

Writing for Peace

Expressive writing has been shown to heal physical and emotional trauma, but might it also promote peace? If so, how? This course, for upper level undergraduates and graduate students in education, explores these questions. In doing so, it provides students with cutting edge conceptual frameworks for understanding not only how writing works in the world, but also how writing can make the world better.

We will reach these goals in four connected units.

First, we will conceptualize peace not as conflict resolution, but instead as conflict *transformation*, a holistic, long-term project, whose goal is equality and trust (Lederach, 2003). This concept of peace, we will learn, includes developing both inner peace and outer peace to promote long-term social harmony.

Second, we will examine writing's relationship to *inner* peace. For this unit, we will review work in psychology, neuroscience, and composition studies that suggests expressive writing can act on the body to release emotional stress. To test out this claim, students will do a brief auto-ethnographic project to examine to what extent their own expressive writing leads them to experience inner peace (see assignment below).

Third, we will address outer peace. Here, we will review work in literacy studies that reveal the conditions under which writing can lead to social empowerment, providing students with a firm basis in literacy studies.

Finally, we will draw from these theories to ask how educators might teach writing such that it promotes peace. For the final project, then, students will develop their own writing for peace curriculum for community or school groups, based on the theories we've encountered (see assignment below).

The objectives of this course are three:

- 1) to develop a deep interdisciplinary understanding of how writing acts on individuals and societies;
- 2) based on this understanding, to examine how writing might promote inner and outer peace;
- 3) to propose ways educators might teach writing for peace.

To meet these objectives, students will:

- a) read and discuss a range of interdisciplinary texts;
- b) conduct an auto-ethnographic project to examine how their own expressive writing does or does not lead to inner peace;
- c) develop a "writing for peace" curricular plan that can be put to use in a community group or classroom;
- d) have the option to participate in the ethnographic writing for peace project in which Prof. Vieira is engaged.

Professor Kate Vieira

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proposed course

Course Outline and Readings

Part One: Conceptualizing Peace Education

- Lederach, J. (2003). *The little book of conflict transformation*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.
- Reardon, B. (1988). *Comprehensive peace education: Educating for global responsibility*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Freire, P. (1968). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (M. B. Ramos, Trans). New York: Herder and Herder.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2014). "Everyday peace: Bottom-up and local agency in conflict-afflicted societies." *Security dialogue*, 45.6.

Part Two: Writing for Inner Peace

- Pennebaker, J. and Evans, J. (2014). *Expressive writing: Words that heal*. Idyll Arbor.
- Daniell, B. (2003). *Communion of friendship: Literacy, spiritual practice, and women in recovery*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Flaherty, A. (2004). *The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer's Block and the Creative Brain*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Vieira, K. (under consideration). "Writing to Heal: A Design-Based Study of a Body-Focused Writer's Workshop."
- 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

Part Three: Writing for Social Peace

- Fisher, M. (2007). *Writing in rhythm: Spoken word poetry in urban classrooms*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Weinstein, S. (2009). *Feel these words: Writing in the lives of urban youth*. Albany: State University of New York. Intro, chapters 5-7
- Diab, R. (2016). *Shades of Sulh: The rhetorics of Arab-Islamic Reconciliation*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh press.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The new mestizo*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- 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.

Part Four: Teaching Writing for Peace

- Wagar, S. (2015) Is it possible to teach writing so that people stop killing each other?: Nonviolence, composition, and critical expressivism. In *Critical expressivism* (eds. Roeder and Gatto), Anderson, South Carolina: Parlor Press, 131-147.
- hooks, b. (1993). *Sisters of the yam: Black women and self-recovery*. Boston: South End Press.
- 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.
- Wenger, C. (2015). *Yoga minds, writing bodies: Contemplative writing pedagogy*. Parlor Press. sections TBA, available as ebook through madcat
- Thompson, B. (2017). *Teaching with Tenderness: Toward an Embodied Practice*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

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Course Assignments

Unit 1 and 2 Assignment:

Can Writing Promote Inner Peace?: An Auto-Ethnographic Study

Can writing promote inner peace? This assignment asks you to incorporate the theories we've read so far and test out this question on yourself. 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 other writing activity in the book that seems like it might be useful or interesting to you.

This will include expressive writing—writing that you will keep private—20 minutes a day in a journal or forum of your choice. Do the activities, week by week, and follow up by answering the reflection exercises in the book.

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

- Describes the extent to which you followed (or didn't!) the “writing-to-heal” activities;
- Describes the outcome of these activities;
- Draws from and cites at least 3 of the theories we've read thus far to speculate as to why the outcome was what it was;
- Answers the question: Does writing produce inner peace for you? If so, how and why?

Successful auto-ethnographies will:

- Show that the activities were completed;
- Explain how the activities led to a particular outcome;
- Demonstrates understanding of the theories we've read by applying them to your experiences.

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Unit Three and Four Assignment:

Can Writing Promote Social Peace?: A Pedagogical Intervention

We have seen the ways that writing can promote inner peace. But given that writing, as we have learned, is a fundamentally social practice, can it also promote social peace? And if so, how might we teach writing so that it accomplishes this worthy goal?

Your task is to create a syllabus for a writing course (taught in the community or in a school), based on the theories we've encountered, that teaches writing for peace, accompanied by a plan for how to study its effectiveness.

The course can be hypothetical or real, and you may actually plan to carry out the study or not. If you do plan to carry out the study, please let me know and we can incorporate it as comparative results into my ethnographic study!

In no more than two pages, please draft a syllabus that includes:

- When, in what institutional context, and to whom the class will be taught;
- The learning objectives of the class;
- How peace will be defined in the context of the class;
- The narrative arc of the class (what will the assignments be? How will they be sequenced?);
- A sample lesson plan accompanied by a sample writing assignment.

Then in no more than one page, please provide a theoretical justification for the syllabus. The theoretical justification should answer the following questions:

- Why do you believe the course of study outlined will promote peace as you have defined it for this particular group of students?
- What do you believe to be the role of writing?
- How does your syllabus combine insights from/build on/or diverge from at least four theorists we've read this semester?

Then in no more than two pages, develop an implementable research plan to study the course's effectiveness:

- What is your research question? (This can include a question and subquestion).
- What methods of data collection and analysis will you use to answer it?
- Why are these particular methods appropriate to the question and the structure of the class?
- How does the knowledge you hope to create from this research build on the work of at least four theorists we've read this semester? What does it add to what we know about writing to heal?

Successful projects will answer all the questions with clarity and specificity and provide a straight logical line between syllabus, justification, and research prospectus.