

## Introduction to Course Activities

Exploring the impact of violence on learning has taught me that opportunities for bringing the whole self to learning are essential to support learning for people who have been through violence. Such opportunities also help all students learn well as they draw on different sorts of knowing, learning styles and multiple intelligences to strengthen learning. In this course I want to give you the opportunity to explore and develop knowledge about violence and learning in a variety of forms in addition to the more usual analytical reading, reflection and writing. In this way more complex and nuanced knowledge can be created and understood. The unfamiliarity of such activities in an academic context can lead us to doubt that they are “real” learning, but in this course all your experiences in all media form an essential part of the content of the course.

Each two week period there will be a range of possible activities for you to try. You are encouraged to try at least 2 or 3 from each Activity Sheet. You are also invited to post reflections, comments and examples of your work with these activities online.

Media will include:

- Programs/practices
- Fiction (short story, novel, poetry) and biography
- Movement
- Music
- Visual arts
- Critical material (non-fiction)

The holistic activities are not just for the fun of painting, or singing etc. but are to explore “knowing” about the week’s themes using different modes. It is important for you not only to try out different media – but also to reflect on the experience.

I encourage you to:

- notice what you choose/avoid;
- reflect on what led you to that choice;
- notice your reactions to what you try;
- question what might have led to these reactions;
- observe the experience with curiosity rather than judgment;
- consider whether/what new “knowledge” you gain about the week’s themes;
- think about how and why this media might support/ block learning;
- consider how and why/why not you might use it in your teaching/work.

*More background information about each of these tasks is included next. You might want to refer to this when you work on the specific activities each week.*

### **1. Programs/Practices: Observation/Reflection**

You could carry out some systematic observation of literacy practices or program procedures in your program/educational institution (or in another program in your area if that is practical) and then reflect on what you see. You may also choose to observe practices in another sort of

program/organization – e.g. a women's shelter, a counselling service - and reflect on learnings you might use in educational work.

There will be specific questions as a guide to draw your attention to particular themes each week.

## **2. Fiction (Short Story, Novel, Poetry, Drama) and Biography: Reading/Writing**

I will post a bibliography of fiction, biography, poetry and some movies to start you thinking about reading/viewing creative material and biography as a source for understanding more about violence. I hope these titles may get you thinking about other titles you have seen/read and what can be learned from them about the issues.

In each section I also make suggestions for specific pieces you might read, or watch and ask questions to prompt your reflection. I invite you to write creatively or autobiographically yourself as a way to explore what you know about the issues.

### ***A Note on Reading Fiction and Biography:***

Among the suggested readings for this course are a number of books and articles with difficult emotional content. Hearing or reading about violence is never easy, but I have suggested these titles because some people find it useful to hear about the experiences of others, either to help develop empathy for what others are going through, or to hear that they are not alone in their own experiences of violence. But I encourage you to be gentle with yourself. You do not HAVE to read the stuff which is most difficult - there are no awards given for enduring texts which are painful to us, and no benefits to reading something we have to shut down just to finish. Go at your own pace, remember that what is okay for some is very hard for others, and that you're reading to expand your own knowledge and to reflect and become more aware of the complexity of the issues.

## **3. Movement (Body Work): Watching/Doing**

Learning takes place in our bodies as well as our minds and I want to explore this during the course. This may simply feel unfamiliar or not "real" work, if so notice these feelings and reflect on them as you try out a physical exercise.

Doing academic work involves a lot of sitting and reading. In this course, I would like you to get up and move! As well as the activities included in each section, don't forget to take frequent breaks to stretch and breathe.

### ***A Note on Body Work:***

For some of us, learning feels safest when it's in our heads. If we have been physically hurt or shamed about our bodies, we may have developed elaborate strategies to ignore them. In that case, being asked to move, stretch, or notice how we feel can be very threatening.

Remember there is no wrong way to do these exercises. You can pick and choose which ones feel okay for you, and you can stop partway through if you want to. It's sometimes useful to try

things which are outside of our comfort zone--things that make us feel goofy or nervous--but only you can be the judge of how much is okay for you.

#### **4. Music: Listening/Creating**

We listen to, or create, music because it is a way to access different parts of our brains, it contains powerful messages, and it creates an emotional response. Course learning activities encourage you to explore music for learning and teaching. In each section you will find some activities you can try out. You could also think of other ideas to try.

Try listening to music:

- as a jumping-off point for activities, for example free-writing or collage. A sentence from the lyrics might provoke your thinking and make it easier to begin
- to provide “background noise” for an activity. If you prefer silence while working, you might want to listen first, then try out other activities, with the lyrics, or sounds in your memory, rather than playing.
- to prompt emotions, feed the spirit, relax or sharpen the mind.
- to prompt reflection

Try creating music (or sound). You could sing, play percussion, beat a drum, or play any other instrument. Then reflect on how it works to help you to:

- breathe and energize
- exercise your voice or other part of your body
- express, communicate or change a feeling
- create a mood
- express a thought
- lift your spirits, rekindle hope
- link body, mind, emotion and spirit together

#### ***A note on music:***

Many of us do not think of ourselves as musicians, if that includes you, don't let that stop you experimenting with creating different sorts of sounds! Many of us have been turned off various forms of music by high school lessons. Explore music in this course anyway and include thoughts and feelings you notice in your reflective writing or visual creations.

#### ***Finding music:***

Obviously, much of the music I suggest may not be in your music collection! Replace music for a specific activity, like dance music for a movement exercise, with anything you already own and like. Let your imagination flow and think of music you could listen to and the purposes it might serve.

Some recordings may be available through your local library. Or listen to selections (or find new material) on the internet:

- Go to Google: <http://www.google.ca>

- Type in the title and artist, or a phrase from the song. For example: Beatles + “Hey Jude” OR “take a sad song and make it better” (The quotation marks are important. They indicate that words you’ve typed are a phrase, and that the program should look for them all together in that order.)
- Google will then return results. In some cases, you may only find lyrics.
- To search for a sound recording, try: Beatles + "Hey Jude" + sound file

## **5. Visual Art: Observing/Creating**

Although I have provided reading lists on critical material, and fiction and biography, it is harder to identify a "looking" list of visual materials! But I do want to invite you to explore looking at art and graphics, as well as creating visuals yourself, as another way of exploring the issues of violence and learning and experimenting with different ways of knowing.

In each section I have included activities where I invite you to look at pictures, or to experiment with visual forms yourself and reflect on the process. You may want to use collage, water-colours, oil paints, finger paints, pastels, markers, or any other material you can lay your hands on. You could collect magazines or scraps of different kinds of paper and material, lace, ribbon etc. to give you a collection from which to create different visual images.

### ***A note on visual arts:***

Even if you don't think of yourself as artistic, try some of the visual exercises. Try to focus less on the product you are creating and more on the process and how your thoughts or feelings change as you work.

## **6. Critical (Non-Fiction): Reading/Writing**

I have a list of further readings for each section of the course, some are available on the internet – you may find others through the public library, or a university library. You may choose to search out your own follow up readings. If you need help finding materials on a particular theme, or finding any of these materials you are eager to read – please ask I will try to help.

### ***Questions to prompt reflection about your reading:***

- What views does the article or resource present or imply about violence and learning? How do they relate to your views? To other views expressed in the course so far?
- Was there a practice, perspective, or position articulated in the article that particularly engaged or resonated with you? Why?
- Was there a practice, perspective, or position articulated in the article that you found yourself resisting? Why were you resistant?
- Have your views shifted through reading this article? How?
- How might you apply an idea from this article to your practice?

You might want to use these questions to prompt your reflection or develop your own.

## **Creating a Journal**

You are strongly encouraged to create some form of journal to collect your reflections on carrying out these activities and participating in this course.

You might try different media and genres: writing, drawing, collage, poetry. As well, try out different papers (lined and unlined) and different colours of pen or font. Your journal entries could focus on any of the following, as well as other areas you want to pursue:

- The readings
- How the readings relate to your context / program
- Insights, puzzles, challenges, possibilities
- Questions
- Your responses to the learning activities you tried
- Themes you might want to explore further

Some people like to leave a wide margin on each page of their journal so they can come back, review their entries and make additions.

A few possibilities for recording in your journal are included below - but you may have other ideas you want to try too.

### ***Free writing***

Free writing is writing whatever comes to mind when you pick up the pen. Many people give themselves a specific amount of time to write regularly. If they can't think of anything to say they just write about how hard it is to know what to write, so that the pen keeps moving for the entire time they have allotted themselves. You might want to try anything from 10 - 30 minutes to try completely "free writing."

You could try reading through your writing immediately you finish and underlining the sentence which seems the most important or most telling. You could also circle the most significant word. Later on you can look back on your highlighted sentences and words and notice your new thoughts or feelings.

### ***Structured writing***

Some people prefer a more structured approach. Try writing down your answers to the "Reflection on readings" questions. Are there other questions you want to add to your list? Answering the same series of questions after every reading might be helpful. There are questions to prompt your reflection for observations and activities.

### ***Visual records***

You may want to try recording your reflection and experiences visually instead of, or as well as, using words. Examples of visual records include

- collage
- drawing

- mind mapping or clustering - this approach uses words but presents them visually on the page.

The extract from *The Creative Journal* by Lucia Capacchione may give you more ideas for a visual journal.