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Office Hours Monday 3:30-4:30
(office hrs by appt the wks of 2.6, 2.13, 3.6, 3.13, 4.24)

E 706, Spring 2017
7105 Helen C. White
W 10:15-12:15

Topics in Composition and Rhetoric: Writing, Healing, and the Body

In an age that is seeing the rise of writing (Brandt, 2015), more and more people are turning to writing to heal emotional and physical trauma, resulting in shelves of popular self-help literature on writing to heal (e.g. deSalvo, 1999). It appears they are on to something. Psychologists have shown that writing can help release emotional stress, resulting in improved physical health (Pennebaker and Seagal, 1999). And medical researchers have documented the beneficial effects of writing on a range of physical conditions, from asthma (Smith et al, 2015) to high blood pressure (Houston, 2011) to wounds (Koschwanetz, 2015) to arthritis (Smith et al, 1999). These developments are occurring against the larger scientific backdrop of advancements in MRI technology, which have enabled neuroscientists to document the surprisingly elaborate connections between mind and body (Davidson, 2012; Dum et al, 2016).

While scholars in composition studies are beginning to explore the myriad ways writing might be embodied (e.g. Haas and Witte, 2001), and while scholars in education have documented writing's potential for *social* healing (Weinstein, 2009), we still understand relatively little about how to most productively use writing to physically heal. How, for whom, and under what conditions might people experience writing as healing—and how might we leverage such insight for the wellbeing of writing students, and for the public good more broadly?

The goal of this course is to be able to answer these questions by exploring writing's relationship to the body, the social, and the soul.

To do, students will:

- a) read widely in diverse fields including teacher education, neuroscience, psychology, classics, memoir and fiction, composition and rhetoric, technical writing, kinesiology, anthropology. *This reading will be assessed by weekly response papers, no more than one page each, summarizing the readings and asking one question to pose in class, all to be turned in the last class day). 25 points*
- b) undertake an autoethnographic project that will draw from the theories we've encountered to explain how writing healed you (or didn't). *Five pages, due March 15. 25 points*

- c) create a syllabus for a writing course (taught in the community, to children, in college, your choice), based on the theories we've encountered, that teaches writing as a way of healing, accompanied by a plan for how to study its effectiveness. *Syllabus to include course description, objectives, how objectives will be assessed (1.5 pages), sample lesson plan (.5 pages), theoretical justification (.5 pages), and an implementable research plan to study its effectiveness (1 page). Due last class day.* 25 points
- d) Two brief presentations: one on either the syllabus or autoethnographic project (last two weeks of class) and another on one of the articles listed for March 1 (to be put together in class with classmates in the same group). 15 points.
- e) Participating in class activities and discussions. 10 points.

Course Calendar

Jan 18, The Writing Cure: Psychological approaches

Pennebaker and Evans (2014). *Expressive Writing: Words that Heal*. Idyll Arbor Press.

Jan 25, The Writing Cure: Embodied approaches

Pogroff, I (1975). *At a Journal Workshop*. Chapter Fourteen. Dialogue House Library.

Ritner, R. (1993). *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*. pgs 99-107, 180-183. University of Chicago. Available:
https://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/shared/docs/saoc54_4th.pdf

Vieira, K. and Conklin, K. (2016). "Writing's Potential to Heal: A Design-Based Study of a Body-focused Writing Workshop." Grant proposal.

Feb 1, Reading, Writing, and the Brain

Wolf, M. (2007). *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*. Chapters 2-3. Harper Perrenial.

Flaherty, A. (2004). *The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer's Block and the Creative Brain*. Chapters 5, 6, 7. Houghton Mifflin.

Feb 8, The Brain (continued); the Body and the Writing Process. (Miller Skypes in)

Davidson, R. with Sharon Begley (2013). *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*. Chapters 6 and 8. Plume.

Miller, E. (2016). "Literate Misfitting: Disability Theory and a Sociomaterial Approach to Literacy." *College English*, 79.1

Haas and Witte (2001). "Writing as embodied practice: The case of engineering standards." *Journal of Business and Technical Communications* 15.4, 413-457.

Feb 15, When Writing Doesn't Heal

(no class, Vieira at Writing Research Across Borders)

Van Ittersum and Hensley Owens (2013). Writing with(out) pain: Computing injuries and the role of the body in writing activity. *Computing and Composition*, 30 (2), p. 87-100. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2013.03.003>

Vieira, K (2016). *American by Paper*. Conclusion and Epilogue. University of Minnesota Press.

Feb 22, The Hand

Rose, M. (2004). *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker*, chapters 6-8, Plume.

Wilson, F. (1998). *The Hand: How its use shapes the brain, language, and human culture*. New York: Vintage. Chapters 2, 12-14.

Mar 1, Healing the Body/Soul

Van der Kolk (2014). *The Body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. New York: Viking. Chapters 5, 6, 12, 14

Lorde, A. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action"
Originally delivered at the Modern Language Association's "Lesbian and Literature Panel," Chicago, Illinois, December 28, 1977.

Lorde, A. (2007). "Poetry is not a Luxury." *Sister/Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Crossing Press.

Choose one article to read and present on:

Houston, T. (2011). Culturally appropriate storytelling to improve blood pressure: A randomized trial. *Annals of internal medicine*, 154, 77-84.

Koschwanez, H. et al (2013). Expressive writing and wound healing in older adults: A randomized controlled trial. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 75, 581-590.

Pennebaker, J. and Seagal, J. (1999). Forming a story: The health benefits of narrative. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 55.10, 1243-1254.

Smith, JM, et al. (1999). Effects of writing about stressful experiences on symptom reduction in patients with asthma or rheumatoid arthritis: a randomized trial. *JAMA*, 28,14,1304-1309.

Mar 8, no class, Vieira collecting data, write autoethnography, due March 15

Mar 15, Metaphor and Fresh Data

Bernard, A., Steinmuller, W., Stricker, U. (2006). *Ideokinesis: A creative approach to human movement and body alignment*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books. 43-144

Bergen, B. (2012). *Louder than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning*. Basic Books. Chapter One and Chapter Five.

Turn in autoethnography

March 22, no class, spring break.

March 29, Psychosocial Healing

Carey, T. (2016). *Rhetorical Healing: The Reeducation of contemporary black womanhood*. SUNY Press. Introduction and chapter three

Weinstein, S. (2009). *Feel these words: Writing in the lives of urban youth*. Albany: State University of New York. Intro, chapters 5-7

April 5, Teaching Writing to Heal (Ife skyping in)

Camangian, P. (2015). "Teaching like lives depend on it: Agitate, arouse, inspire." *Urban Education*. 50(4), 424-453.

Daijute, C. (2010). "Stories of conflict and development in U.S. public schools." *International Perspectives on Youth Conflict and Development*. Oxford University Press.

Ife, F. (2016). *Maktivist Literacies: Black Women's Making, Activism, and Writing in DIY Spaces*. Chapters Four and Five.

April 12, Teaching Writing from the Body

Wenger, C. (2015). *Yoga minds, writing bodies: Contemplative writing pedagogy*. Parlor Press. sections TBA, available as ebook through madcat

Perl, S. (2004). *Felt sense: Writing with the body*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Heinemann. Chapter One.

Jabr, F. (2014). "Why walking helps us think. *The New Yorker*.
<http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/walking-helps-us-think>

April 19, Publishing to Heal: Memoir and Fiction (Birdsall and Konop visit)

(half will read one book and half the class will read the other, all will read Dunn)

Birdsall, B. (2010). *Ordinary Angels*. Createspace Independent Publishing Platform.

Konop, G. (2009) *Cancer is a Bitch: or I'd Rather be Having a Midlife Crisis*. Decapo Lifelong books

Dunn, S. (Dec 30, 2016). "We are the story." *Angel's Flight: Literary West*. Available:
<https://aflwmag.com/2016/12/30/story-samantha-dunn/>

April 26 Presentations (on syllabus or auto-ethnography)

May 3 Presentations (on syllabus or auto-ethnography)

Autoethnography Assignment.

Starting in week one of class, follow Pennebaker and Evans' instructions for a six-week writing to heal course described in part three of their book PLUS one or two other writing activities in the book that seems like it might be useful or interesting to you. Please keep the FLIP OUT rule in mind.

Do the activities, week by week, and follow up by answering the reflection exercises in the book.

Without necessarily revealing the trauma or emotional problem you are writing about, please write a four-page paper that:

- Describes what you did
- Draws from your reflections, surveys, and maybe your writing to describe what the outcome was physically and emotionally on different weeks
- Draws from and cites at least 5 of the theories we've read thus far to speculate as to why the outcome was what it was

Successful auto-ethnographies will:

- Evidence that the activities were completed with integrity
- Analyze the reflections in order to make a convincing case for how the activities led to a particular outcome (this can be nuanced—doesn't have to be "I'm healed!")
- Evidences understanding of the theories we've read and applies them aptly to the outcome to develop a theory of how writing healed you (or didn't) in the previous six weeks.

Due March 15, hard copy in class, no more than five pages, double spaced