Broyles, Kathryn A. "Virtual Performance & Generative Pedagogy" Panel Presentation, PAMLA, Western Washington University, March 10, 2018

PRESENTATION SCRIPT

Slide 1:
Devin Whitaker in his article, "Veteran Literacy: A Case for Veteran Identity Theory in Composition and Literature" says, "My hope for this essay and supplementary writing exercises is that the broad ideas … serve as a jumping-off point for specific scholarship addressing the need for a conversation to begin and to sustain regarding veterans and what they can contribute to the humanities, literature theory and composition course instruction." He calls for us to reject a deficit-based model full of assumptions about veterans and reach for a veteran-centric mode of re-interpretation of assignments, and of pedagogy—in other words, be as aware of audience as as student-centered as you are with any other student group. His article echoes my own ambition here.

Slide 2:
With this presentation I'd like to invite you to think about online learning in new ways – how online learning can support veteran success in the classroom –the stage it sets and the roles it invites and should invite.

This presentation focuses on online learning, not only for its unique potential for important multimodal composing, but as a jumping -off point for sustained discussion regarding veterans and what they can contribute to humanities, literary theory and composition course instruction - and what we can do, as scholars to support their success. I want us to consider, too, the opportunity for institutional continuity (despite geographic challenges) online courses offer and how that continuity opens up a surprising rhetorical space enabling an extension and reconstitution of real world identity despite the virtual platform.

Slide 3
I have been teaching online since 1999, and full-time online for more than 9 years. It is my experience that for many military students, online learning often represents the only opportunity to continue schooling uninterrupted within a

single institution despite multiple geographical postings, both stateside and abroad, and not uncommonly, during deployment in zones of conflict.

Without the option of accredited online learning, active duty military often end up trying to cobble together courses taken at every opportunity, from as many as six or seven institutions trying to reach their personal goal of a degree.

I'd like to suggest to you, that the opportunity for institutional continuity online courses offer opens up a surprising rhetorical space enabling an extension and reconstitution of real world identity despite the virtual platform. Indeed, Carolyn Baker, the Defense Department's chief of continuing education, cited in a report by the Military Times Edge, remarked that "online learning outpaces classroom-based courses in four of the military service branches." Why?

Slide 4
Because it opens up the spaces we often take for granted at a brick -n-mortar campus….room for asking questions, room for imagining different ways of being and doing.

Online learning creates opportunities to share ideas and conversations, not just within the classroom, though - not just on campus or with colleagues, but within a family (even though members may be separated by great distances) in situations where security restrictions, troop movements, and personal desire to shield one another from worry can often shut down, or even prohibit, conversations.

Online learning provides a stable space enabling a focused application of one's personal commitment and intellectual capability, and an opportunity to explore one's identity in new ways and to "try on" new ideas, often with only virtual repercussions—a benefit not lost on individuals whose professional responsibilities frequently involve great risk.

SLIDE 5
When your job is top secret, or you simply aren't permitted to say where you are for a time (a normal occurrence for me with my students - "DR. B - Ive got to go TDY", or "I'll be FOB, but get that work in by Thursday…") So, for wives and

husbands, as with any family - having new things to learn gives you new things to talk about - to share - to explore together – your roles as individuals can broaden and deepen. This is a great advantage for the pedagogue wanting to create excitement around a discipline isn't it - to have students who not only will, but ***want to*** and ***have to* draw** on that learning- talk about it and apply it - depend on it for ways ***to be "normal" with family***. Or who might try to use it as a way to build new bridges to mitigate other stresses.

When it comes to the military, even retired military and spouses, the digital classroom offers an emotional and intellectual space that can, in effect, reconstitute community.

From the intersection of multiple geographies, identities, literacy narratives, and the online classroom, I hope together we can seek to **cultivate change in pedagogical approaches to veterans and to online classrooms.**

I hope you'll think with me about how we can leverage the rich learning spaces online technologies and online classrooms can create to further foster stability and growth for men and women in uniform - and move away from seeing it as it often may function for the freshman millennial - a chance to take algebra in your pajamas.

Slide 6
Now, that' s a legitimate way to take algebra as far as I'm concerned! but I do think when we make those kinds of assumptions about online learning, we miss the opportunities it provides for reconstituting community and reinforcing a centering identity.

- As professionals, we tend to have a lot of assumptions about online learning - it's asynchronous,
- it should or shouldn't replicate the classroom (research says it should not),
- it can replace a class,
- it can only augment a class

…. but if we don't start arguing about the legitimacy of online learning and instead we start with the fact that it provides opportunities for constituencies otherwise shut out of traditional modes of learning - and we recognize that a

very important one of these groups is active duty service members and other veterans… then our energies can be spent differently. If I don't write pedagogy as a way to justify online classrooms, and instead I spend energies enabling students to excel in all the ways and with all the approaches to literacy and language, and technology I have access to, then what shall we do and why? That's one thing I hope we can discuss.

SLIDE 7 [journal]
Another thing needs discussing - what we need more of is research in veterans studies, from all disciplinary perspectives – from rhetoric, from literature, from history, drama, all corners. You can find a sampling of that research in the Journal of Veterans Studies, and your own work is welcome there as well!

But what about research and veterans?

How should we ask questions about "veterans" and at the same time not conflate who veterans are? How do we set aside our assumptions and biases about their performance as a collective on the world stage, or as individuals in our classrooms?

It's useful to find cross sections of data streams in order to reach for basic best practices. But we can skew or do harm when we categorize veterans. This is certainly true in any constituency, but when we talk about the U.S. Military and the individuals that comprise all branches, we're talking about the penultimate example of America as a melting pot:

Slide 8: [stats on current military demographics]
Slide 9: Gender
Slide 10: Family
 Note: Over half (56.1%) of Active Duty military members are married, which is lower than the percentage that were married in 1995 (59.9%). In 2012, a majority (69.5%) of officers and over half (53.3%) of enlisted personnel reported themselves as married. Over half (58.0%) of Active Duty males and nearly half (45.0%) of Active Duty females are married. In addition, 6.3 percent of DoD's Active Duty members are in dual-military marriages.

What about families and Spouses? It's important to recognize that active duty and reserve military members run concurrent lives - just as do any professionals. We all wear many hats and play many roles. As a culture, we tend to think of folks in the military always in uniform. But that's not the case. They have an **"all in"** job that lays their life on the line, but they have husbands and wives and children who see what they do as both a point of pride and a point of frustration-

It might be a helpful analogy to think of the stress for these families as being similar to being permanently joined to someone trying to make partner in a top NYC law firm in terms of hours, attention away from home, etc. Only you eventually make partner - the military commitment doesn't end. Or perhaps compare it to someone _permanently_ working on their medical residency, year after year after year - but while these two temporary situations are, in the end, quite lucrative .

Being in the military, for 95% of individuals is about the benefit to self, and country. It is not for money. They earn a solid living, but by no means does the salary reflect concomitant recompense to the risk, effort and training as compared to our lawyer or doctor. In fact, it is a misconception of many civilians that the military has many "benefits." In some sense, it does - technically. But one is not awarded these benefits, even if one is due them, automatically, despite the fact that one may automatically be sent to war quite easily.

Slide 11 [..from Medical Humanities - Univ. of Sheffield]/language identity & personal experience of illness]

When you have students struggling with the VA. It's a very real challenge that can be insurmountable - For my own family, I can speak simply to trying to get aid and attendance in my father's last days from a 100% service connected death and the following benefits fight for my mother. It took us a year and a half and we managed to get my father's aid and attendance 3 months before his death. He died in Sept. 2015 and we got the letter more than a year and half after my father's death (after applying three times), that my mother will indeed receive survivor's benefit.

This will mean that she is not destitute - as she will not receive any Social Security as my father's widow because she herself was a public health nurse and new legislation passed a few years ago prevents someone with a pension from a government source from receiving social security. So, we have two individuals, both giving their lives for public service and good, and had I not been able to step in on both counts, my parents well-being and financial status was at risk. I don't tell my story for sympathy. It's not even exciting or complicated compared to what other veterans and families may be going through who are suffering far more debilitating issues recovering from more recent conflicts and at the same time negotiating growing families, school aged children, and so much more.

I explain this only to help you understand that there is much going on in a veteran's life behind the scenes that complicates even the most direct access to what the general public may assume is a support system already in place for veterans. So, as scholars and pedagogues, seeking to think about changes in approaches to online learning and to supporting veterans in the academy, I hope that you can begin to see how much the "flexibility" and "accessibility" to excellent, accredited, technologically savvy online learning might mean to such families.

You can still go to class, despite sitting at the VA for three days to get an appointment for a prosthesis. You can still go to class in the evening after it takes you five hours to get dressed in the morning and get all your meds down. And you can still go to class and earn an accredited degree despite six deployments in as many years.

In terms of identity - I see online learning as stabilizing where the internet is often disruptive.

I see online interactivity from student veterans as much more authentically them, because they needn't present themselves in particular ways physically in the virtual classroom space - they turn their energies to the new narrative.

I see the writing needed to occupy online spaces effectively as being of

particular interest to us as rhetoricians and scholars in the Humanities. Multimodal composition gives technically and artistically oriented students a new way into success in innumerable rhetorical contexts.

But here are my questions: Slide 12

We use web 2.0 apps to make learning engaging and "fun."
But how do we, should we, deliberately use it to foster stability and community. If you think of the next online classroom you're assigned in this way - and you remember the connections you may be enabling for veterans and their families around the world and in your neighborhood, how will you change the space? How will your attitude shift towards the work?

How shall we approach studying what folks are up to in these spaces? Let's talk!

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