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**Metaphors We Serve By:
Critical and Constructive Play with the Discourses on Service,
National Service, and Service-Learning**

Abstract:

This thesis presents an argument for the redescription of scholarship, generally, and service-learning, specifically. Its seven chapters constitute a set of interrelated research essays beginning with reflexive constructions of theoretical and personal starting places before moving into critical and constructive investigations of discourses informing service-learning. Conceptual metaphor analysis is the uniting methodological concept throughout. Through close readings of key texts I identify and examine the implicit and explicit metaphors that frame historical and institutional conceptualizations leading up to and currently informing service-learning.

In chapter one I propose a humanistic scholarship informed by the redescriptive metaphor *scholarship is play*. In chapter two I discuss the theoretical issues of scholarly reflexivity and trace my own shifting conceptual metaphors of service. In chapter three I historicize the term service by tracing its etymological story and describing the semantic shifts that underpin its present polysemy. In chapter four I investigate the manufacture of service meanings by critically examining the conceptual metaphors framing the National Service Movement from 1900 to the present. In chapter five I investigate the contestation of service meanings by critically examining the conceptual metaphors used in the attempt to establish and authorize service-learning. In chapter six I explore the imagination of service meanings by identifying the growing number of explicit and purposeful metaphors being introduced into the academic service-learning literature. The movement in these chapters from *historization* to *manufacture*, to *contestation*, to *imagination* is from scholarly deconstruction to reconstruction, from critical understandings of social discourses to creative participation in social formation. A call for the generation of new purposeful metaphors is the logical conclusion to my argument. As a service-learning practitioner, and thus a member of my own audience, I end with a first response to this call. My reflections on the metaphor *service is play* constitute a final chapter, an afterword that constitutes less a conclusion than another beginning.

Criticism of metaphoric worlds, or visions, becomes one clear and important—perhaps the clearest and most important—instance of a general human project of improving life by criticizing it.

Wayne Booth “Metaphor as Rhetoric” (64)

“Metaphors We Serve By”: Standing on One Leg

The condition of postmodernity involves a kind of aporia, an admission of life’s inherent difficulty, of wobbling pivots and no *terra firma*. The absence of a given starting place compels scholarship towards greater reflexivity and humility. Learning is evolutionary and pragmatic. We make places to stand along the way. Scholarship, like other conceptual categories, is socially constructed. Similarly, the complex and contested term service is also socially constructed. Its historical meanings are many and diverse, and its potential for ongoing reconstruction is bounded only by the limits of the imagination. Service changes over time and contexts, it expands and contracts, and even turns back on itself in ironic antonyms. The meaning of service, in its next instance, is up for debate, and, at least partially, open for creation.

This dissertation as a whole is intended as a conversational entry into the discourse on meaning construction. It consists of several targeted essays in which I critically investigate the conceptual metaphors framing scholarship and service, and constructively explore creative metaphors for rethinking and doing scholarship and service. My method of discourse takes metaphor as its chief tool. The benefit of metaphors is their plasticity and playfulness. They highlight and hide without ultimately defining. Metaphors provoke associations and solicit interpretations; their purpose is to enrich dialogue, not end it. The overarching metaphor guiding this critical and constructive process for me is Play. And metaphors themselves are playful, merging word play, thought play, and world play. In the constitutive chapters numerous specific metaphors are examined but play remains my starting place and framework.

In chapter one I began by gathering lessons from several academic conversations on metaphor, most of which began in the late-1970’s. Informing each of these separate conversations was Max Black’s earlier conceptual shift from *metaphor as substitution* to *metaphor as interaction*. From this lead, Lakoff and Johnson effected another movement from *metaphor as language* to *metaphor as thought*. Rorty (following Davidson and also Dewey’s Pragmatism) argued for another from *metaphor as meaning* to *metaphor as use*. Arguing more generally, Smith and then Gill moved the conversation in comparison from *comparison as discovery* to *comparison as imagination*, which amounts to redescribing *comparison as metaphor*. Combined, my adopted lessons are that metaphors are conceptual tools for making, imagining and remaking the world. Given the lack of a foundational starting place—and subsequent letting go of an agreed upon end (*telos*)—this makes science one model, not the only model for scholarship. The problem with science is not that it isn’t helpful for doing many things, but that it hides the constructive process of knowledge-making with its dominant interpretation of *knowledge as discovery*. I argue that *scholarship as play* is a useful redescription. Play represents a reconstructive and hopeful movement amidst the aporia, play facilitates growth and evolution—and not just for children, play is fundamentally what we do with language and

concepts, play also returns enjoyment to scholarly labor, enhancing both the process and product.

That the inherited world is a constructed world (a world of conceptual metaphors) and that this inheritance can be remade through playful acts of the metaphoric imagination recasts the research agenda of scholarship. In chapter two I argued for a redescriptive shift from *research as discovery* to *research as reflection and reflexivity*. Research is a basic and defining human activity. In research we bend back experiences upon our knowledge and interests and create new knowledge as a tool for enhancing our interaction with the world. This highlights the primacy of self-consciousness as well as pragmatic purpose of growth. As an exercise in reflexivity (self-play) I explored several shifting conceptions that have informed my participation in service. The narrative is itself a construct, but usefully demonstrates the complex semantics of service and introduces my interest in the national service and service-learning discourses. I traced my story from *service as Christian charity*, to *service as pluralist charity*, to *service as passport*, to *service as quagmire*.

This personal semantic complexity is matched and exceeded by the semantic history of the term service itself. In chapter three I offered an etymological exploration of service. The thousand-year history of service demonstrates that language is not best described as a conduit for transmitting original meaning (etymons as nuggets of the truth), but rather, language is itself a discourse constructing meaning over time. Terms are always subject to continuing reconstruction. In English parlance service has developed a number of deep historical strands of meaning, some complementary, some virtual opposites. Metaphor, in various forms, is a primary agent of this change process. This historical discourse is also specifically instructive because the meanings of service it highlights continue to be variously called upon or reinterpreted in current discourses on national service and service-learning. Many of the present confusions and conflicts about the meaning of service are nothing new; they are reformulations of past discourses.

National service is a modern compound of service that has a century-old tradition in the U.S. In chapter four I explored this linking of service with nation, highlighting nation as a keyword influencing service. Nation can be understood, and often is, as an organic entity, a natural organism. However, this description hides the constructedness of its history and borders. Nation can be usefully redescribed as a manufactured entity, one whose manufacture depends upon narrating convincingly the organic story. Nation uses narratives and other tools like service to create a sense of belonging and a willingness to sacrifice. The history of national service has been framed by a number of conceptual metaphors, the first and most pervasive being *service as the moral equivalent of war*. Thus the history of the past century in the U.S. reads as the oscillations between real and metaphoric wars. The logic linking military service and non-military service to nation is the primary call of nation for sacrifices that leads to solidarity. In the 1990's as the U.S. as a nation began to shift to a corporate identity, it drew aptly upon the *service as economics* tradition and framed *national service as business*. The new expanded wave of national service programs promised to get the job done and return on investment. Throughout the national service discourse, citizenship is an ongoing subtext. Service is a location for engaging or inculcating members of the nation. Currently, in the post-9/11 world there is a new national service metaphor emerging, one in which real and metaphoric wars have been combined and expanded. War is becoming a totalizing

concept and service is subsumed in that unbounded war effort. While service so redescribed certainly functions as a strategy for binding and building the nation, the metaphor reduces service to a single frame, one that is problematic to say the least.

In chapter five I explored the more recent, if overlapping, discourse on service found in the rise of service-learning. Service-learning is rooted in deep contests over *culture as transmission* versus *culture as transformation* specifically as this applies to the discourse on traditional versus progressive education. The term was first used in the mid-1960's amidst the context of the socially transformative civil rights movement. Over the past four decades numerous campus-community programs were united under the new name and began to organize and argue their way towards increasing acceptance within educational establishment. While the name served to unite, the term service itself brought along its semantic complexity, including a popular association with class-based charity. An ongoing discourse in service-learning involves attempts to distance the field from this service as charity semantic tradition. For some this redescription focused on service-learning as social change ethics, for others the focus has been on service-learning as an approach to education, and for still others the conceptual shift has been toward service as an activity of citizenship. Charity as a conservative term posed a challenge to the transformative work intended on these various fronts by service-learning advocates. The relatively successful institutionalization of service-learning by the end of the 20th century raises a new wave of contest between transmission and transformation orientations. The question remains of service-learning—as it moves from the periphery to the center of the institution and as its new advocates are increasingly distant the counter-normative social movement consciousness that gave it birth—will it hold on to its culturally, educationally transformative edge in the move. The largely traditional research path chosen to support the field and the rise of civic engagement as a supporting frame linking service-learning and national service give reason to suspect a conservative turn. The field's "pioneers" are worried but cautiously optimistic and still working to redescribe service-learning in new ways that highlight its transformational origins. Joining them is also a large number of newer transformative voices, and even in the case of conservative compromises, it seems these are mostly strategic for other transformational purposes. Much of this discourse is played out in explicitly used conceptual metaphors.

While this discourse of contestation is ongoing, another discursive possibility is to focus on recovering or creating new interpretations of service and service-learning, new spaces of hope and transformation. In chapter six I explore how imagination is a useful and important tool for developing service-learning. A review of the field's literature demonstrates a number of areas of imaginative development with accompanying new metaphors for service and service-learning. Some of these new conceptualizations reframe the field as a whole, asking us to rethink the entire discourse in new terms. Others offer strategic metaphors for particular contexts or particular purposes. Both general and specific uses of imagination are important.

Service can be usefully redescribed *as care*, recovering valuable relational aspects of the charity tradition so long contested. It can be described *as border-crossing* with literal and metaphoric layers intended and highlighting the potential of borderlands but also their inequality and pain. *Service as text* opens new ways of interpreting experience and bringing it into critical reflection. *Reflection* itself is a metaphor with deep roots in

Dewey and potential for development as a genre and as an aspect of reflexivity. *Service as storytelling, as community, and as a journey* are also emerging metaphoric conceptions with rich potential. Service-learning as a field can be expanded by adding *new roots* traditions and *new activities* redescribed as serving real needs even if indirectly or through non-traditional associations. The aim of this discourse is not reductionist—to make everything service and service everything, as seems to be the case in the reductionist collapse of national service into war—but rather to expand and refine the service-learning discourse by presenting new possibilities for conceptual and practical exploration. By making the metaphors we serve by explicit, purposeful, and fresh we enrich the discourse and deepen the practice of service.

To reduce this dissertation summary to its barest essentials, my discursive verbs move chapter to chapter from deconstructing (preface) to making (1) to reflecting (2) to historicizing (3) to manufacturing (4) to contesting (5) and finally to imagining (6). There is a reconstructive movement to this order. It also highlights to complexity of discourse, having many and overlapping modes. The metaphoric redescriptions that follow this order are from *scholarship as science* to *scholarship as play*, from *research as discovery* to *research as reflection*, from *definition as origin* to *definition as historization*, from *nation as natural* to *nation as manufactured*, from *culture/education as transmission* to *culture/education as transformation*, and from *service-learning as definition* to *service-learning as imagination*. That's "Metaphors We Serve By," standing on one leg.