**Classroom Metaphors**

Cynthia James

Changing hardened teacher beliefs is one of the biggest challenges in teacher education. In secondary systems like ours, where 'training' comes not before, but after years of implementing practices of past teachers, trial and error, and survivalist habits that may not be in the best interest of students, this may be even more so. Research recommends that teachers can examine their practice through extended metaphor. The follow-through often helps them to exchange dysfunctional for healthier worlds.

How, then, might a language teacher, like myself, visualise her classroom? What metaphors might usefully link its Trinbagonian contours to the wider world? Perhaps a garden—vegetable or flower would be less important than the overarching motif of growth.

As gardener, I would be mindful that my students come to me with gifts. They are born wired for language growth. I am not their maker or the designer of their futures. Yet how I care for them will determine if and how they grow. Exposure to the roots of words will help root language. But there must be air and space for them to branch and claw new clauses into extensions and sturdy, well-coordinated sprouts. Each new spurt of language builds on prior tendrils that firm up into recognisable, meaningful, and worthy fronds.

In the maintenance of my garden, I can never strike a monarch-of-all-I-survey pose. Yet, I must prune the wilful branches so that they will establish on their own, an order that is in keeping with the community they share with others. I must tend, but not smother the right of saplings to reach up each for their own light——to excel while being respectful of older and younger growths, and of the growth of the infirm.

I must clear the ground where weeds spring up and threaten abundant growth. But plants must also grow to learn the natural order of their own maintenance. Weeds are essential hardy shrubs that, in their potential to stifle, do more than threaten to overrun. They balance the temptation to neglectfulness; they challenge the primacy of growth. For my students must come to know that if they cultivate a positive penumbra, they can cover the pall at their feet, such that weeds will find it difficult to grow.

In spite of their potential, plants may bend 'own-way' as they mature. As cuttings and suckers from different parent shoots, my students will come with different requirements for fulfilment into fruit, as much as cauliflowers require a different moulding from the moulding of bean sprouts.

And so that my garden will not degenerate into a babel or mixed metaphor, it shall serve me well to recognise early its variety of codes! I must train myself in the theoretical and practical ways of generating best language growth, paying due attention to research. For there will be standard English roses offset by accented thorns, there will be hybrid heliconias, and there will be rare and priceless orchids that are Creole.

I allow no rigidity to be imputed to my metaphoric garden. Most gardens maintain confinement to spot and regularity of row. By contrast, my virtual language garden proffers plenteous space, and light—cyberspace resources are open to all. I am not inconsolable either about the inevitable graduation of my students from my language classroom to other worlds. However, by the time my plants are ready to move to more hallowed ground, they must have given back to the ground they have profited from.

I know that fruits and flowers do not all come to fulfilment at once. But one of my new beliefs is aligned to an old proverb——that seasons do give over. For in my language garden, while past and present are contiguous, there comes a time when new life must replace the old.

School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine