VII. Writing, Video, Performance, Reflection

The [2011] NEA-supported creative writing workshops were inspired by the NEA's acclaimed program Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience, which launched in 2004 to help U.S. troops and their families write about their wartime experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq, and stateside – **National Endowments for the Arts, http://arts.gov/partnerships/walter-reed**

Three top learning goals:

1)Understand and be ready for the more outlier range of potential personal reactions from student veterans to writing prompts or subject matter related to the politics, ideologies, violence, stereotypes and experiences of war;

2)Prepare contingencies for intense reactions/discussion of writing submitted by or feedback from a student veteran;

3)Consider the possibilities of what a student veteran may reveal during writing assignments and whether they should flag faculty referral to counseling, support services, or other reactions, in keeping with the syllabus, etiquette and policies of the college

ABSTRACT:

Whether a required composition course, a creative writing course, poems, or just an essay for a discipline's assessment or reflection (history, politics, etc), a student veteran/active duty service member may hand-in writing as typical as the teacher's expected every-answer, as mundane as a standard student's experiences, or as rich and different as only the field of combat can render. The potential challenge for faculty giving writing assignments (fiction, non-fiction, or research) to student veterans comes from issues of whether a topic should be approved as appropriate, the effect of prompts, the reality and mythologies of PTSD, consideration and reaction over what type of feedback the instructor should give, and whether the student should share their content with the rest of the class. Faculty need to know that writing & reflection are simultaneously the most beneficial, cathartic, pivotal, life-changing college activities, and also the most potentially at-risk of academic assignments for a class.

BRIEFINGS:

Composition and creative writing classes are where student veterans can really shine: bringing experiences from their lives onto paper towards catharsis and ephiphanies, making peace with memories, providing a viewpoint on life beyond the life milestones and marginalia of many younger students, connecting through sharing, expressing themselves (which some may not have done with non-veterans), and transitioning to see themselves as civilian by breeching that world as something from the past seen from the eyes of the present. It can also be a place where frustration, anger,

violence, inappropriate content for the non-veteran audience (is there such a thing? What does the assignment or syllabus say about this? Anything?) can silence the rest of the room, exclude the student veteran further from see themselves as students in the right place (college), or launch heated battles of opinion. Disturbing content can create disturbing questions, a sense of fear, in the classroom. Can a student opt out of a topic? What do you do if the student contacts you the night (or hours) before the assignment is due, requesting an alternative writing project because of their status or experiences as a active duty, reserve, guard, or student veteran? Worse yet, reception or feedback phases of writing can incite another round of problems. Do you censor topics or content? Will the student veteran (justly?) feel you are censoring out their NON-FICTION real world experience? How do you handle the student who says, 'what? You just used Excel during the war? You were a cook in Germany the whole time of the war? You didn't fight? So you weren't a warrior?"'

What if you have a self-identifying student vet with PTSD or undergoing counseling. Should you carefully alter/exclude/tailor your prompts to avoid language that could trigger problems? What if you do and the student veteran or another student asks why this class can't discuss their 'truths?' What if a student veteran reveals a traumatic experience? Being involved in an incident of friendly fire? Being attacked, being disabled, action or inaction that led to a battle buddy's injury or death? Being raped overseas or during training or deployments? A 'morally' traumatic use of force to kill? What if you suggest seeking help because of content, and they claim it's just fiction, but your gut feeling and their behavior tells you otherwise? What about the student veteran required to give feedback to something 'morally caustic' that another student finds glee in writing, reading about – for example, flag burning?

How do you handle feedback on essays or stories from a student veteran that discuss contemplating or the desire to commit suicide? The ones that merely hint at it? The assignment (or if it is read out loud) that reveals something illegal or off campus rules (for example, carrying a weapon right now in class), for which the rest of the class is now looking at you to intervene? How do you handle 'writing circles"? A student veteran who refuses to work with another student because of ethnicity or point of view or gender?

Non fiction essays can be even more problematic. Topic and viewpoints? Imagine a reflection question that asks, "What do you think it would feel like to kill?" when the student veteran knows it too well and does not want to discuss it? "Write your truth" goes the adage. But what if that's something that intimidates by the sheer scope and harshness of its realities? It's not as simple as topics vs PTSD triggers: a stark reality presented by a student veteran might not just 'freak out' some non-veteran students, but style, language, actions, role played plot can set a tone of hostility in the class that you are not prepared to handle.

Sometimes the pedagogical issues of placement and developmental class content create a rub: a student veteran may not be pleased to be placed in a class they consider beneath their 'life experience', a class they completed in some manner that did not transfer as credits, a low score on a placement exam, resenting that the writing class (especially if developmental) is wasting their GI Bill monies on lower level writing work. These are more cut and dry issues than the above, but they can still grow into acting out, resentment and resistance in the classroom that affects the student veteran, other students, faculty, and classroom decorum.

Finally, what about grouping student veterans and active duty/guard/reserves in a writing cohort? Are you as INSTRUCTOR ready for what may come out of a class where the experiences of military service and the codes and languages of those experiences are the norm? And would a student veteran cohort actually be a unified norm? What about the differences in writing subjects, attitude, and experiences between students who participated in combat, support, or logistics? Differences in/by gender? By military branch?

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TIPS:

Faculty TIP 1): Definitions of a few types of 'vet friendly' classes – especially useful for writing/reflection courses or groups.

From "An Ethical Obligation: Promising Practices for Student Veterans in College Writing Classrooms," an excellent quick overview of writing/reflection and the student veteran college population: "1. **Veterans---Only**: only veterans or military service members are allowed to enroll in these courses. Many focus at least part of the class on topics directly related to the military or to the veteran experience. 2. **Veteran---Focused**: veterans and the military experience are the focus of these courses, and while enrollment is not restricted, the topical focus of the class intentionally encourages veteran enrollment. 3. **Veteran---Friendly**: faculty in these courses have committed to creating a safe place for veterans, and they take into account the veteran status of their students in every part of the course, from classroom seating to creation of assignments. While the veteran or military experience is not the focus of the class, faculty who designate their classes as friendly to veterans signal to veterans their awareness of the benefits and challenges of the transition from the military service to higher education"[1]

[1] D.Alexis Hart and RogerThompson "An Ethical Obligation: Promising Practices for Student Veterans in College Writing Classrooms." June 2013. http://www.ncte.org/library/nctefiles/groups/cccc/anethicalobligation.pdf (pg 10-11)

Faculty TIP 2): Writing/Reading/Reflection activities as military related service learning: Along with journal writing to shed light/explore inner issues and feelings, reading, visiting, writing, or reflecting activities are an excellent match or assessment for service learning. For example: "**Project Read Aloud**...(Thanks to Tricia Sindel-Arrington at Chandler Gilbert Community College).. [Students] are required to read aloud to a partner of their choice (a senior, parents, sibling, etc.) for 10 sessions throughout the semester. Then they reflect on each session, how it went and what they gained. Some of their personal reflections and experiences are so life-changing" This project could easily be adapted for student veteran usage – formally or informally. ***You can see the assignment description/prompts/requirements at the end of this chapter – section titled Project: READ ALOUD***. An informal example [at my college, CGCC] was a student veteran taking a psychology course who volunteered at a VA nursing home and listened, vet-to-vet, for almost six hours to a dying WW II veteran who told things related to his service experiences that he had never discussed with anyone, ever…the experience was both enriching (and slightly traumatizing) to the listener and cathartic to the aged vet letting go of haunting memories. The reflection then became both an active learning experience AND a potential source for reflection or research paper.

Faculty TIP 3): Assignments with therapeutic as well as academic (grammar, paper writing, research,etc) value. "Therapeutic writing" can be accepted in the class as extra credit, using papers, presentation, reading assignments, blogs, recording/filming personal histories, whether as personal reflection (student veteran experience) or as writing about others. Some student veterans will say yes, some no: some will want to write as therapy, some will want the absolute opposite. Offer a buffet of choices and let students decide and you will get authentic, passionate assignments and possibly aid the transition of a student veteran.

Faculty TIP 4): Some examples/models of writing and other expressive arts as thereapeutic, academic, or creative outlet for student veterans:

Explore some examples of what's been done already, even if grants/courses/exhibits are over:

A) Operation Homecoming: Writing the Wartime Experience (NEA partnership with Walter Reed National Military medical center): http://arts.gov/partnerships/walter-reed
B) Warrior Writers: http://www.warriorwriters.org/home.html
C) Common Ground on the Hill: http://www.commongroundonthehill.org/veterans-initiative.html
D) The Journal of Military experience (especially for non fiction and scholarly writing): http://militaryexperience.org/the-journal-of-military-experience/
E) As You Were: The Military Review (fiction and non fiction, poetry, artwork): https://mea.submittable.com/submit/31481
F) Art Contest: WAR PAINT: http://www.studentveterans.org/on-campus-veteran-support-group/programs/warpaint.html

G) NY Times blog piece on writing as a Veteran: http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/28/the-right-to-write/?_r=0
H) NVAM – National Veteran's Art Museum in Chicago, with traditional art, community outreach and special exhibit such as Artwork made from pants of raped women soldiers posed in combat situations (Iris Feliciano) http://www.nvam.org/about/
I) Basetrack Live: ASU Gammage workshopped multimedia experience 'play' based on Basetrack http://basetracklive.com/
J) Margaret Bellafiore's exhibit: an art professor creates a sound installation of the voices of veterans on her campus and realizes that it changes her conception of soldiers and opens new dialogue across different demographics and ideologies at Bridgewater state University campus in Massachusetts [sound installation was titled Combat to Campus, the Voices of Veterans and exhibited at the Mobius Gallery in Boston and also at the Bridgewater Campus Center] http://www.aaup.org/article/combat-campus#.VKsPdth0z4Y
K) Writing used for children/family of veterans: Courageous Children's Summer Camp/ http://www.operationmilitarykids.org/public/home.aspx
L) A powerpoint presented to military (honesty/semi-satirical approach leads to firing: http://www.armytimes.com/article/20100902/NEWS/9020339/The-PowerPoint-rant-that-got-a-colonel-fired
M) Video Project from Iraq war college students veterans (w/pics): http://wpsu.org/backfromiraq/index
N) Consider SATIRE and its role in student veteran writing: SATIRE WORKS: The military has a great tradition of satire -- a great tradition of interesting stories to mine, especially for writing, composition, presentation, reading classes -- for lessons focusing on audience and wry humor. Excellent examples: http://duffelblog.com

6 Sample SCENARIOS* relevant for Writing, Video, Performance, Reflection

for instructions on how to use Sample Scenarios, go to HOW TO USE TOOLKIT chapter/module and read: "How to use SCENARIOS: Teachable Moments strategy or as Faculty Development exercises"

SCENARIO 1:	I was rattled by the previous presentation (PTSD diagnosed/documented or not, incident, subject matter, etc] and would like a 2nd chance to present for a better grade.
SCENARIO 2:	I wrote an intense piece but now don't feel I can share/present even though latter is worth 30% of the assignment grade. Can I complete some form of alternative assignment to make up for not presenting/reading my work?
SCENARIO 3:	Mid presentation/mid reading, student starts to break down. Class looks to instructor to/how to intercede or not.
SCENARIO 4:	Reveals disturbing communication
SCENARIO 5:	Has a disturbing assignment share
SCENARIO 6:	Gives inappropriate feedback

******Where are the solutions?*** *There are too many different ways to 'solve' each, agreeing and disagreeing, similar and dissenting, so instead you have 1)the scenario 2)suggested steps in Chapter "HOW to USE Toolkit" to find your own localized solutions.* ***Forcing people to start discussions - active learning -- rather than reading/skimming what I thought/found worked in MY location/culture is the key to action and owning the problem and approaches.*** *Only homegrown solutions SOLVE WITH PURPOSE*

PROJECT READ ALOUD : SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT (with prompts and instructions) using Reading/Writing and Reflection

(by Patricia Sindel-Arrington) patricia.sindelarrington@cgc.edu

To receive credit for the Project Read Aloud (by Tricia Sindel-Arrington/ you must:

1. **Select a partner** to read to: a son, daughter, sister, brother, niece, nephew, cousin, neighbor, a child in a child care center, a sight-impaired senior adult, a grandparent, a parent – **but not** a boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, classmate, lover, or friend).
2. **Set** a mutually agreeable schedule and turn in your **Partner Page (see last 5).**
3. **Identify** partner's interests and attention span and **select** appropriate read aloud books. If you are reading to a child, the age, maturity level, and attention span are very important. Some general advice: for nearly every subject of interest there is a book or magazine available. Sometimes you may select a magazine article because you know it fits your partner. Always bring several selections to a real aloud session. Selecting the best book to read aloud may take as much time as the actual read aloud session. **Use the librarian for reference sources to help you make interesting and age-appropriate selections.**
4. **Practice** reading aloud, if necessary.
5. **Read aloud** with partner for **a minimum of ten sessions**, from 20 to 30 minutes each, during this semester and **record** your read aloud activities on the **Project Read Aloud Log (see page 4 for assignment requirements).**
6. **Write** a final **essay/report (see page 3 for assignment requirements).**

Project Read Aloud Report

Directions: When done reading to your partner, write a detailed report and prepare to give a brief oral report to the class. For the written report, answer the following questions in separate typed paragraphs. Remember to use 12 font, Times Roman and double space your paper. Make sure you edit your report for writing errors and provide a thorough analysis. For each question, your response should be at least 450-500 words.

1. What was the age and relationship of your reading partner to you? What did you read to them? Describe the typical meeting: Where did you read, when, how long?
2. How did your relationship change as you went along? What did you learn about that person that you did not already know? Has your partner's attitude toward reading changed?
3. What did you learn about yourself that you did not already know? How has your attitude changed toward reading, especially read aloud?
4. What was the best thing you experienced about this project?
5. What surprised you about this project?
6. Explain why you will or will not read aloud again.

Project Read Aloud Log (Sample) Your name:

Partner first name:

Required Session #1:

Date: **Time:** **Number of minutes read:**

What you read:

Where did you read:

How did the session go for you both?