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2 UNIFORM MEETS RHETORIC

Excellence through Interaction

Angie Mallory and Doug Downs

We first crossed paths in a first-year composition (FYC) course. Angie, four months out of the navy and in her first university classes; Doug, a specialist in FYC pedagogy whose courses emphasized self-directed inquiry. On the first day, Doug asked the class what as writers they wanted to learn. Angie thought, "You don't *know* what we're supposed to learn? Just *tell* us." When asked a question, Doug often turned it back to the class with a "what do you think?" In discussions of scholarly readings, Angie waited for definitive "here's-what-this-text-says" explanations that rarely came. Writing assignments were given as relatively open ended: "Tell me what you think about X," with procedures, steps, or outlines rarely offered. Doug gave extensive feedback on writing but did not grade it. He sometimes arrived late to class, sometimes haphazardly dressed. He was so clearly a flake, Angie nearly dropped. She stayed only because she knew she had to take comp sometime, and she figured she could tough it out—accept the course as a waste of time, give the instructor what he wanted (though he would not be clear about what that was), and "finish the mission."

In a happier ending, a couple of weeks in, Angie began to value Doug's approach, and the course ended up being a major- and life-changing one. Here, we focus on why it almost was not: the dramatic shift in interaction with "superiors" that accompanies a veteran's addition of *college student* to her range of what James Paul Gee (1989, 1999) has called "Discourses," language-based identity "toolkits" (which we describe in detail later in this chapter). Angie's experience in FYC, along with that of the four other military veterans we interviewed, was of becoming *valued interlocutors* after years of unquestioning performance of scripts that rarely called for their intellectual input. Our interviews

with veterans suggest that for many, military service bifurcates critical thinking and doing, valuing the latter. Yet in college, critical thinking is doing, and FYC means to teach students ways of credibly making their voices heard. Our research suggests the need for veterans and instructors to begin negotiating this shift quickly and openly—far more than literature on veterans in college has noted to date.

As in Angie's case, we found no actual failures stemming from lack of accommodation: veterans in FYC who encounter self-directed learning and new interaction with superiors don't drop the course in vast numbers or earn low grades. They adjust and usually perform among the best in the class. What interests us, instead, is how FYC instructors may be unaware of the disjunct between what they seek in their classes and the far different rules for contribution and interaction with superiors in the military. There has been almost no attention to what additions (not just *transitions*) veterans are making to their cultural knowledge as they begin college, particularly in classes that nondirectively seek student contributions to intellectual projects shared with faculty. Similarly, little attention is paid to pedagogy's assisting acquisition of the new Discourses veterans encounter. Instructors seeking to foster inquiry need better awareness of veterans' different expectations for what constitutes appropriate student-faculty interaction and teaching. Such awareness influences pedagogy, particularly in terms of feedback supporting such interaction.

We arrive at this conclusion by first discussing two weaknesses in veteran-education research—lack of attention to veterans' learning outcomes and the dominant metaphor for veterans' arrival at college, *transition*. We then consider the learning, classroom interaction, and inquiry fostered in effective composition courses: what can FYC ask of students, and where can it take them? From this baseline, we recount interviews with veterans, analyzing how military enculturation predisposes veterans to encounter leadership, expectations for contribution, and nonhierarchical interaction in FYC, and how these veterans negotiated differences between their expectations and reality. From these accounts, we derive strategies for feedback and interaction that helped veterans begin adopting Discourses of inquiry.

FRAMING THE PROBLEM: VETERANS ACQUIRING NEW DISCOURSES

Our review of research on veterans in college shows little attention paid to actual vet learning outcomes. The preponderance is actually

administrative: what support structures ensure that veterans encounter the fewest headwinds moving from barracks to campus? Chief among such studies is Cook and Kim's (2009, iii) *From Soldier to Student: Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus*. Surveying 723 institutions, the sixty-four-page report is "a first-of-its-kind national snapshot of the programs, services, and policies that campuses have in place to serve veterans." Yet it does not consider student learning; amid discussions of financial-aid, counseling, disabilities services, credit counting, and transfer, academics don't come up. We would hardly know that veterans take classes. Looking beyond student-affairs reports, there is no parallel reporting on veteran learning; conversation simply vanishes. In the ERIC database, *student learning* yielded 10,989 hits; adding in *veteran* and *military* dropped the count—to zero. Broadening the search to *student learning* and *military* generated twenty-four hits—all on job-related instruction for active-duty servicemembers. In Academic Search Complete, adding *military* and *veteran* to *student learning* reduced hits from 5,559 to 1.

The same trend dominates industry commentary (e.g., *Chronicle of Higher Education*): extensive discussion of structural challenges and opportunities, little attention to student learning (see Byman 2007; Glasser, Powers, and Zywiak 2009; Lipka 2010; O'Herrin 2011). For example, Herrmann et al.'s (2008) *CHE* article "College Is for Veterans, Too" discusses "financial aid, transfer credits, educational programs, health care, and classroom dynamics." But "educational programs" means scheduling around veterans' full lives, and "classroom dynamics" means preventing instructor politics from silencing veterans.

To us, then, the majority of research on veterans in college actually *overlooks the very point*: student learning.

That is not to say that no attention is paid to classroom experiences. There is significant conversation on what can be addressed in classes with veterans, and what veterans contribute, along two main lines: how to talk about traumatic incidents without "setting off" ex-soldiers—often cast as damaged, broken, abnormal, sometimes dysfunctional—and how to handle the professorate's left-leaning, antiwar, antimilitary, politically critical bent. Some work, like Leonhardy's (2009) article in the special veterans issue of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, explores how veterans create productive classroom energy based on the wealth of lived experience they have to draw on. (No other articles in that issue, and none in the 2010 "dot mil" issue of *Kairos*, considered student-veteran learning in FYC.) But there's no real discussion of veterans' learning processes and outcomes.

Given such silence, and especially since much of veterans' learning as they enter college is about how to be college students, we see a great need to explore how veterans learn and how their learning relates to effective composition instruction. One example of the cost of poor attention to how veterans learn is our second major critique of literature on veterans in college: the widespread deployment of a *transition* metaphor in describing veterans' evolution "from" military "to" academic life. While in some ways accurate, *transition* is insufficient to account for the learning necessary for veterans to acculturate to the academy.

Much veteran scholarship, particularly by Rumann and Hamrick (2010) and by DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008), is explicitly grounded in transition theory, particularly Nancy Schlossberg's. She characterizes transition as "moving in, moving through, moving on" (Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering 1989). From a cultural perspective, *transition* makes sense. The major life changes of joining up, being deployed, surviving deployment, separation from the military, and entering college are life altering (Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell 2009, 6–8), and transition theory helps name the characteristics of these changes and plumb their impacts.

But scholars of written communication recognize that it is not only veterans' *positions* that change in entering college, but their *language* and discursive knowledge. These changes must also be understood as Discourse acquisition. According to James Gee (1999, 19), Discourses are "ways with words, feelings, values, beliefs, emotions, people, action, things, tools, and places that allow us to display and recognize characteristic *whos* doing characteristic *whats*." A Discourse is "a sort of 'identity kit' which comes with costume and instructions on how to think, act, talk, and write, so as to take on a social role that others will recognize" — the "saying-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations" that tell people how to *be* in given situations (Gee 1989, 7). When we recognize a performance of a Discourse, we identify the performer as a "real" X (e.g., doctor, bachelor, soldier, student) (Gee 1999, 18). Later we'll detail some of the key elements that constitute a military saying-doing-being-valuing-believing Discourse, but for now, think *unifirms*.

Gee understands Discourses as malleable, dynamic, and fuzzy. Each of us embodies multiple Discourses concurrently, each inflecting the others (Gee 1989, 7–8). For example, a soldier Discourse would be modulated by hobby, family, and faith Discourses (say, a Jewish soldier who is also a father and sailor). This interplay of Discourses means that even as veterans "move" to college, they *maintain* their military Discourse, along with Discourses they acquire in college. In showing how we embody different

Discourses to different degrees in different circumstances, Gee's (1989, 9–10) theory is essentially rhetorical: failure to "shift" our "natures" (Discourses) as appropriate to a given moment may create social embarrassment and failed communication. He finds that the only way to *become* a "real" X is to "mushfake" the Discourse: use tools from one's existing Discourses to try to emulate the new Discourse. In other words, being a wannabe is how we actually acquire a Discourse. But mushfaking takes time as one gradually comes to embody the new Discourse.

In these ways, Gee's Discourse theory explains how veterans acquire Discourses of the academy, and why FYC is a central site for the beginning of that acquisition. Discourse theory lets us see the changes veterans encounter not as *transitional* but as *accretional*: veterans are not *replacing* a Discourse but *adding* one—not moving *from* a military Discourse to the Discourses of the academy, but rather mushfaking new academic Discourses by modulating their existing military Discourse. In ways that are centrally important to student learning in FYC, then, "transition" is simply an inaccurate metaphor for what veterans actually experience. There's a transition of *place*, but only *addition* of Discourse—re-*placement* but not *replacement*. Understanding this difference, and understanding the resulting inadequacy of the transition metaphor in addressing veteran learning, are crucial for investigating that learning, particularly when it concerns human interaction and discourse to begin with.

ACADEMIC DISCOURSES OF INQUIRY AS EMBODIED IN COMPOSITION COURSES

If we wish to study veteran learning in FYC as related to Discourse acquisition, we need to consider what Discourse is meant to be acquired—and what learning environments compositionists have developed to foster that acquisition. Among the best summaries of what cutting-edge FYC does is the CWPA's "Effective Teaching Practices in General Studies Writing Classes" (Rhodes, Downs, and Bowden 2011), which includes these statements:

- Pedagogically effective student writing arises out of inquiry into questions that students can find to be compelling.
- Effective instruction approaches writing as a whole and varied activity, by its nature including feedback from peers and experts, that aims to create authentically communicative results.
- Effective writing instruction encourages students to reflect on their writings.

- Effective writing instruction uses writing as a means of exploration, critical thinking and disciplinary learning.

CWPA intends this document to gather settled knowledge on writing pedagogy: stable, widely accepted practices characteristic of what well-trained teachers would implement, ideas to which well-trained college writing instructors would rarely have serious philosophical objections. To understand how different veterans' expectations of writing instruction are from these principles, we need to consider the nature of writing as an inquiry-based and interactional activity that leads experts to advocate the above practices.

We take it as axiomatic that writing is a *rhetorical* activity: it is always *situated* in time and space; always *motivated* by some authorial goal; *contingent* on its situation and motivation; materially *embodied* in some combination of modality and genre; fundamentally *interactional*, depending on a collaboration of writers and readers; and fundamentally *epistemic*, generating new knowledge rather than simply transmitting existing knowledge. Further, we understand writing as activity based: texts are tools that help groups of people accomplish a specific activity (Russell 2010), and thus writing cannot be understood or taught outside the context of any given activity because the nature of the activity helps shape the writing both directly and by shaping the rhetorical situation that shapes the writing (Geisler et al. 2001).

The first point made in the "Effective Teaching Practices" document is on inquiry because the activity or Discourse that all college education participates in, and is situated by, *is* inquiry. For this chapter, we'll describe the Discourse of inquiry in much the same way Doug has elsewhere: "Ways of behaving, habits of mind, values and beliefs, epistemologies, and dispositions that favor questioning, pursuit of new knowledge and understanding, desire to analyze and synthesize, curiosity, and 'negative capability' (Keats's term for deliberate tolerance of long-term cognitive dissonance stemming from not having one's mind made up)" (Downs 2005, 42). Such investigation via questioning requires several characteristics. First, scholarly inquiry requires a skeptical stance toward hierarchy, order, authority, and power. It tends to resist hierarchy by demanding autonomy and self-direction, which is one reason that, more than most other bureaucracies, universities favor decentralization and individual agency. Second, inquiry demands a tolerance for change, instability, and dynamic emergence—a lack of fixity and a permanent unsettledness of knowledge. Third, it demands doubt about and challenge of dogma, established doctrine, and procedure. The very purpose of inquiry is to *ask again*, to reexamine knowledge,

assumptions, received wisdom, and common sense. To advance knowledge, we question and challenge it. And inquiry, fourth, requires subjective management of complexity and multiplicity—because big problems (flying to the moon, reducing poverty, understanding the gut biome) do not resolve to one simple answer but rather demand interweaving multiple systems, explanations, and solutions driven by the situated perspectives of those inventing them. Lastly, then, inquiry is voiced and unscripted: conducted in the voices of individual participants, the result of willed expression.

Now, if we are to teach Discourses of inquiry, activity theory and situated learning theory (Artemeva 2008) suggest we do so in a setting of inquiry itself (Downs 2010). Especially given that writing is situated and contingent, unscripted and voiced, it's no surprise that writing instruction has evolved to accommodate these characteristics. It uses what Jay Lemke calls an "interactive learning paradigm" as opposed to a traditional "curricular" learning paradigm. In a curricular paradigm, Lemke (1998) states, "someone else will decide what you need to know, and will arrange for you to learn it all in a fixed order and on a fixed schedule." This paradigm dominates schooled learning. (And according to education critic Ken Robinson [2010], significantly stifles student creativity.) Education's future, Lemke (1998) argues, is the interactive paradigm, "access to information, rather than imposition of learning." It "assumes that people determine what they need to know based on their participation in activities where such needs arise, and in consultation with knowledgeable specialists; that they learn in the order that suits them, at a comfortable pace, and just in time."

The development of college writing instruction since the 1970s clearly reflects the interactive paradigm, which is well suited to the expressive, interactional, developmental nature of writing itself. The expressive and process movements shifted writing instruction from a curricular paradigm of mimetic study of literature (Fulkerson 2005) to a rhetorically based interactional paradigm, turning classes into sites for reading students' own writing, reflection, and engagement with social issues from students' perspectives. College writing instruction now positions students as fully voiced *contributors* to conversations rather than as silent bodies to be acted upon by others' texts. One example is writing-about-writing (WAW) pedagogy, which makes students' contributive inquiry on writing the subject of FYC (Downs and Wardle 2007). It was in a WAW-based course that Doug and Angie's dialogue began, and it was the dual calls to inquire and to contribute that discomfited and then engaged Angie as a veteran.

This, then, is a common form of writing instruction that veterans will encounter. It

- shifts initiative from the instructor to the students;
- values questions more than answers;
- expects writing to create knowledge rather than simply transmit it;
- seeks contributions from students in their own voices;
- works via genuine interaction among students and teacher rather than in a one-way transmission of instructions from teacher to students;
- demonstrates the rhetorical nature of writing—its nonuniform, non-formulaic, unscripted aspects; and
- expects students to develop as writers in a self-directed manner varying from student to student.

This is the scene of our study: a rhetorical, interactional world encountered by students who, as our interviews show, instead expected a uniform, curricular world.

MILITARY ENCULTURATION ENCOUNTERING COMPOSITION CLASSROOMS

We want to know how veterans encounter FYC in all its nondirective, inquiry-driven, interactional glory. How do veterans map the course onto their military backgrounds, how do they mediate military and inquiry Discourses, and how do they use military Discourse to muffle inquiry? Addressing these requires describing key elements of military Discourse—which we call *scripts*—that shape veterans' expectations of college. We then consider how inquiry-driven FYC compares to these scripts in the areas of instructor leadership, faculty-student interaction, and student contributions. This comparison demonstrates how radical veterans' learning is as they excel in college writing courses.

Our data come from interviews with five veterans (including Angie) from a range of public institutions, selected via convenience sample. Most have attended several schools, including community colleges and four-year institutions (three were actually attending MSU when they were interviewed). One is now a graduate student. All are in their twenties and thirties, and only one (currently in the reserves) plans to return to active duty. Two are male, three female; four are navy veterans, one air force. Angie conducted IRB-approved interviews of about an hour using a set primary-question list and free-form follow-up questions. Angie and Doug transcribed interview recordings together, establishing coding categories. We then coded transcripts separately and found our primary codes were reliable for analysis. We also frequently corroborated our

interpretations with three older veterans from other branches (including the army and the marines).

MILITARY DISCOURSE AS SCRIPTS

Unlike Discourses of inquiry that build knowledge via collaborative argument, military Discourse makes many minds think as one to accomplish an ordered mission. The military intakes tens of thousands of recruits of varying backgrounds and mindsets and quickly trains them to respond uniformly and automatically in intense life-or-death situations. While reading researchers find that "little meaning is literally on a page and that much meaning must be contributed by the reader" (Geisler et al. 2001, 272), the military strives for the opposite: texts must be read exactly and literally by all so that all take the same meaning; nonuniform interpretation can be fatal. What is the nature of the training that conditions individuals to uniform reading and thinking, allowing an uncommonly symmetrical response in the face of life-threatening chaos? We call it *scripting*: universal procedures delineated by nearly nonmisunderstandable texts in a rigidly hierarchical culture of unwavering deference to those texts.

Scripts include any written and trained procedure covering servicemember activities, behavior, and mission. In military Discourse, *everything* is scripted: how beds are made, pots are cleaned, missiles are loaded on airplanes; what an off-duty enlisted soldier does when meeting an off-duty officer in an off-base supermarket. Scripts include not only the how-to instructions for job training but rules of conduct governing every thinkable human behavior and interaction. From the time a recruit steps onto the bus for boot camp until the moment they're discharged or retire, every moment of their life complies with scripts developed to depersonalize and make uniform their thoughts and actions.

Take human interaction. The Naval Education and Training Professional Development and Technology Center offers a *Basic Military Requirements* course, chapter 9 of which covers "Customs and Courtesies":

A custom is a way of acting—a way that has continued consistently over such a long period that it has become like law. A courtesy is a form of polite behavior and excellence of manners. You will find that Navy life creates many situations, not found in civilian life, that require special behavior on your part. Customs and courtesies help make life orderly and are a way of showing respect. (Naval Education and Training Professional Development and Technology Center 2002, 9–10).

"Courtesies" include saluting (ten pages of the twenty-page chapter: how to, when to, when not to), ceremonies (including colors and boarding and leaving vessels), and military etiquette (behavior in contexts such as eating and passing in halls, and "addressing and introducing Naval personnel"). The manual teaches, for example, the script for responding to an order from a superior: "The only proper response to an oral order is 'Aye, aye, sir/ma'am.' This reply means more than yes. It indicates 'I understand and will obey.' Such responses to an order as 'O.K., sir' or 'All right, sir' are taboo. 'Very well' is proper when spoken by a senior in acknowledgment of a report made by a junior, but a junior never says 'Very well' to a senior" (Naval Education and Training Professional Development and Technology Center 2002, 9–17).

Soldiers have a written rule, then—a detailed, specific, set-by-step instruction—for every action, scripts that invite neither critical thinking nor initiative in rewriting. There are serious penalties for not following scripts—in the case of high-risk jobs like ejection seat technician, the results of thinking for oneself by detouring from a written instruction can be the death of an aircrew member and the jailing of the seat tech. Even in cases where less weighty scripts (e.g., when to salute) are not followed, a script-consciousness still calls attention to the unfollowed script. The only space military culture provides for critical thinking is when it falls within the confines of a script. Nor may scripts themselves be questioned except in circumstances (such as policy reviews) that include scripts for how a script is questioned.

With this description, we don't mean to insinuate that soldiers are mindless robots—military Discourse demands uniformity *in spite of* their free-thinking autonomy. The proof of this—and the proof of the rule of uniformity—is in times of need when lives and battles are on the line and individuals abandon scripts and disregard orders, sometimes receiving honors for doing so (e.g., the recent case of Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Dakota Meyer). Because of the severe consequences of disobeying orders, such moments tend to come in the heat of battle with nothing left to lose and the greater mission (or conscience) demanding autonomous action. (And if the disobedience doesn't work, the alternative to a medal is a court martial.)

In part because of the rigor of training required to ensure adherence to scripts, and given the necessity of uniformity to the military's mission and purpose, excellence is determined by who best embodies scripts. Servicemembers understand that one way to be excellent is to follow scripts for appearance, obedience, timeliness, knowing-without-learning, and script following.

SCRIPTS VERSUS PEDAGOGY

Given the deeply enculturated military tendency to script, we might expect veterans to try to script college. And it was in fact the appearance of expectations about classroom excellence in our interviews that first showed us the role scripts seem to be playing for veterans. We saw scripts in the main areas of expectations for instructor leadership, for student interaction with instructors, and for student contributions. However, our research demonstrates not simply the persistence of scripting; it also suggests that the scripts veterans try to deploy often work directly against the pedagogy described earlier. Where instructors seek self-directed learning, veterans judge excellence by strong instructor leadership. Where instructors are creating an inquiry-driven environment in which students contribute questions, input, and knowledge, veterans bring scripts that deny their right or ability to question or to go beyond following instructions. Where instructors seek unranked interaction toward inquiry, veterans have scripts that render talking with superiors and taking initiative taboo. In what follows, we examine these areas in detail, showing what our interviewees' scripts looked like and how they conflicted with the classroom experiences instructors are often trying to create.

LEADERSHIP SCRIPTS VERSUS SELF-DIRECTED CLASSROOMS

The military's rigid hierarchical structure puts a premium on outstanding leadership. Since servicemembers must obey orders unquestioningly, leader ethos is often a sign of whether a mission will be survivable. In a scripting culture, measures of leader ethos and quality are clear and fixed. Excellence for all servicemembers is determined in part by timeliness, appearance, and comportment—and for leaders, by decisiveness and judgment. Leaders lead by example, so whatever scripts servicemembers must follow, leaders are expected to perform to even higher standards.

Our interviews routinely showed that veterans do not cast these scripts aside. For example, every veteran we interviewed reported following the military script of showing up to a scheduled event (class) fifteen minutes early—to find no one else there. Each thought something was wrong; one even asked at an office if class had been cancelled. Another, even as she begins grad school, still shows up to class fifteen minutes early because, as she said, "that is the way to be excellent." These habits remain despite the fact that no one else is following such scripts.

Our veterans also reported being attentive to neatness and precision in dress and appearance. They see *values* in appearance—evidence of

the military scripts in which excellence is evidenced by sharp creases and spit-shined boots. One veteran recounted, "At first, I was very judgmental. Because, when [an instructor] did walk in, he was wearing sandals and a T-shirt, and I think it was . . . a pair of jeans. I don't remember, but I just remember thinking, 'Wow.'" Three veterans told of being distracted for nearly entire class periods by wrinkled shirts, skewed gylines (shirt buttons should form a precise vertical line with a pants button), and sloppily rolled shirtsleeves. Said one veteran as she became aware of her own preoccupation with the instructor's gig-line being off, "I was just appalled that I wanted out of that rule-driven military environment so much, but that it was so much inside my head that I was still using it to judge other people." As veterans learn this new Discourse, they come to realize that the academy rarely locates excellence in such appearances. Instructors vary in dress, comportment, and timeliness, but few polish their shoes. Since their work is intellectual, physical appearances are often not a reliable indicator of its quality. Many instructors consider time spent fetishizing neatness to be wasted, whereas in military culture neatness *is* the work demanded by many scripts.

Veterans seem to start out unaware of this shift in values, still measuring ethos by military scripts. One veteran confessed, "I didn't know I was that conditioned." Thus, in the opening hours of class, when instructors and students are building rapport, an instructor may already be failing important tests of leadership in a veteran's mind. Angie herself had such an experience with Doug: when he hurried into class three minutes late, holding a haphazard armload of supplies, her heart sank: he didn't care about his students, or he would've taken the time to be there early and set up. Students were obviously a blip in his day. That assessment snowballed as she eyed his casual dress and his relaxed demeanor—sitting against the front of a table to talk, whereas in the military relaxing and slouching are signs of disrespect. An instructor who respected his students and was serious about teaching them would stand up tall and straight. Doug also failed to show knowledge, authority, and decisiveness by asking students what they wanted to learn and often deflected questions by evasively asking questions back. The preponderance of our data was similar: in the beginning of class, instructors may already be developing ethos problems with veterans.

And it will only go downhill because writing instructors are often not trying to be strong leaders to begin with. Per the pedagogy described earlier, instructors negotiate control and authority with students so students are able to set their own learning agendas, work at their own paces, and pose and follow their own questions. A writing class in which

students learned only to follow strict instructions would be an abject failure. The one sense in which instructors might want to lead by example is in being active, vocal writers and readers. But even this "leading" looks, through transparency, like vulnerability. Students see an instructor acknowledging when writing is difficult, "shitty first drafts," rejections by editors, and frustrations when words won't come. They see a reader who makes mistakes and misinterprets, as readers will. The instructor is demonstrating the rhetorical, contingent, unsettled nature of textuality and inquiry, and that will *never* look like the strong, decisive leadership a veteran may be seeking.

CONTRIBUTIVE INQUIRY VERSUS FOLLOWING ORDERS

Military enculturation makes servicemembers mission oriented, and missions are accomplished through the generation and implementation of orders, which limit initiative taking. When servicemembers arrive at a site full of unknowns, they find the person in charge and figure out rank structure—where they fit, to whom they report, what's expected of them, and who reports to them. Risks, ground rules, and perimeter are established, and work is carried on within them. Showing initiative by disorderly scurrying around on one's own is not acceptable. As one veteran said in comparing veterans' attitudes to other students', "We're a little more used to that hierarchy—that this is the person in front of us, so respect them and do what they say." Our interviews suggest that when soldiers become students, their need for clearly defined missions, areas of responsibility, and orders linking the two does not abate. A vet in FYC is immediately figuring out her area of responsibility so that she knows *how* to take initiative. Veterans are fine readers of rhetorical situations, and from the opening moments of class, they are inspecting cues amidst syllabi and instructor demeanor, language, and responses to see where they fit and what is expected and allowed.

Without exception, our veterans first assumed the mission of FYC was skills instruction, a one-way transmission of knowledge from instructor to students via extensive skills practice: "We're so used to 'Tell me what I need to do and I'll do it,' and then the instructor's like 'No, here's your assignment, figure it out,' it's like what the hell?" Veterans don't expect to have to give input because students who *could* would already have the skills the course should teach. Furthermore, completing this mission requires clear instructions on what students are expected to produce with stepwise procedures explaining how. Repeatedly, veterans reported a desire for, satisfaction with, or frustration at the lack of

such instructions. For example, "It made the writing harder . . . we're used to having [steps] A, B, C, D. That ability to be free in your writing and not be constricted to a set standard . . . that freedom just to write on a topic . . . ooh, I can write whatever I want? . . . that was frustrating . . . breaking my brain out of that mold . . . I don't have to wait for somebody to dictate to me what to write or what to think . . . that was the hard part." When freshmen just out of high school complain about a lack of directions, it usually means they want to be told what to do so they don't have to come up with it themselves. A veteran's similar complaint—"the instructor isn't clear about what she wants!"—has a different source: without a mission and orders, a servicemember is not *allowed* to move.

So, for best-practices writing instruction, an impasse forms. For the instructor, the mission is *not* skills instruction as writing is too rhetorical to reduce to skills. Rather, the mission is to help students experience writing rhetorically: organic, emerging from particular contexts, shaped by readers' needs and uses for the text. Detailed instructions and procedures aren't how writing works: how could an instructor predict what a student will want to say, and how could there be a procedure for writing independent of the writer's own process, motivation, and material? Furthermore, the mission is *teaching inquiry*, inculcating students into a *way of being* (Discourse) that questions via writing. Students must direct their own learning goals and questioning; the instructor's role is to help them expose and consider unexamined assumptions.

In this light, an expectation of clear orders and directions is a problem. An instructor's desire might be "I order you not to follow orders"; when rhetoric's answer to writing questions is "it depends," saying anything else is simply untruthful. But when a vet seeks decisive leadership and directions in order to accomplish the mission of skills acquisition, that response is, in military vernacular, "a clear sign not to proceed." For veterans who have experienced the frustration of vague military leadership, it's imperative to know precisely what is expected before moving on. So when Doug asked students what they wanted to learn, Angie wrote that she wanted to get better at right ways of writing. Doug's feedback read, "What if there isn't just one right way, and why would we want there to be?" Angie perceived this response as stonewalling, refusing to be pinned down to concrete answers, or even worse, failing to acknowledge the possibility of clear answers. She also felt slightly rebuffed: she had asked what she thought was the right question, and in return had basically been asked, "Why would you want that?"

Even as veterans better understand the FYC mission and thus the difficulties with issuing specific directions, the invitation for input,

contribution, and true inquiry can be hard to believe. For some of our veterans, such an expectation was never part of their service, so they tended to believe the call for student opinion was itself a script—"that's just what the instructor is *supposed* to say, they don't really mean it." Or, "I was just thinking it was kinda like his initial spiel that he gives every one of his classes [sarcastic tone]: 'Well, what are *you* expecting to learn? 'Cause we're gonna be learning *this*.'" Such skepticism can be understood through recourse to "cog-in-a-machine" clichés. In such clichés, the military is portrayed as a machine, servicemembers are cogs, and everyone knows what cog they are. In contrast, inquiry-driven FYC is no machine, but it takes veterans some time to realize this and to recalculate their place in this space—to learn that questions truly are invited in college. Said one, "In class, the instructors actually value your feedback . . . a question that is not directly related to whatever the instructor is talking about, you can get away with asking it in college . . . in the navy they're like, 'that's off the subject . . . we're not talking about that.'" A further incompatibility between inquiry-driven FYC and veteran expectations for scripting is that in the military, you're not so much supposed to *learn* things as you're supposed to already *know* them: "You don't ask questions. You know, you're supposed to know it," one vet said. Admitting lack of knowledge marks failure. Another vet said directly what most others implied: "It's hard for me to admit I don't know something," and the preferred route to covering a knowledge gap is to find out on one's own. This stance toward not-knowing opposes that of inquiry-driven FYC, which understands knowledge as constructed *through* writing, not known beforehand. Writing classes force students to not-know and collaborate in search of answers. In FYC, veterans are not measured by what they know, but by what they're learning—not-knowing isn't a sign of brokenness but rather the point of showing up.

The veterans pointed out one saving grace to such disjuncts of expectations: feedback. Positive, constructive, approving feedback—which our interviewees say is often lacking in military culture—made adopting this new Discourse possible. In the absence of clear directions, veterans use peer and instructor feedback to clarify mission and procedure. In the absence of concrete, decisive answers to questions, feedback gives students confidence that if one answer to a question doesn't work, they will not be shot down but guided in another attempt. Feedback helps confirm that veterans didn't hear wrong when their instructor asked for their opinion. Crucially, though, feedback in these cases wasn't one-time, teacher-to-student communication but rather a series of loops, an *extended conversation among equals*. Extended feedback became so central

to veterans' success in inquiry-based FYC that it is the key feature of the third major script conflict between military culture and writing courses: the nature and role of interaction between teachers and students.

INTERACTION VERSUS HIERARCHY

Effective writing instruction requires interaction among writers and readers: instructors create interaction among students and the instructor that makes writers readers and readers writers and students and teachers both learners. The notion is that writing instruction is a *collaboration* between students and teacher, all of them readers and writers *allatonce*. What is immediately difficult for veterans in this approach is scripts that establish hierarchies and ranks, strictly regulate interaction and "familiarity" across ranks, and quell the initiative talking and questioning that faculty-student interaction thrives on. The veterans we interviewed, therefore, reported a significant period of adjustment in learning what kinds of interaction with their writing instructors were permissible and desirable—as well as initial discomfort with the kinds of interaction that accompany best-practice writing courses.

One source of that discomfort is scripts that regulate interaction by rank. As we've noted, the missions the military is tasked with demand uniformity, iron will, and absolute adherence to incredibly difficult orders. The military must therefore take the notion of "nothing personal, just business" to extremes—it must create a social structure in which a ranking officer can order a soldier in their command to sacrifice lives. Proscriptions against overfamiliarity with higher-ranking officers, and scripts establishing precise and limited channels of communication and authorized verbal expression, are the only workable solution to helping thousands of people act uniformly and appropriately when lives are threatened.

The shift in stakes when soldiers become students—from lives to letter grades—significantly impacts veterans. Erin Hadlock (2011, 5), an army major and graduate student, reports one interview with a veteran: "He said that the hardest thing to get over was constantly asking himself, 'Why does it matter? If no one is going to die, why do I care? How can it be important?'" Yet even when lives are no longer at stake, the scripts don't fade. When instructors invite open discussion that questions and exposes the instructor to criticism, veterans report that their first response is to reject the invitation. Veterans treat instructors as superiors requiring deference, especially in public conversation. Divergence from these scripts—offering ideas in opposition to or questioning

the leader—is disrespectful and unwelcome. Divergence from these scripts—offering ideas in opposition to or questioning the leader—is disrespectful and unwelcome. Thus, by these scripts veterans are effectively frozen, prevented from interacting with their instructors.

Part of this difficulty is that veterans don't realize how different the organizational structures of universities and the military actually are. While a "chain of command" can be extracted from a university organizational chart, shared governance, tenure, and functional organization can quickly muddy who gives and takes orders—not that the academy is terribly comfortable with orders to begin with. Intellectual work rewards not direction followers but whoever is thought to have the brightest solution to a given problem. Often the university itself can't readily identify which office should work on a given problem, or which of several authorities to take a problem to. Does academic misconduct go to the department head or the dean of students? The answer is often "it depends." *Not* a military hierarchical structure. But veterans are enculturated to a script of rank identification as a condition of interaction. Even the entrance of someone into a military classroom requires that their rank be identified and an appropriate response rendered. If the commanding officer makes an impromptu visit, who ever sees her first must call out "officer on deck!" at which the entire class stands rigidly at attention until she passes through, or puts them "at ease" (standing rigidly in a different position), or sets them back to their business with an "as you were." With this background, veterans can be troubled and disconcerted by a lack of organizational knowledge and no way to gain it.

We find, then, great initial reserve among veterans in interaction with instructors, despite the fact that this interaction would help veterans build fluency in their new Discourse. Despite being excellent students, not one veteran we interviewed made the first move in establishing contact with an instructor. In four cases, instructor feedback and mentoring eventually broke the ice, and in one case, a veteran's consultation with a retired servicemember helped her understand that, and why, college was asking her to think for herself—and then it became okay for her to talk to the instructor.

Another kind of interaction new to our veterans was praise. One vet recounted saving lives in Afghanistan, receiving no official thanks, and being denied treatment for a resulting disability until he could be discharged: "That's one reason I got out . . . and then to come here and get compliments from the professor . . . the world isn't really [so] crappy." Another vet reported that in his military instruction, praise

was rarely heard. "If . . . a chief, or one of my instructors from A-school and C-school . . . were the ones grading . . . they would just say, 'You did this wrong and this wrong, this wrong, this wrong. Next time work on this.' They would never say, 'You did this well, but not this' . . . you just did this bad." When FYC seeks formerly proscribed contributions from veterans, then, it is formerly proscribed interaction with and feedback from the instructor that makes it safe to take that proscribed initiative, assert to the "superior" instructor what's important, and ask "stupid" questions. One vet told a story about an instructor's positive feedback: they "told me where I could improve, and when I first read . . . the comments it was like, 'You nailed this one.' And I was like, 'Aw, it's about time, yeah!' It's great, it just boosts you more." Even when the feedback is not completely approving, it helps make the overall request for contribution believable. The frankness of pointing out what *isn't* working is as important as the approval because it lets veterans see that in Discourses of inquiry, *thinking* and contributing are rewarded even when the resulting ideas don't work.

For all the difficulties veterans report in warming to interaction and contribution, our final assurance is that once veterans understand what they're being asked and allowed to do, *they love it*. It's not as if service-members on active duty are opinionless, don't think for themselves, don't see better ways of solving problems than their superiors do—that they don't think critically. They do: each veteran regaled us with stories of bad leadership, problems they wished they could have fixed, and situations for which their politest description was "crappy." All but one expressed true pleasure in their college writing courses once it became clear that it really was okay to *say what they thought*. What veterans learned was parameters: new, scary, initially undefined but tempting principles about mission, purpose, interaction, and what counts in academic environments as excellent participation, thinking, arguing, writing, and reading. Through spiraling loops of gradually freeing interaction—including copious feedback and modeling by instructors and increasingly fearless questioning and feedback from students—veterans came to understand what their writing instructors were looking for: the veterans' own ideas, concerns, and expression.

EXCHANGING THE SCRIPT FOR INTERACTION:

HOW TO MOVE FORWARD

It takes a huge leap of faith for *any* student to believe that their contributions matter and have value, but even more so for veterans, who have

also been conditioned to forget that their personhood itself matters. Our final turn here is to what veterans said builds such trust for them.

Given the disjunct between what FYC attempts to teach and the scripts veterans tend to bring, why do we not see more failure in veteran learning? How did veterans who began FYC in frustration—in Angie's case, so severe she considered dropping—end up giving glowing reviews, saying the world is a better place, changing their majors and their lives? The veterans report initial frustration followed by a turning point one veteran described as "getting to know the instructor," "figuring out what he was about." What facilitated this "knowing," and why did it shape learning outcomes so dramatically? The common thread woven through our veterans' stories is *feedback*.

Although we initially understood feedback in the traditional one-way sense of teachers and other students helping a writer see how readers experience their writing, this study suggests that feedback as *an extended conversation among equals* serves another purpose: conveying instructor ethos. Despite classroom moments that, against military scripts, might erode veterans' confidence in their instructors, written and oral feedback brings second chances for all parties as it embodies qualities veterans deem trustworthy and supports learning without scripted thinking-interacting-being. We believe that scripts and spontaneous human interaction are, in this context, mostly mutually exclusive: script consciousness does not allow the interaction that thrives in the FYC learning environment. It takes a vulnerable daring beyond what scripting is capable of to interact spontaneously. For a veteran, maybe more so than for others, spontaneous interaction requires trust built over time as instructors, day after day, show consistency. But beyond consistency, veterans seem to build trust by feeling and responding positively to innate needs met by the feedback experience: being listened to, being asked for input, having time invested in them, and being offered transparency. In short, feedback demonstrates to veterans how their instructors value them, which helps build the trust that transforms interaction to learning.

We close, then, by discussing these needs in greater detail, underlining some of the practical ways these ways of feeling valued look from a veteran perspective.

Being listened to

Veterans noted when they felt heard in their writing courses. While the veterans in our study spent between four and twelve years being listened to enough to carry out missions, their writing courses introduced

a whole other kind of being heard. It's an interactive listening: instructors seek the intent behind their students' words. Veterans feel heard when their ideas seem to genuinely interest instructors. Their journey toward contributive interaction turned on phrases like, "That's interesting; could you say more about that?" Such listening bestows value veterans rarely encounter from military leaders, and it is, they say, a big deal. "The moment you realize that it's not an act—that the professor is actually curious about your thoughts and questions," one vet said, "that's the moment where everything changes."

Being asked for input.

Instructors should seek input that requires students to draw out their own opinions, values and thoughts—not necessarily about war or anything veteran related but about writing, the assignment, *how they see anything*, especially context. Veterans know they have a different view on life—they just don't expect to find it valued.

Having time invested in them.

Initially, many veterans feel asking questions wastes the instructor's time: "I just got in a habit of doing a lot of my own research because that's pretty much how they train us . . . I'll take the initiative and look it up on my own rather than waste [their] time with one of my questions." When an instructor spends time on veterans, it builds their sense of self-worth and belonging in the university. Veterans know how to read actions rather than words; mere assurances that "students are my priority" mean nothing next to actions. Investing time brings action to promises.

Being offered radical transparency.

The literature focusing on horrors veterans have seen is not wrong; sitting by the sheltered eighteen-year-old student may be one who held a dying child on a street turned battlefield, was unable to stop rapes due to mission-first requirements, or had best friends incinerated at their sides. They inhabit a place where reality is hard and sugar coating is see-through and unappealing. Inquiry-driven instructor and war-tempered student often share a value for seeing and saying things as they are. An instructor's radical transparency—self-revelation and straightforwardness—builds trust like nothing else, especially in the nature of the work being embarked on. Soldiers know that a prebattle brief presented in

rosy terms is BS, and veterans still think so. For them, writing classes are battlefields and instructors are laying the battle plan. The reality that writing is hard, even for instructors, not only earns them credibility, it imbues value to veterans' struggles, shows by example that learning is acceptable and knowledge making is a process of struggle, and makes the instructor part of the team.

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3

NOT JUST "YES SIR, NO SIR" How Genre and Agency Interact in Student-Veteran Writing

Erin Hadlock and Sue Doe

Few things leave as powerful an impression as hundreds of soldiers, sailors, airmen, or marines in formation. Their thunderous "hooahs" create a flash bomb of sound, and their crisp rifle movements are identical and precise. The very nature of a member of the uniformed services in formation—the forward stare and rigid back at attention, the replication of exact angles of boots and the cupping of hands, and the way he or she sloped height of the formation—completely reflects this organization of discipline, rigidity, and uniformity. Over our respective careers, we have had many opportunities to be filled with equal parts awe and gloom at the power of military formations. As a former instructor at the United States Military Academy (USMA), Sue saw recent high-school graduates shorn into cadets on Reception Day, the first day of a larger, indeed comprehensive, grooming that is transformative and profound. As an active-duty officer, current USMA instructor, and army aviator, Erin has taken part in these very formations for well over a decade. Both of us, however, have also had the privilege of going deeper than the formations. We have come to know the soldiers—as well as sailors, airmen, and marines. They are far from the automatons they may first seem to be, and their training does not preclude them from acting responsibly and individually. These servicemembers may shout "Yes, Sir!" and "No, Ma'am!" until they are hoarse, but those are hardly the only phrases they know.

This essay addresses the idea that a deepened understanding of the range and limits of servicemembers' rhetorical abilities is important to our teaching of veterans as they transition onto college campuses. Moreover, we argue for increased research and analysis of student-veteran literacies rather than simplifications of them. Our own research with student-veterans on the campus of Colorado State University, a