Metaphors We Serve By: 
Investigating the Conceptual Metaphors Framing National and Community Service and Service-Learning

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Conceptual metaphors are ubiquitous and powerful frames for human experience, having important analytical and pedagogical applications to service-learning. This article draws from self-descriptions of national and community service organizations, and from service-learning history and literature, to reveal and examine underlying metaphors of service. Analyzing these metaphors of service leads to a second constructive pedagogical project: describing and developing purposeful metaphors for service. Both aspects of this project, the analytical and the generative, clarify service-learning’s multiple meanings and, in the process, facilitate reflective learning, a key component of service-learning.

“But indeed, words are very rascals since bonds disgraced them.”
William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night

Conceptual Metaphors

Two decades ago George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) persuasively argued in Metaphors We Live By that conceptual metaphors are ubiquitous and powerful frames for human thought and experience. “Metaphor has traditionally been viewed in [philosophy and linguistics] as a matter of peripheral interest. We share the intuition that it is, instead, a matter of central concern, perhaps the key to giving an adequate account of understanding” (p. ix). They have continued to elaborate this in their recent work, Philosophy in the Flesh (1999), where they define conceptual metaphors as, “mappings across conceptual domains that structure our reasoning, our experience, and our everyday language” (p. 47). In this sense, metaphor is more than a specialized usage of language reserved for writers and rhetoricians. In fact, the sensibility of poetic metaphors builds upon a fundamental human disposition to make sense of new or dissonant experience through comparative representations. Conceptual understanding is in most cases metaphorical because cognition is a complex and layered process in which “most concepts are partially understood in terms of other concepts” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1986, p. 56).

There are two complementary but distinguishable scholarly projects that arise from recognizing metaphor as a fundamental influence on conception. The first is historical and analytical; it involves identifying, describing, and critically examining the metaphors, implicit or explicit, that frame a given concept. These I term metaphors of concepts. Uncovering metaphors of is the predominant project of Lakoff’s and Johnson’s work, which consists of textual or contextual deconstruction. Their method in Metaphors We Live By was to name a concept and explore the conceptual metaphors framing it by examining the common language used to describe or speak about it. For example, in choosing the concept “argument” they uncover numerous examples of the conceptual metaphor argument is war. One “attacks” or “defends” a position in an argument, and so forth. It is important to recognize that conceptual metaphors both highlight and hide aspects of a concept. Using a comparison to direct attention toward this aspect implies distracting attention from that aspect. Returning to the example, if argument is war, then cooperative learning is not a primary goal of conversational debate.

There is also a conceptually constructive project that follows this theory of cognition. If metaphors of concepts have historically arisen to frame our consideration of those concepts, then we may, in a manner similar to the poet, self-consciously develop new metaphors that nuance or change a concept’s meaning. These I distinguish as metaphors for concepts because they creatively redescribe concepts, giving them a new interpretive range, and, in many cases, overturning previous conceptions. As Diane Blakemore (1992) argues, metaphors “…cause us to notice things, or, more specifically, to see things in a new light” (p.160). If, in the literary tradition, metaphors are used to evoke creative connections and connotations, then developing creative metaphors for concepts is an integral aspect of human learning and knowledge construction. If
conceptual metaphors frame thought, then innovative metaphors lead thought development and create new situational frames for human interaction. This sense is what is intended in Donald Schön’s (1993) helpful term “generative metaphor.” Educator Thomas Sticht (1993) has applied a similar notion of metaphors to pedagogy describing them as “tools for thought.” The theory of conceptual metaphors has epistemological implications as well because it highlights the gap between concepts and reality. Hugh Petrie (1979) has argued that the very possibility of learning and ideation must depend upon something like metaphor.5

Literary metaphor is just the tip of the iceberg...so to speak. Metaphor, while having aesthetic-rhetorical uses, is profoundly intertwined with cognition itself. Metaphor is central to epistemology (i.e., what is known), to cognition (i.e., how it is known), to pedagogy (i.e., how teaching and learning occur), and to program framing (i.e., in this case, how we situate learning and serving). Metaphor analysis and development is an important consideration for persons interested in knowledge and learning across the theory to practice continuum.

Service-learning, described variously as a philosophy, a pedagogy, and a program, can benefit from both components of this conceptual metaphor project. On the one hand, the conceptual metaphors of national and community service and service-learning can be explicated and critically examined, and, on the other, new metaphors for developing these concepts are needed. While there are a few articles in the community service and service-learning literature that argue the pedagogical or programmatic usefulness of specific service-learning metaphors (i.e., service-learning is X) (Dolan, 1992; Foos, 1998; Hayes & Cuban, 1997; Keith, 1998; Morton, 1995; Varlotta, 2000), the field can benefit from a broader perspective in which specific metaphors are understood as instances of a fundamental and pervasive human tendency toward metaphoric thought. This has important political implications because new metaphors not only extend our tools for conceptualizing service-learning, they often contest previous conceptions. In directing attention towards, they direct it also away.

Conceptual metaphors, whether or not they are consciously developed, effectively frame each experience of national and community service and service-learning.4 This is a beginning of this research, drawing from descriptions of national service programs and service-learning literature to investigate the powerful and ubiquitous conceptual metaphors we serve by. What follows begins descriptive and interpretive research into metaphors of service that have framed national service and service-learning in the United States and into emerging and potential metaphors for service-learning.

Conceptual Metaphors of National Service and Service-Learning

“For we, all of us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act fatally on the strength of them.” —George Elliot, Middlemarch

National Service is War

The tradition of national service in the U.S. is replete with this conceptual metaphor. The opening words of William James’ 1906 “Moral Equivalent of War” read, “The war against war is going to be no holiday excursion or camping party.” This address by James is often cited as a founding document of national service, and his metaphor is repeated in an unbroken chain through the language describing the various “Corps,” from the Civilian Conservation Corps, to the Peace Corps, to AmeriCorps, to the newly proposed Citizen Corps. In the U.S. national service tradition participants are mobilized and deployed to attack social problems.

William James (1906) thought that the very possibility of a more peaceful, civilized world required the sublimation and redirection of warrior energy. A founder of American psychology, he considered the war instinct to be deeply imbedded in men, referring to a “militaristic sentiment” or “military instinct.” While the actuality of war is to be avoided—and he was utopian in his confidence that this could happen—James proposes that the characteristics and energies of warriors be redirected toward what he understood in the evolutionary terms of his day as the ongoing battle of mankind against nature. In so doing he began a tradition of stretching the term war beyond its literal meaning to constitute a metaphoric frame for the concept of national service.

I do not believe that peace either ought to be or will be permanent on this globe, unless the states, pacifically organized, preserve some of the old elements of army-discipline....Martial virtues must be the enduring cement; intrepidity, contempt of softness, surrender of private interest, obedience to command, must still remain the rock upon which states are built. (p. 5)

His words have informed nearly all that has followed in national service.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), established a generation later, was a large scale government sponsored attempt at enacting James’
(1906) vision of a metaphoric war. James had advocated that, “instead of military conscription, a conscription of the whole youthful population to form for a certain number of years a part of the army enlisted against Nature” (p. 5). Franklin Roosevelt borrowed the concept in his 1932 election campaign, proposing “a fight against soil erosion and declining timber resources.” In developing the CCC, Roosevelt asked to “recruit thousands of unemployed young men, enroll them in a peacetime army, and send them into battle against destruction and erosion… over three million young men engaged in a massive salvage operation [all italics added].” The National CCC Alumni Organization describes these activities in an article tellingly entitled “Roosevelt’s Tree Army”—a designation popularly displayed in CCC projects in, for example, roads named “Tree Army Avenue.”

The war language of the description continues. Men were “outfitted in uniforms” and “mobilized” in “camps,” and organized into “battalions.” The Army itself aided with logistics and transportation, blurring the lines between real and metaphoric battalions (www.cccalumni.org).10 Twenty years after the end of the CCC, President John F. Kennedy, having piloted the idea of a “peace corps” during his campaign, issued a challenge to American citizens in his 1961 inaugural address. He slips into and out of real and metaphoric war language turning each upon the other. The name “Peace Corps” demonstrates the flexibility of metaphor, in this case finding a home in the ironic marriage of peace and war terms.

Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty…. Now the trumpet summons us again—not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need; not as a call to battle, though embattled we are—but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation”—a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself [italics added].

(http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres56.html)

Having heard him speak on several occasions, Sargent Shriver, the first director of the Peace Corps, dramatically envisions the impact that a greatly expanded Peace Corps—from 6,000 to 50,000 volunteers—might have in the world and upon “the greatest nation in history.” With similar zeal, Shriver went on to lead the “War on Poverty” initiated in 1964 under President Lyndon Johnson, components of which were similarly framed service “corps,” such as the National Teacher Corps, VISTA, and the Job Corps.

As a Peace Corps Volunteer myself, I spent two years working with a small rural community to build a primary school in Gabon, Africa in the early 1990s. I discovered that the Peace Corps programs of the early 1960s followed the war metaphor quite closely. The early Peace Corps years in Gabon saw teams of Americans with imported generators, power tools, and instructions to build as many schools as possible during their two-year tour. They were fighting inadequate infrastructure. By my time, the “Corps” and its material problem-attacking approach had been softened by three decade’s experience of the complexities of international development. I was encouraged to focus on building relationships, and, furthermore, to take my time on the project, emphasizing the transferring of construction skills to interested community members. Implicitly, the Peace Corps had discovered the inappropriateness of the conceptual metaphor service is war. I, too, considered it unsuitable for the context and issues of my Peace Corps experience. Reflecting, I find that my own metaphors of service in the Peace Corps had little to do with nation, patriotism, or war. As the sole American for some miles, and with infrequent contact with the Peace Corps Gabon office, I settled into the tiny village of Seka and intuitively began making sense of my service experience with the metaphors “cross-cultural learning,” “relationship building,” and “community project work.”

In 1970, the creation of the Youth Conservation Corps and a number of subsequent youth corps continued the CCC’s vision of a truly national service effort, a movement culminating in 1993 with the creation of the Corporation for National Service and its AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America programs. AmeriCorps, in its scope, its language, and its domestic focus represents a close return to the war-framed CCC. In its first year 20,000 young people were recruited, and seven years later in January 2001 the number of Corps members and alumni surpassed 200,000 persons, more than the number of Peace Corps volunteers in its 40 years. As he was leaving his post as CEO of the Corporation for National Service in 2000, in a letter sent to the staff of the Corporation’s many programs around the country, Harris Wofford remarked, “How many people know that AmeriCorps and its sponsoring organizations are seeking to recruit more AmeriCorps members than the Marines?” That his comparison of AmeriCorps to Marine Corps is sensible depends upon the established overlap of language in which military service and national service have been described. The metaphor of war, beginning with the dual use of “Corps” has been so digested as to make this seem the obvious comparison. He goes on to recall the CCC’s grandness and calls for national service once again to
reach that level of involvement (personal communication, January 19, 2001).

The present U.S. governmental initiative to enlist the entire citizenry in an enigmatic “War on Terror” is an even grander vision bound by this same metaphoric frame. The programs of the renamed Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) programs are currently being redescribed with war-time rhetoric under the heading USA Freedom Corps. President Bush’s forward to the USA Freedom Corps blueprint begins with mention of “September 11” and his opening paragraph concludes: “one of the best ways to counter evil is through the gathering momentum of millions of acts of service” (www.usafreedomcorps.gov). In fact, the entire agency seems to be reorganizing under the headline “America Responds.” National and community service activities designed to meet the needs of public safety, public health, and disaster relief are being expanded and reframed by the “War on Terror” imperatives of national defense and homeland security. The programmatic goals are defensive and reactionary rather than holistic and proactive. AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members will increasingly take on police-like and terrorism-response roles (e.g., neighborhood watch organizers or biological attack educators). Furthermore a new war-response branch of CNCS is in formation, “Citizen Corps: Engaging Citizens in Homeland Security,” whose mission is to “harness the power of citizens to help prepare their local communities for threats of terrorism” (www.nationalservice.org). In many cases it seems Corps members will be performing administrative tasks for professional security or emergency personnel who will thus be freed to act as primary responders. Recalling that metaphors hide as they highlight, what experience of “community” is to be gained by Corps members filling out and filing paperwork?

Granted, service as war highlights a call for large-scale solidarity and unquestionable common purpose. Furthermore, war in democracies is framed in a rhetoric of noble purpose, such as “making the world safe for democracy,” or “preserving personal and states’ rights.” Such rhetoric gives meaning to the difficulties encountered in war, inspiring feats of heroism, dedication, or sacrifice. No sacrifice of life, property, or time should be “in vain.” Fighting in a war is meaningful and important. Much of the experiential war literature attests to how being a soldier affects a young person’s self-identity. Similarly, Peace Corps and AmeriCorps volunteers often describe their experiences as long lasting and formative.

There is, however, a limited usefulness of the war metaphor applied to national and community service. What, for example, is the role of the community being served? In war they are typically incidental, neither the problem nor the solution, but unfortunate residents of the battleground, often suffering huge casualties. How is the “enemy” identified and approached in service settings when a community need is ill-defined or complex (i.e., when it is unclear what should be attacked)? Wars are defined by abandoning complex or humane solutions. What happens to the metaphoric war of service during times of actual war? Traditional wars are consuming efforts leaving little energy or resources for other activities.

While war is an energizing concept for “soldiers,” the destructive side of war is notably absent even from war-time discourse. Real wars destroy people, materials, ways of organizing societies, even civilizations. People involved in actual wars are typically horrified or sickened by the experience. It took my grandfather, a veteran of the Normandy coast landing, 50 years to begin telling even the most sterilized of his WWII stories. Still the question can be asked: What does service destroy? Perhaps, as James (1906) suggested, it destroys, in constructive ways, the way scrubbing a floor destroys dirt. Can service destroy preconceptions and ignorance of others? Wrongly framed or implemented, can service be socially destructive?

National Service is Business

In 1993, Congress created the business-sounding Corporation for National Service (CNS) as the governmental agency supporting national service and service-learning. It is a quasi-governmental agency originally designed to be significantly funded by corporate contributions. Its title of “corporation” rather than “U.S. Department” (e.g., Department of Education) reveals the political need to shift national service away from its popular conception as “charity”—a concept too easily linked to the perceived abuses and inefficiencies of a welfare-state—and toward a business-like model of effective government expenditure. A “Chief Executive Officer,” not a “Secretary,” tellingly, heads the agency, and its mission watchwords are “Getting Things Done” (i.e., it’s not about charitable intentions). Eli Segal, its first CEO, was not a bureaucrat but rather the CEO of a private company. In 1995, just two years after CNS was created, a study supported by the IBM Foundation, the Charles A. Dana Foundation, and the James Irvine Foundation reported that “every federal dollar invested in AmeriCorps results in $1.60 to $2.60 or more in direct, measurable benefits to AmeriCorps members and the communities they serve” (www.cns.gov).

The business metaphor has also entered into the
national framing of service-learning. Learn and Serve America (LSA), a division of CNS, now renamed The Department of Service-Learning,\textsuperscript{14} recently released a study of its first three years of higher education service-learning funding. Conducted by RAND (Gray, Ondaatje, & Zakaras, 1999), the summary report gives considerable attention to “assessing the nation’s returns from investing in the program.” They performed a cost-benefits analysis in which the services provided to communities by LSA’s higher education programs were measured against the grant investment, matching funds, and in-kind resources expended to enable them. According to their calculation, although the first two years failed to yield a positive return, the effectiveness trend steadily increased with the third year (i.e., 1997) showing a positive investment, suggesting that future years "will more than repay the total investment" (p. vi).

However, both the method and calculations of RAND on this final component are highly suspect. All but noting explicitly that such a numerical calculation of national service is beyond measure, RAND based their final evaluation component on layer upon layer of abstracted data. They multiplied an estimate of the number of student hours by an estimate hourly wage that \textit{would} have been incurred if community agencies had hired workers in their place, or presumably if the federal government had paid them to do so. This assumes that the real value of student community service is equivalent to that of paid staff and ignores that community agencies would simply have done without had student volunteers not been placed. Their footnote: “These numbers are subject to a great deal of uncertainty, especially in the valuing of the benefits. Therefore, interpretation of small differences is inappropriate…” seems a deliberately modest disclaimer (Gray et al., 1999, p. 22).

This section of the RAND report exemplifies the business metaphor’s limitations, especially when read too literally. It may highlight the need for marketing national and community service programs to the public and to their government representatives, but it is hardly a meaningful reduction of service’s value, or a valid or verifiable program evaluation method. While the conceptual metaphor \textit{service is business} is useful in framing public/private community service partnerships that incorporate accountability and focus on deliverables, it hides the rich relational character of community service and service-learning. The business metaphor hides the potential metaphor \textit{service is community}. In this case it also directs service-learning research and program evaluation attention toward even the most forced quantitative methods and away from the tremendous potential uses of qualitative and ethnographic methods.

Businesses define problems and solutions during a funding proposal phase; however, many social problems only surface through immersion in community context. Further, their solutions may require ongoing adjustments. The complexity of social problems is that they are part of, not accidental to, the social fabric itself. Businesses, by their nature, want a bottom-line, optimally with a profit in every accounting period. They are competitive and reductive; that is, they are fundamentally framed by the war metaphor themselves. Service is business and business is war. The title AmeriCorps intends this double-entendre: “Corps” as corporation and “Corps” as military ranks. Social health, however, by nature is dynamic, long-term, not always quantifiable, and subject to unanticipated vectors (e.g., the HIV-AIDS epidemic). Community is built through intangible and immeasurable human interactions. Is it important to consider that some social needs might require high-cost, low-return material investments? Whatever the metaphor’s strengths, national and community service and service-learning are not reducible to business as usual.

\textbf{National and Community Service is Citizenship; Service-Learning is Citizenship Development}

John Dewey is widely considered to be the seminal philosophical influence from which service-learning theory and practice developed. Although the terminology of service-learning was not yet in use, Dewey interrelated the concepts of human learning, community service, and democratic participation. For Dewey, experience and education were inextricably linked to social and political development, making community service an integral aspect of citizen participation in a democratic society. Dewey was reacting against a class-based notion of \textit{community service as charity}. John Saltmarsh (1996) has made careful study of Dewey’s shift in the conceptual framing of service away from charity and toward democratic citizenship.\textsuperscript{16}

Attempts to effect a paradigm shift in the meaning and practice of community service are part of an ongoing dialogue in which the concept of service is understood as existing along a value continuum. For Dewey and many in his tradition of progressive democracy, \textit{service as charity} represents one end, that of shallow, sometimes harmful, instances of social participation (e.g., Cruz, 1990; Illich, 1990; Marullo & Edwards, 2000). At the other end, \textit{service as citizenship} or...
service as social change represents mature and effective community service (i.e., toward justice and equality). This is a normative debate about what constitutes “good” service; its metaphors are prescriptive, not descriptive.

The metaphor service is citizenship is found in the language of higher education as public affairs, honors, and leadership programs increasingly integrate service-learning pedagogy. Benjamin Barber (1994) is a notable voice in this dialogue shifting service from charity to citizenship.

For all of the welcome interest in the idea of service today in America, little can be expected unless it inspires a renewed interest in civic education and citizenship. Simply to enlist volunteers to serve ‘others less fortunate’ or ‘those at risk’ (we are all at risk!)…will do little to reconstruct citizenship or shore up democracy and do nothing at all to improve the caliber of our educational community… Service to the neighborhood and to the nation are not the gift of altruists but a duty of free men and women whose freedom is itself wholly dependent on the assumption of political responsibilities. (p. 86)16

Robert Siedel and Edward Zlotkowski (1993) have argued that the term “service” is so steeped in this notion of paternalistic charity that academic programs adopting the title “service-learning” unfortunately enmesh themselves and their pedagogy in this highly problematic tradition. They suggest avoiding “service” with the alternative designation “community-learning.”

[Community learning,] while responding to the best motives of students wishing to be ‘of service,’ can help avoid the trap of alienation between server and recipient. What is stressed is not the disparity implicit in the idea of ‘service’ (rooted in the Latin servus—slave), but the sharing of interests inherent in the concept of ‘community’ (from the Latin communis—common). (p.15)

This proposal however involves more than changing a conceptual metaphor. Removing the “service” from service-learning would mark a shift in the leading concept itself. “Community” highlights society at its utopian best, and so may constitute an important metaphor for envisioning the social change potential of effective service-learning programs (see Morton, 1986). But “service” highlights the reality of society’s brokenness. Even at the risk of its paternalistic connotations, is there not some desired reference to social inequality in the title of these various community-based school activities?

Conceptual Metaphors For Community Service and Service-Learning

“The right word is always a power and communicates its definiteness to our action.”

George Eliot, Middlemarch

Keith Morton (1995) has critiqued the value-continuum conceptualization of service. Arguing that community service is mistakenly conceived of as a linear value scale from charity to citizenship, Morton describes three distinct, if overlapping, paradigms: service as charity, service as project, and service as social change (i.e., democratic citizenship for social change). He argues that the context of community service determines the appropriateness of one model or another, and within these specific contexts, each model may be framed and implemented along a superficial to profound continuum. “Each paradigm has ‘thin’ versions that are disempowering and hollow, and ‘thick’ versions that are sustaining and potentially revolutionary” (p. 24). From a pedagogical standpoint he suggests that rather than prescribing service as social change over service as charity, service-learning can benefit from investigating each paradigm. “As educators...do we advocate a way of doing service, or do we hold up choices?” (p. 31).

Morton’s (1995) question helps us move away from the tendency to reify and normativize the concept of service. For example, the tradition of using war language in national service descriptions is so consistent as to suggest that service is indeed a war and it ought to be. After a century of such descriptors one wonders whether the “corps” connotations have been so fully digested as to be beyond question. Similarly, when the “is” of service is business, service is charity, or service is citizenship becomes reductive or exclusive, human cognition’s complexity and epistemology’s softness are themselves problematically reduced. This goes beyond acknowledging that service is a difficult term; service is no single thing, and has no single definition. Kendall’s (1990) often cited notation of 147 different definitions of service-learning in the literature is not necessarily a bad thing. The relevant question is whether a specific definition (i.e., metaphor) serves to clarify or muddle its particular social context.

Morton’s (1995) argument for three distinct community service paradigms is a move towards developing self-consciousness about the conceptual metaphors that are chosen to frame the concept. Service-learning can make use of numerous conceptual metaphors for pedagogic and programmatic purposes. In a given setting, the focus
of service might be developing nurturing relationships, completing discrete projects, addressing social injustice’s root causes, or complementing a classroom curriculum; service need not attempt all simultaneously. Pedagogical and programmatic choices of conceptual metaphors might then be evaluated for their impact on learning and their applicability to specific service settings. As we have seen, metaphors, because of their comparative nature, highlight certain aspects of a concept and, in so doing, hide others. Taking the gaps between concepts and their objects seriously requires highlighting the metacognitive aspects of reflection and learning. Service-learning students and instructors alike must ask, “What is framing our concept of service, to what end, and with what success?”

As mentioned previously, the metaphoric nature of conceptualization has a creative application as well. Those who are involved with service and service-learning are beginning to explore and experiment with new, self-consciously chosen and explicitly noted conceptual metaphors. This project is not one of describing the few reigning images of the present and past, but of the near limitless possibilities of developing, evaluating, and refining new conceptual frames. The first project explicates and analyzes conceptual metaphors of service and service-learning; this latter project develops and explores the usefulness of conceptual metaphors for service and service-learning. What follows are descriptions of several emerging and potential examples of metaphors for service.

Service is Charity

One reaction to the earlier debate giving primacy to service as citizenship or social change over service as charity has been to recover and valorize a different notion of charity. In The Call of Service Robert Coles (1993) notes that,

for some of us the word has patronizing implications—toss them something called ‘charity.’ But for others the word summons the greatest of moral mandates, for as a biblical word it is meant to convey the essence of concern for others and the act of making that concern concrete and generous. (p. 54)

He goes on to recall that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. substituted and interchanged the term “charity” for “heart.” Charity, redescribed as deep concern, heart, or care, constitutes a powerful rebuttal to the charity as paternalism critique of Dewey and others.

Morton (1995) began to develop this different conceptualization for use in service-learning when he argued that charity could have thick versions, particularly when rooted in spiritual traditions where acts of service “witness to the worth of other persons” (p. 26). Following Morton, Catherine Foos (1998) has further problematized the prescription for service as social change over service as charity by applying to service-learning Carol Gilligan’s (1982) critique of a similar continuum preferring “justice” over “care” in traditional theories of human moral development.18 Service as charity—and charity as care—by highlighting service’s relational aspects might then be a useful conceptual metaphor for numerous programs whose primary intent is to foster long-lasting, intimate, or nurturing bonds between persons or communities.

Service is a Text

The explosion of the term text, beginning in circles of literary criticism, is encapsulated in the deconstructionist slogan “Il n’ya pas de hors-texte;” there is no outside of text; consequently, knowledge is neither singular nor reducible to pages of textbooks. While service-learning advocates, as intellectual heirs of Deweyan pragmatism, have long agreed with this in theory, they have struggled with the practical dichotomy between classroom (i.e., where learning traditionally takes place) and experience (i.e., where service traditionally takes place). Again it is Keith Morton (1996) who has offered a description of the metaphor service as text, but a text that is, “written [italics added] concurrent with the course,” as a conceptual tool for faculty seeking a fuller integration of classroom and experiential learning (p. 282). In a recent article, Lori Varlotta (2000) has also begun to unpack the metaphor.

From a traditional pedagogic standpoint conceptualizing service as experience is dissonant with classroom practices based on printed texts. Adopting the wider understanding of text and applying it as a conceptual metaphor for the service component of a service-learning course highlights new ways to incorporate the experiential into the classroom. Service as text highlights for faculty the need to integrate service with learning and offers metaphorical connections between their traditional course construction activities and those of designing and implementing a service-learning course. Service as text might also be a useful pedagogic tool. Students, following faculty, are also accustomed to separating the classroom learning from experience. What learning outcomes might result from students’ conceptual awareness that experiential texts are part of their course curriculum?

Varlotta (2000) intentionally focuses on the “learning” in service-learning, and in so doing, her argument demonstrates that metaphors for service
and service-learning may be strategically chosen. She calls *service as text* a “pedagogically purposeful metaphor” (p. 76). Metaphors juxtapose and compare; they do not intend perfect identification. The tautology *service is service* is unhelpful because it offers no room for conceptual play...it begs no questions of similarity and difference. “Text” is a tool for new thinking about academic service-learning; it need not be comprehensive or exclusive of other tools. Not only are there multiple metaphors of service already operating, often simultaneously, but creating multiple new metaphors for service is a primary means of developing increasingly thoughtful service settings and facilitating new knowledge construction.

*Community Service is Border Crossing; Service-Learning is Border Pedagogy*

Border Crossing and Borderlands are terms that Gloria Anzaldua (1987) has powerfully used to describe places of political, cultural, and ideological overlap. Borderlands may be geographical, as in her case of the U.S. Mexico border region, or metaphorical. They are places of struggle and injury but also of new identity and social reformation. Anzaldua and her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, exemplify what it can mean to allow diverse voices into the conversation that is knowledge construction.19 Her own voice is alternately angry, determined, and hopeful. The movements of crossing borders and the image of new spaces, “borderlands,” that arise along contested frontiers have, since Anzaldua’s articulation, become significant concepts in postmodern thought.

Henry Giroux (1992) has appropriated these terms as tools for establishing an alternative pedagogy in higher education. He describes a “border pedagogy” that links education with radical democracy—not unlike John Dewey’s conception of *service as citizenship/social change*—and understands learning as occurring within social spaces whose boundaries shift with reconfigurations of culture, power, and knowledge.

First, the category of border signals a recognition of those epistemological, political, cultural, and social margins that structure the language of history, power, and difference...Second, it also speaks to the need to create pedagogical conditions in which students become border crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power. Third, border pedagogy makes visible the historically and socially constructed strengths and limitations of those places and borders we inherit and that frame our discourses and social relations. (p. 28)

Reminiscent of Paolo Freire (1990), Giroux is reconceptualizing pedagogy through the metaphor *education is cultural politics*.

While some contesting and remapping of educational boundaries can occur within the traditional classroom, I think that service-learning’s situatedness within actual physical borderlands, in which diverse and unequal communities come together in collaborative action, particularly suits it as a context highlighting the links between education and progressive democracy. Citing both Anzaldua and Giroux, Elisabeth Hayes and Sondra Cuban (1997) have begun exploring this conceptual metaphor’s value for service and service-learning.20 Novella Keith (1998) also has begun to apply the metaphor to investigate how community service might create more equitable borderlands.21 I agree that Anzaldua’s (1987) images, and Giroux’s (1992) linking them to pedagogy, have tremendous potential application to service-learning as it is developed as a philosophy, a pedagogy, and a program. Although Hayes and Cuban (1997) refer to the physical border crossings implicit to service-learning, their chief interest is in developing the metaphor as a pedagogical tool for student reflection. Keith (1998) uses the metaphor to reconceptualize a community service setting, one in which community building might be maximized by increasing the number and type of border crossings.

Metaphors lead creative conceptualization because they offer a broad interpretive range; they beg unpacking. With this concluding example of an emerging metaphor for service, I would like to play this out a bit. Service-learning as border-crossing and borderlands highlights numerous distinct meanings.

First, service-learning creates opportunities for crossing physical boundaries. It takes students and teachers beyond their classroom walls and across real community lines, even national boundaries for international service. *Service-learning as border-crossing* highlights the physical movement necessitated by community service.

Second, service-learning creates opportunities for crossing socially constructed boundaries. The communities brought together in service activities are diverse, but also unequal. Service-learning bridges unequal constructions of race, language, class, age, religion, gender, and other categories. *Service-learning as border-crossing* highlights the real and reciprocal crossing of socially constructed barriers.

Third, service-learning creates opportunities for crossing epistemological and pedagogical
boundaries. The terms “border-crossing” and “borderland,” when offered by service-learning facilitators to students and community members as metaphors for reflective and engaged thought upon the previous crossings, provides a space for reconceptualizing what it means to know and educate. What reflections might result from a self-conscious and experientially-based positing of the question, “What is the relationship between physical and social borders?” As a pedagogical tool, what is the value of asking students to reflect upon their own borders? Service-learning as border-crossing highlights the possibility of new ways of knowing, new knowledge canons, new sites of knowledge construction, and new methods of learning. Simply explicating the conceptual metaphor creates a pedagogical borderland.

Fourth, and I do not claim to have exhausted the possibilities—near inexhaustible possibilities is in fact the power and fun of metaphor—service-learning creates opportunities for envisioning borderlands. Service, because it involves the experience of social inequalities and crossings of the very borders that sustain and reproduce them, facilitates musings on alternative worlds; on utopias, not as practical realities, but as visions propelling social change. David Harvey (2000) argues the importance of envisioning spacio-temporal utopias, an idea he terms creating “spaces of hope.” More generally this project relates service-learning to the development of “moral imagination” (Johnson, 1993). Service-learning as border-crossing highlights the need to reflect upon and act toward creating a more just and caring society.

Although I find border-crossing to be an attractive conceptual metaphor for service-learning, this is not to say that relying exclusively upon this frame would not hide certain important considerations. While service-learning as border-crossing might lead to increased reflexivity in students and increased diversity sensitivity, a critic might reasonably ask, “What exactly gets done through service framed in this manner?” Does border-crossing emphasize process to the exclusion of focus on impact, product, or result?

It is also important for me to return to Anzaldúa’s (1987) text and remember her highlighting the painful aspects of borders and borderlands. She is writing from the U.S./Mexico border, which she describes as “una herida abierta [i.e., an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and blues” (p. 25). While it may be important to explore utopian social visions in which certain unjust borders no longer exist, it should not be forgotten (or taught) that borderlands are often bloodied militarized zones, places where the worst kinds of stereotyping and profiling occur, where people on both sides are suspicious of the “other,” and where one side is greatly advantaged. Borderlands are spaces where human difference is highlighted and crossing requires either power, justification, or cunning. Borderlands are spaces of human vulnerability. So too, the borders within communities separate center from periphery, powerful from disempowered, all existing within social webs of complex relationships. If there is a normative lesson it is that students and faculty ought not cross borders lightly. Border-crossing from the perspective of the less powerful neighbor often means invasion and attack. How can this complexity be highlighted rather than hidden by our framing metaphor? How can service-learning create mutual partnerships with reciprocal crossing privileges? What level of community partner support and invitation is sufficient to justify the crossings inherent in a higher education service-learning project? Is the crossing of community members into educational settings a peripheral or central aspect of borderlands? The metaphor begs these challenging questions.

Summary and Possibilities

Explicating and critically examining these metaphors we serve by is an important prerequisite for developing community service settings. As a line of research it follows a pair of metacognitive questions: what is our level of awareness about how service and learning have been conceptually framed, and to what highlighting and hiding conceptual ends? That is, what are and have been the predominant metaphors of service and service-learning? While these pages explored war and business as frames for national service and the prescriptive replacement of citizenship/social change over charity as the political ideal of service, there are certainly other metaphors of service and service-learning operating that have not been examined here. As a resident of Maryland, the first state to make service-learning a requirement for high school graduation (75 hours), service-learning as curriculum requirement is taking effect. An increasing number of students bring to my service-learning course a high school experience of what they term, with fully intended irony, “forced volunteerism.”

Turning a research gaze toward higher education, it would be interesting, perhaps important, to investigate the concept of service as it has been framed in faculty requirements for tenure and promotion. The triad of research, teaching, and service highlights faculty contributions to the institutional community and the wider scholarly community, but often hides or undervalues faculty service to non-academic communities through
leadership in service-learning. Is “service” to a higher education institution exclusive of service-learning partnerships with its surrounding communities? How can faculty advocates of service-learning create new metaphors that reconceptualize institutional service in such a way as to highlight and accredit their work? This would be an integral step in moving service-learning from the margins to the center of higher education pedagogy.\textsuperscript{22}

“Reconceptualizing,” as a scholarly project, begs the second set of metacognitive questions concerning self-conscious experimentation with conceptual metaphors for service and service-learning. How, as service-learning advocates, are we thinking about how we think about service and learning? How intentional are the frames we develop for integrating the two in the conjoined concept service-learning? That is, what are our self-conscious \textit{metaphors for service and service-learning}? What are the framing strengths and weaknesses, the highlighting and hiding tendencies, of metaphors old and new for service site development, student service reflection, student curricular learning, community partner learning, and faculty course construction, to name just a few considerations? The preceding pages made a beginning exploration of three such metaphors for: \textit{service as charity (care), service as text, and service as border-crossing}. There are numerous other possibilities. \textit{Service-Learning as ludic (playful) epistemology} is a helpful, if a bit arcane, tool for my own understanding of service-learning as a philosophy. In Dewey’s pragmatist lineage it allows me to substitute multiple and constructed knowledges for a singular and sure enlightenment ideal. It allows me to shift the processes of knowledge acquisition from systematic doubt (Descartes and his hermeneutics of suspicion) to conversation and interaction (play and a hermeneutics of trust). It is the social basis of knowledge and the social context of service-learning that become highlighted.

Another metaphor, useful from a methodological and pedagogical standpoint, is \textit{service-learning as action research}. This highlights the need to formulate and refine through ongoing reflection a set of critical “questions for investigation” when entering service settings. It also affirms the complex political character of service-learning and research, and distinguishes service-based research from traditional experimental or quantitative methods.\textsuperscript{23}

One final example of a potential \textit{metaphor for national service immersion programs} like AmeriCorps, Peace Corps, or service-learning programs emphasizing citizenship development is \textit{service as a heroic journey}. Service framed in this manner might be understood as a kind of \textit{rite de passage} into adult citizenship (see Dolan, 1992). In fact, in the 1950s Englishman Alec Dickson had already begun attracting young people to his Voluntary Service Overseas programs (VSO) by framing international service as a romantic quest (Cobbs Hoffman, 1998; Dickson, 1976). His ideas influenced President John F. Kennedy, and consequently the Peace Corps was originally designed for young people with little or generalist professional training. Their service would be an adventure from which they would emerge with strong characters and meaningful experiences. This metaphor can attract young people into an intense initial experience of civic involvement and help them gain the tools and knowledge, as well as the right, to become a participating member of a larger national or international social world. Their service immersion is a liminal stage, betwixt and between, which provides a rich context for them to begin working out what they hope to be.

Explicating the operative \textit{metaphors of service and generating self-conscious \textit{metaphors for service} is a research project that involves both historical investigation and conceptual development; it incorporates text-critical methods but can also be extended to include ethnographic studies. For a young field variously identified as philosophy, pedagogy, and program—and still in its formative search for self-definition and academic place—this research shifts the focus from reduction to exploration, from singularity to contingency, from the definitive to the potential. The question “What is service-learning?” when intended metaphorically has myriad responses, several of which have been explored here and another, which, offering a question for a question, asks, “What could it be?”

Notes

I would like to thank Dr. Mary Rivkin of UMBC for our conversations from which this project emerged. I would also like to thank referee 61 for many helpful suggestions.

1 Lakoff and Johnson (1980) do distinguish between “conventional” and “creative” metaphors but their emphasis is on the former.

2 Lakoff and Johnson were influenced by Michael Reddy’s (1993) argument that language itself has been fundamentally framed by the metaphor \textit{language is a conduit}. By this framing, words are conceptualized as containers whose meaning is transferred via a duct system of phrases and sentences. Such a metaphor hides the powerful influence of context upon communicated meaning.

3 There is a notion of metaphor…which treats metaphor as central to the task of accounting for our perspectives on the world: how we think about things, make sense of reality, and set the problems we later try to solve. In this sense, ‘metaphor’ refers both to a certain kind of product—a per-
spective or frame, a way of looking at things—and to a cer-
tain kind of process—a process by which new perspectives
on the world come into existence....This is the process
which...I shall call generative metaphor (Schon, 1993, p.
137).

4 “As with other tools, metaphors provide a way of
extending our capacities....When metaphor is considered
as a tool for communication, attention is focused on its use
for the exchange of information among speakers and lis-
teners. The consideration of metaphor as a tool for thought,
on the other hand, is concerned with the discovery of rela-
tionships between seemingly disparate domains and an
exploration of the extent to which they can be related”
(Sticht, 1993, pp. 621, 626).

5 “It can be claimed that the very possibility of learning
something radically new can only be understood by presup-
posing the operation of something very much like metaphor.
This is not just the heuristic claim that metaphors are often
useful in learning, but the epistemic claim that metaphor, or
something like it, renders intelligible the acquisition of new
knowledge (Petrie, 1979, p. 439).

6 Lakoff’s ongoing work at the University of California,
Berkeley includes a Web-based project listing and substan-
tiating several hundred conceptual metaphors. There are no
listings for metaphors relating to concepts of national ser-
vice, community service, service-learning, or pedagogy.

7 James was a man of his times. The cultural model oper-
ating in this essay would be highly troublesome today. He
speaks of Nature as an “enemy,” and juxtaposes “earlier men” with “modern civilized men” implying a qualitative
human evolutionary development.

8 “At the present day, civilized opinion is a curious men-
tal mixture. The military instincts and ideals are as strong
as ever, but they are confronted by reflective criticisms
which sorely curb their ancient freedom” (James, 1906, p.
2).

9 The Franklin Delanor Roosevelt Memorial in
Washington D.C. quotes, in boldly carved letters,
Roosevelt saying “I have seen war....I hate war.” It is iron-
ic that someone who hated military war would see fit to
apply the conceptual metaphor “war” to national service.
Perhaps this is understandable when one considers that for
Roosevelt, first as Assistant Secretary of the Navy from
1913-1920 (WWI), and later as U.S. Commander and
Chief during World War II, war was his predominant con-
ceptual frame.

10 The CCC was supported by tripartite federal agen-
cies, the Department of Labor (jobs and recruitment), the
Department of the Interior (project locations), and the
U.S. Army (training). The lines between metaphoric war
and actual war began to blur as U.S. involvement in
WWII neared. “As early as 1937, demands for military training in the Corps were commonplace, and inevitably
the agency’s original relief purposes came into question.
By 1940, with a vigorous noncombatant defense training
program established by Congressional amendment,
defense-related training had officially become ‘the major
objective’ of the Corps” (Stange, 1987, p. 68). The CCC,
during its 10-year existence, went from modeling and
marketing itself upon romantic agro-forestry frontier
images, to celebrating technology training and modern-
ization as war approached. “Even the modernizing
effects of war were welcomed, at least by Colonel C.L.
McGee, who, in a virtual parody of William James’
famous essay [Moral Equivalent of War], informed
[CCC] enrollees in a dedication address that ‘It’s great to
get into war. It broadens you’” (Stange 1987, p. 70).

11 CNCS is a post 9/11/01 name change, introducing
“Community” into the former designation Corporation for
National Service. Freedom Corps is an umbrella name for
all the various Corps including AmeriCorps and Peace
Corps.

12 The CCC was considered a temporary relief agency
and shortly after the Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor it
was deemed inessential to the actual state of war. CCC
funding was discontinued by summer of 1942. It is also
noteworthy that William James lived a generation past the
U.S. Civil War, the young people involved in the CCC lived
a generation after World War I; similarly the Peace Corps
followed World War II, and AmeriCorps followed the
Vietnam War. The metaphor has thus been intermittently
useful, depending on its remove from the nation’s being
involved in an actual military war. The current U.S. “War
on Terror” exemplifies a different possibility, namely the
collusion of military and community service by collapsing
the distinctions between real and metaphoric war. This is
possible because the current war is already to a large extent
a metaphoric one, that is, it is being waged without “decla-
ration,” against nontraditional enemies (i.e., not “states”),
and with nontraditional means (i.e., more “intelligence”
than “troops”).

13 Private philanthropic foundations are also appropriat-
ing the language of business as they create funding streams
for community service and service-learning programs
under the title of “social entrepreneurship” (e.g., Ewing

14 This is not an unimportant titular change.
“Department” parallels other state “Departments” (e.g.,
The Department of Education) and “service-learning”
institutionalizes a debated term at the national level.

15 Saltmarsh (1996) cites Dewey’s 1932 Ethics, “Charity
may even be used as a sop to one’s conscience while at the
same time it buys off the resentment which might other-
wise grow up in those who suffer from social injustice” (p.
17). See also Morton and Saltmarsh (1997).

16 However, such a shift toward service as citizenship
might affect a reciprocal movement in the conceptualization
of politics to citizenship as service. Ironically, students par-
ticipating in community service frequently neglect other
basic forms of democratic participation such as voting.
Mathew Crenson (1999), referring to national service orga-
nizations from the Peace Corps to CNS, argues that “these
programs unquestionably inspire worthy people to worthy
deeds, but they also represent a government-sponsored shift
in our conception of citizenship” [italics added]” (p. 8).

17 The principal journal in the field, first published in
1994 (i.e., one year after Siedel and Zlotkowski’s remarks),
no doubt cognizant of these difficult terminological issues,
strikes an inclusive note in its title *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*. The hyphenated term “service-learning” is today the most frequently used and has been adopted at the national level by CNCS.

18 In response to Lawrence Kohlberg’s influential model of human moral development in which moral maturity proceeds according to recognition of a principle of universal justice, Gilligan argues that “care” serves as an alternative foundational principle, one relevant especially for women. Translating this to the field of service-learning, Foos argues that while “justice” constitutes the foundational principle for service as social change, “care” is an appropriate foundational principle for profound instances of service as charity. “The implication seems to be that mature service entails political activism, and that a non-political approach to service is naïve” (p. 17).

19 Anzaldúa writes in multiple voices, as a woman, as a Latina, as a lesbian, as a scholar, and more. She critiques the dominant categorizations of gender, sex, language, and nation. She reinterprets cultural history as hegemony saying, “Culture is made by those in power” (p. 38). Her writing blurs literary genres, textual canons, and standardized language.

20 “In contrast to simply developing students’ abilities and motivation to engage in ‘helping’ relationships, a border pedagogy asks that we problematize such relationships and use them as opportunities for challenging and transforming inequities of power and authority” (Hayes & Cuban, 1996, p. 76).

21 “Community service creat[es] a sort of borderland, a symbolic space that facilitates the bridging of ‘borders’—boundaries constituted through power, wealth, and status hierarchies which privilege some people while excluding or marginalizing others. While it is possible for the marginalized and excluded to cross borders through social mobility or cultural assimilation, for instance, the process typically involves leaving one’s prior status behind in order to assume the more valued status. Borderlands, on the other hand, involve a mutual accommodation and understanding across borders, and erasing of hierarchies” (Keith, 1998, p. 86).

22 Ernest Boyer (1994, 1996) made an initial entry to this project through his descriptions of the “New American College” and “Scholarship of Engagement.” He argues that it is in the best tradition of American higher education to practice of real social problem-solving.

23 Particularly important for service-learning in higher education is the need to distance itself from the community-based human scientific research conceptualization of community as a living laboratory.

References


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