Kegel, 2018a, p. 458). In this case citizens do pass their interests up so that lawmakers have to take them on. More research might be useful to better understand how a metaphorical understanding of passing upwards connects usefully with a civic educational understanding aiming at providing a conceptual reconstruction. The same applies to the other concepts.

To sum up, metaphors can help teachers to teach politics in a more student-oriented manner. Metaphors help teachers to access their students' political understanding. They know what aspects their learners highlight and hide. They are better equipped for their students' (mis-)conceptions. However, metaphors – as suggested here – are an initial approach making more research necessary to deepen civic educational understanding of metaphors.

## 6 The meaning of metaphors for social science education



Language is full of metaphors helping us to explain the world we experience in everyday life. Students' metaphorical understanding highlights a utopian view on politics but hide other aspects. Students understand politics as shaping society, knowing how vital governance, participation and human dignity are. Such a metaphorical understanding is encouraging for a world that is becoming more and more authoritarian. It facilitates social science educational intention to make people politically engaged as mature citizens.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The didactic term of politics is very complex. Hence I intentionally do not give a detailed account of it. It is not important for this study's purpose.

<sup>2</sup> The fictional names were taken from American literature (*Alice in Wonderland*, *To kill a mockingbird*, *The Wizard of Oz*) implicating no connection.

