American Vocabulary – Investigating Words of Meaning

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Rationale

- As the new age of warfare is shaped by the world around us, it becomes far too easy for our world to become detached from the experiences of soldiers occurring overseas. This lesson seeks to help students create connections with "over there" through word association: terms they have heard and perhaps used over the course of their life but might be further explored through a combination of self-reflection and exposure to unique perspectives of those who have experienced twenty-first century combat first hand.

Objectives

- Following a short word association brainstorming session, students will be able to select a line of focus which will guide their exploration of Veteran Empathy Project resources.
- Following an explanation of veteran interviews and other web content, students will reflect upon their own understanding of American warfare by comparing their own understanding to Veterans Empathy Project testimonials.
- Following the development and execution of a class presentation, students will enhance their presentation skills by incorporating moving pictures as a mode for supporting their own ideas. (Optional Objective)

Suggested Procedures

Day One
Anticipatory Set

- The lesson might be opened using several different techniques, chosen by the instructor depending on student ability and learning styles:
    - The instructor should select a short (perhaps one to two minute) section of a clip from the Veterans Empathy Project In Their Own Words section and share a few words they believe connect with the War on Terror.   Following this demonstration, the instructor should ask students to use their own knowledge to develop their own list of words that elicit memories and emotion connected to the War on Terror.
    - Alternatively, the instructor might choose several images indicative of War on Terrorism, perhaps those already covered in class or in connection to the Web Resources Section of the Veterans Empathy Project. After taking time to show these images, the instructor should ask students to write a list of words they associate with these images. Following a short time, the instructor should ask students to choose one or two of the words they feel most strongly about and share their perspective with a classmate seating in close proximity.
- Following the completion of a list of associated terms, the instructor should suggest to students that this list be employed as a guide to direct their explanation of Veterans Empathy Project resources.

Development

- The instructor should use a computer connected to an LCD projector to display the Veterans Empathy Project website. After pointing out the homepage and discussing its general mission (perhaps using the About the Project section of the webpage), the instructor should navigate to the In their Own Words section, which is where students will spend the majority of their time. When the page is displayed, the instructor should point out the listing of tags on the left hand side of the page, suggesting that students look for words they personally identified within their own list. The instructor might also click on one of the interviews to demonstrate how the interview is played and to model how content below the video might be navigated using the video tabs.
- The instructor should ask students to spend time with the Veterans Empathy Project Website, identifying at least three interviews that relate to one or more of their words,, recording in their notes how the interview impacted their understanding of the chosen term, perhaps asking questions such as:
  - Is their understanding of the term different as a result of seeing the interview? Why or why not?
  - Has their view on the War on Terror changed as a result of seeing the interview? On the military in general?
  - Are there parts of the video that inspired a need to learn more? What questions did the interview invoke?
- The instructor should provide the great majority of the class period for students to explore the interviews aboard the website, focusing on one or more of the guiding questions above.

Closure

- The instructor should ask students, perhaps as a group if students worked collaboratively, to reflect upon one of the interviews they watched, sharing out the observations they recorded for that video. This section might be used as an informal evaluation instrument for the lesson.
- An optional free write might also be used to close class, perhaps asking students to reflect, in general, on how their viewpoint of the words they choose has changed as a result of interacting with the Empathy Project or how the project confirmed their original interpretation of their chosen words.

A second and third day might be added to the lesson if the instructor would like to formally evaluate the lesson via student presentations. In this way a second day might be used for students to create the presentation based on their notes and a third used for class presentations, either within small groups or as an entire class. The suggested resource for such presentations is Microsoft PowerPoint – asking students to use Veterans Empathy Project interviews as embedded evidence to support their conclusions. A short video is included on the resources homepage that provides an overview of how videos can be embedded into PowerPoint.

Possible Modes of Evaluation

- This lesson can be evaluated informally or formally at the teachers discretion:
  - Informal Evaluation – The instructor might gather a sense of what conclusions students arrived to following the ideas they share during the initial closure discussion.
  - Formal Evaluation – If the instructor decides that a class presentation dealing with conclusions students have gathered is appropriate, this assignment might be formally evaluated as a check for understanding and to provide feedback to students.

Differentiation

- While the lesson does differentiate naturally by providing students with choice of focus and content, lesson activities might be further differentiated for lower level and advanced level learners.
    - The anticipatory set might be modified for lower level students, perhaps giving these students several words from the Veteran Empathy Project tag list to reflect upon, as developing such a list may be difficult for some students. In connection to this modified list, the instructor might suggest specific interviews or even specific sections of interviews that would prove accessible for these students or might trigger interest in the topic of the War on Terror.
    - Advanced students might be asked to research images and other resources that could be used to introduce the lesson and give these resources to the teacher, thus broadening the possible lines of thought when completing the word association phase of the lesson. In addition, the instructor might point out other resources that might interest advanced students within the Web Resources Section of the Veterans Empathy Project.

Potential Connection to the Danielson Group's *Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument*

The *Veterans Empathy Project* hopes to connect with teachers across the country, to which many areas throughout the United States have embraced the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* initiative for effective instruction. This lesson connects to many of those facets instruction, several of which are noted below.

- Domain 1a – Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy
- Domain 1d – Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources
- Domain 2b – Establishing a Culture for Learning
- Domain 3b – Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques