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Transition and Transformation - From Military Combat to College Classroom: Strategies for Success

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Abstract

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MA, Pacific University, 2001

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Philosophy

General Teaching Psychology

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Abstract

Research shows that faculty, staff, and administrators at institutions of higher learning have a fundamental responsibility to create a safe and effective learning environment for returning military combat veterans. Studies of student veterans have shown that combat veterans have both unique strengths and barriers that must be taken into account if they are to complete an advanced degree. This study contributes to the literature on educational barriers faced by student veterans and their educators. Knowles' andragogy theory provided the theoretical framework for this transcendental-phenomenological research study. Ten randomly chosen student military veterans from Tacoma Community College in Tacoma, Washington, participated in guided 60-minute interviews to discuss pedagogical tools and administrative actions found to be helpful or hindering to students' academic success. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis, and participants' accounts of their experiences produced the textural and structural descriptions that led to identification of salient themes. The findings of this study revealed the Veterans' needs to feel respected and treated as competent adults. They needed community colleges to scaffold their cognitive, communal, and emotional needs; they also needed flexibility on attendance and assigned seating, faculty polices, and pedagogical offerings. Serious social problems can emerge if the educational needs of this at-risk student population are unaddressed. Social change will come as a result of scaffolding student veterans through a successful journey toward their desired goals. This process will enrich the lives of this population by opening the door to better jobs, higher pay, and a higher quality of life for both the student and his or her family.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my Sister, Lydia Lynn Lewellen who stood by my side and never once let me believe I could not make this happen. Her love and encouragement were my guiding light when I was unable to see my way through and thought surely, there was no end. She is my rock, my friend, and my confidant. She is my Sister and I love her so much.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Administrators, staff, and faculty of institutions of higher learning can expect to serve more than two million military combat veterans in the next decade (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). However, a deficiency in research about military combat veteran students in community colleges impedes development of appropriate pedagogical methods, and college faculty may lack an understanding of the classroom challenges of these students (Herrmann, Raybeck, & Wilson, 2008). In this study, I focused on veterans who have recently returned from combat and enrolled in college. The study was guided by my assumption—grounded in the findings of current literature--that combat veterans encounter unique barriers to education. According to Persky (2010), societal ills such as homelessness, alcoholism, suicide, and drug abuse positively correlate with military veterans having served in combat. Post-trauma embitterment disorder ([PTED]; "Bitterness and Resentment," 2008), and battlemind ("Army Behavioral," 2008) have recently been recognized as subclassifications of reactive and maladaptive disorders (Persky, 2010). Students faced with these issues may require specialized forms of pedagogy and support services in the academic environment. This study aimed to contribute to the literature on the barriers military combat veteran face in their education, and to provide a guide for faculty working to establish day-to-day pedagogical and support practices.

Background

Since the 1960s, educational policies and practices have resulted in more people from nontraditional academic backgrounds seeking access to higher education (Brock,

2010). Many of these students, particularly those seeking admission to open-enrollment institutions, face unique barriers to education and can benefit from targeted instruction and support services (Brock, 2010). Several studies (Brock, 2010; Hagedorn, 2010; Morreale, 2011) have demonstrated the challenges faced by community colleges in addressing the needs of the increasing numbers of enrollees whose barriers may include psychological casualties of combat; absence or just-emerging presence of an academic persona; history of abuse or neglect; lack of financial resources and/or general coping strategies; and need for more intentional pedagogies and student support services.

Hagedorn (2010), in particular, argues that community colleges, with their pool of students coming from historically marginalized populations, have found themselves regarded by 4-year academic institutions as an "alienated subclass," a classification Hagedorn insists community colleges must overcome if they are to successfully educate students who face these multiple and shifting barriers to education. Brock (2010) has demonstrated that targeting supports and resources in three specific areas has the potential to improve academic outcomes for these non-traditional community college students who may lack the social resources or academic records to move directly to universities. These areas include financial support, learner scaffolding services, and remedial learning. Brock (2010) asserts that while some institutions which have focused on these areas have seen increased student gains, these efforts need to be scaled up to accommodate the greater number of underprepared and nontraditional students entering college as a result of the evolution of higher education access policies since the 1960s.

While Brock (2010) reviewed these strategies for community college students in general, his assertions about the positive impacts of scaling up these interventions on

student outcomes logically apply to an at-risk veteran subpopulation. As such, a part of this study was devoted to examining these three specific interventions (remedial or otherwise intentional methodology; student support services; and financial aid) for their potential to improve success rates for student veterans returning from combat. Indeed, the need for community colleges to thoughtfully and deliberately scaffold the cognitive, communal, and emotional needs of veteran students has never been greater. Grossman (2009), for instance, has noted that developments like the updated GI bill, amendments to the ADA, and higher unemployment rates will lead to increased numbers of veterans returning to school. For many veterans, the open-enrollment system of community colleges is a good fit, yet many lack the necessary supports needed to succeed.

Home support is widely regarded as important to student success, and veterans may have varying degrees of support systems at home, where family members' resources and reserves may be taxed by caring for a loved one with TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) or PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) (Church, 2009). Colleges thus may find themselves needing to compensate for lower levels of home supports. Furthermore, the manifestations of traumatic brain injuries and mental health disorders impact learning. Church (2009) suggests that the most common forms of these manifestations-- unpredictable attendance, scheduled absences for medical appointments, injuries and medications that affect cognition and academic performance--will be familiar to professionals who are already experienced in working with students with disabilities. Just as certain pedagogies and services support the academic performance of general students with disabilities--scaffolding, opportunities for students to experience and build on smaller successes to boost both learning and positive self-concept--so too are these

pedagogies and supports more likely to lead to positive outcomes for combat veteran students than many traditional classroom practices (Church, 2009).

Indeed, Morreale (2011) found that for combat veterans in particular, academic motivation is tied to their academic self-conceptualization. Morreale (2011) further found that community colleges that focus on veterans' academic self-concepts and move away from a deficits-based lens may further develop motivation in veteran students by using pedagogies that emphasize and build on the strengths these students bring to the table. Emphasizing those strengths may involve a "which came first" predicament for colleges to navigate, and combat veteran students may need specific campus support services to achieve that first round of success. However, many veterans neither self-identify as disabled, nor take advantage of the services that are already offered to disabled students on campus (Church, 2009; Grossman, 2009). This complicates the efforts of instructors and student services staff to support the learning and performance of combat veterans, and suggests a need to embed combat-disability-friendly supports and pedagogies universally within curricula and general support services (Grossman, 2009). Similar strategies have been used in delivering mental health services to veterans who may be reluctant to admit the need for them. Rather than focus on psychiatry as a separate strand of care, veterans' health care institutions have begun framing psychological health screening and supports as part of the comprehensive health care package provided to all troops and veterans (Church, 2009).

Yet how can a similar approach be achieved in academic institutions? Instructors can only provide combat-disability-friendly pedagogies and strategies if they are aware of the need for them and know how to employ them. The same holds true for support

services personnel who may need to use specific strategies to deliver information and following-up with veteran students. The lack of literature on this subject leaves far too many college administrators and instructors guessing, to the potential detriment of the veteran students.

Grossman (2009) warns of a "perfect storm" of veterans returning to higher education campuses unprepared to meet their needs, and calls for interdisciplinary and interagency cooperation to come up with innovative ways to support veteran students within the classroom and the offices of support services personnel. Some colleges may need to rethink some of their policies, such as bans on using calculators in math classes or minimum course load requirements, to meet veterans' needs (Grossman, 2009). Teaching instructors to present their curricula in a way that meets the unique learning needs of disabled combat veterans will need to be a priority for faculty in-service training programs at colleges (Grossman, 2009). Lemos and Lumadue (2013) describe veterans' reported dissatisfaction with the gaps in support available to student veterans transitioning from the battlefield to a classroom setting. This dissatisfaction begins with the military's debriefing sessions, where veterans claim they do not receive enough information about their earned educational benefits. It continues when veterans arrive at college campuses and must navigate the maze of bureaucratic red tape amid the strained resources colleges have available to provide advising and other services (Lemos & Lumadue, 2013).

Colleges need not start from scratch in designing practices and supports to help veteran students. Queen and Lewis (2014) compiled information concerning available social support and general institutional policies geared toward aiding military personnel

in transitioning to the classroom. Their compilation included services that some colleges provide directly to veterans including educational scaffolding and mentoring; career development services; psychological health counseling; customized admittances and coordination activities; in-state tuition for veterans; courses designed specifically for veterans; and training for college staff and faculty who instruct as well as serve veterans (Queen & Lewis, 2014). In compiling this data, Queen and Lewis provide colleges with an array of possible institutional resources that are crucial to colleges' formulating their own veteran-friendly pedagogical methods and support services. Post-secondary institutions that do not have in place programs that emphasize veterans' strengths while scaffolding both instruction and support services to address the cognitive, social, and emotional casualties of combat will need to address these deficits if these veterans are to achieve their educational goals.

Problem Statement

While there is a deep history of literature in the field of education addressing the unique needs of students at risk, few articles have been published that address the narrow, but profound, strengths and pedagogical needs of military veterans who are coming to postsecondary education after combat in recent fields of military engagement (Iraq and Afghanistan). Military veterans share educational challenges with other students; however, those who have experienced combat have absolutely distinctive issues (Church, 2009). As with other nontraditional learner populations, student veterans are apt to be older, supporting families, and managing both an occupation and college. Unlike their nontraditional peers, student military veterans might have service-connected disabilities

that impact their ability to master course content and navigate the sometimes labyrinthine support service policies (Church, 2009).

For the thousands of veterans who are transitioning from combat to college, the consequences of attending institutions unprepared to accommodate their needs can translate to real barriers to veterans' achievements of their educational goals. Veterans suffering from sensory impairments may have difficulty in hearing lectures, discussions, or even advising sessions; they may not be able to see the board, read course materials, create written assignments, or even access the course website (Church 2009). Veterans suffering from TBI may have trouble sustaining attention and concentration, processing new information, and thinking at an expected pace. Many of these challenges are also faced by veterans with PTSD (Church 2009). Pedagogical strategies that work with other students with disabilities are likely to benefit veterans with disabilities as well, but only if colleges use them (Church, 2009). Furthermore, colleges that want to help combat-disabled veterans to meet their educational goals cannot wait for veterans to ask for help before beginning to provide the pedagogies and targeted outreach that can support veterans' unique needs. Many veterans who are returning from combat with disabilities may be unwilling to disclose this fact and therefore may not receive the pedagogies and supports they need to meet their educational goals unless these supports are embedded in the curricula and outreach efforts (Grossman, 2009). The consequences of not doing so can be great: For some veterans, educational goals are connected to career goals (Grossman, 2009), and failure to meet educational goals can mean failure to obtain the career of one's choice. Other veterans, however, may be too disabled to pursue a career; for them the "lifelong learner" status that college courses provide may be what gives their

post-combat life meaning and purpose (Grossman, 2009). Colleges that fail to support the learning needs of combat-disabled veterans may be inadvertently denying them much more than the colleges realize.

<div align="center">**Military Combat Veterans' Unique Pedagogical Needs**</div>

In addition to providing pedagogies and services that support learning for veteran students with brain injury and mental health disorders, colleges need to be aware of specific cultural characteristics of combat veterans that, when combined with the impacts of combat injury, could further impact academic performance. Military combat veterans may not value group work with nonmilitary classmates because theories of cultural mediation such as Vygotsky's suggest students' self-esteem, self-identification, and self-concept are different after trauma (Vygotsky, 1962). Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) concluded that observation of aggressive behaviors affected language acquisition; therefore, combat veterans' experiences with aggression may impede learning and limit their ability to interact with non-military students.

Military culture has its own vocabulary and a markedly different system of communication than the classroom community (Tannen, 1990). The directness of military orders are often in stark contrast to the indirectness of a teacher's instructions (Tannen, 1990). Knowles said college coursework has to be made real and relevant for maximum learning. Thus, soldiers may question the relevance of exercises such as grammar drills (Knowles, 1973). A thorough explanation of learning-outcomes and expectations of each assignment may reveal such relevance.

The traditional teaching atmosphere also presents difficulties for some veterans (Sinski, 2012). Mental health issues resulting from military combat service cause a lack

of focus and concentration. Therefore, lengthy lectures might be unproductive for their learning. Sinski (2012) has emphasized the need for pedagogical planning to avoid triggers. Such planning includes avoiding seat assignments, placing veteran students facing a doorway, and circumventing attention to combat details such as questions about a veteran's combat action. A pedagogical tool such as one-on-one, teacher-to-student tutoring addresses these concerns. PTSD and traumatic brain injury can cause sensory difficulties such as reduced vision and hearing (Church, 2009). Having the classroom completely dark might trigger fearful responses for these military students with traumatic experiences in combat (Perry, 2002).

An abundance of literature exists addressing research into psychological therapeutic practices currently being utilized by postsecondary educators to address unique needs of returning combat veterans. However, little published literature exists that proposes or documents actual classroom methodologies that lead to academic success in student military combat veterans (Morreale, 2011). As noted earlier, veterans may have service-connected disabilities that impact their ability to master course content and navigate support services protocol (Church, 2009). The same pedagogies and services that support the academic performance of non-veteran students with disabilities may also lead to positive outcomes for combat veteran students (Church, 2009), yet an exploration of pedagogical tools currently in use that have enabled combat veterans to successfully complete one year of college studies has not been done. According to Ellison et al. (2012), this population is underachieving in the college environment and the attrition rate in the first year of college exceeds that of non-veteran students. Data analysis from the

Million Records Project (Cate, 2014) shows a 48.3% dropout rate for student military veterans.

The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 altered the scholastic assistance for student veterans serving since September 11, 2001. This expansion led to an increase in college enrollment by military veterans seeking to equip themselves for a successful life outside the military (McBain et al., 2012). Criteria for maintaining access to these monies include appropriate academic progress, and failure to thrive in the classroom may cause a loss of funding. A reduction or loss of benefits for educational purposes may limit future employment opportunities. Without postsecondary education, the military veteran returning to the civilian workforce will be ill prepared to compete for high-paying, sustainable careers (Cate, 2014). Too often, student services efforts are focused on reacting to problems rather than proactively helping veterans develop strategies and habits for college success (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). A proactive approach is needed to guide student military veterans to effective strategies from the day that they enroll.

In light of the lack of research on classroom methodologies that foster academic success in student military veterans, it is essential that research sheds light on pedagogical tools and support services most effective at bolstering academic success and reducing college attrition among this student population. Furthermore, according to Knowles' (1984) assumptions of adult learners, motivation for returning to college will vary among student veterans. Inadequate classroom methodology may squelch what motivation does exist.

Purpose of the Study

This project addresses an area in higher education that has seen a steadily growing population since the implementation of the Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008 (Buckley & Cleary, 2010). The results of this study provide insight into the most useful pedagogical tools for helping student combat veterans complete the first year of college. Insights from this study may assist in educating instructors in appropriate pedagogical tools to ensure military combat students' success. Active duty veterans and those returning from duty comprise a growing segment of college classes (Buckley and Cleary, 2010). Veteran combat students are underperforming and dropping out at higher rates than their non-veteran peers (Ellison et al., 2012). Information is needed to understand what actions college instructors and service providers can take to ensure military combat veterans complete college courses successfully in a timely manner. Educator awareness of effective pedagogical resources increases the likelihood of the implementation of those resources (Hagedorn, 2010). Use of these resources will help ensure student veterans' college completion and establish a launching point for a positive, productive future.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to examine pedagogical resources available to all students and determine those resources most useful in ensuring the academic success of student military veterans. Drawing on previous research on pedagogical resources and student military veteran needs, I developed the following research questions:

1. What do military combat veteran students enrolled in community college identify as the most helpful practices of their classroom teachers and support staff?

2. What do military combat veteran students identify as practices that hindered their learning?

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative because the goal was to record students' descriptions of pedagogical tools and how each participant found them useful. In doing so, recommendations (from outcomes) emerged to share with fellow educators and the psychology staff at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Fort Lewis, Washington. Experiments employed in quantitative studies would not reveal the nuance sought in this study. Qualitative research remains vital to understanding what pedagogical tools help ensure college success in military combat veteran students, the primary focus of this dissertation. In this study, student combat veterans who had successfully completed one year of study were interviewed to determine which pedagogical tools helped ensure their collegiate success. These include classroom specific tools such as group work, field independent learning exercises, textbooks, role-play, handouts, and computer programs, among others. To prevent confusion in identification, the interview instrument contained descriptions of pedagogical tools. One of Knowles' assumptions of adult learners is that, as a person matures, he or she continually accumulates a knowledge base that becomes a resource for learning (Knowles, 1984). This knowledge base may differ between combat veteran and non-veteran students, creating differences in pedagogical needs. Qualitative phenomenological inquiry dictates that interviews assess the lived experience of participants. Interviews with successful student combat veterans revealed the most helpful pedagogical tools and the way in which they contributed to academic success for this population.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Knowles' (1984) assumptions of adult learners. Knowles' approach to adult learning provides insight into the unique requirements of the adult student. Knowles' documentation of these needs indicates a correlation among all adult learners. Student combat veterans, like civilian students, attend college for a variety of reasons. Examples include training for a new career, or training to further his or her military career. The student veterans' military experiences may create a need for unique pedagogical tools. This study did not address cognitive or behavioral issues in student combat veterans; instead, it addressed the pedagogical tools most useful to the student combat veteran.

Operational Definitions

In this dissertation, I use and reference the following operational definitions and noted exceptions to these definitions.

Student military combat veterans: A military veteran currently enrolled as an undergraduate student in higher education. This study targeted student military veteran undergraduates who served or are currently on active duty in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marine Corps.

Pedagogy: "From the term 'pais or paid' implying child, and 'agogus' implying leader of." Therefore, pedagogy means the leader or teacher of children (Knowles, 1973). The term pedagogy has come generally to refer to leading those of all ages who seek to learn (Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997).

Pedagogical tools: Classroom tools, practices, and resources through which teachers construct and carry out teaching practices. These include journal writing, role-

play, exercises, textbooks, curriculum materials, and peer feedback (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999)

Andragogy: Educational term applicable to adult education. "aner" or "an" meaning man and "agogus" meaning leader of. Therefore, andragogy means leader or teacher of adults (Knowles, 1973).

Triggers and trigger warnings: Advance warning or alerts that warn susceptible students of coming information that might be troubling and incite a traumatic reaction. Triggers can be almost anything and appear in many forms: sounds, sights, smells (Jarvie, 2014).

Post-trauma embitterment disorder: A pathological reaction characterized by a distinct psychological process. Symptoms are severe, chronic, and even life threatening ("Bitterness and Resentment," 2008).

Non-traditional students: Students who are unique in socio-economic, experiential, or familial background (Bandura, 1986).

Methodology: Theories and models of learning and teaching; teaching tools and how they are used; a system of methods (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Traumatic brain injury (TBI): An acute, individual event that damages the brain and affects all areas of life (Church, 2009).

Social anxiety disorder (SAD): Unreasonable and obsessive fright of social circumstances that might cause humiliation or shame (Mather et al., 2010).

Intimate partner violence (IPV): Bodily, sexual, or emotional harm by a current or former mate or significant other (O'Campo et al., 2006)**.**

Limitations

This phenomenological analysis was based upon the heuristic theories outlined by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas noted that it is important for researchers to isolate any personal experiences with the phenomenon to avoid any bias that the researcher might transfer to the participant concerning his or her experience with the phenomenon. In this study, the researcher followed those guidelines by asking questions that were focused but not leading. This guided the participants and ensured they fully shared all their experiences related to the issues without attempting to express what they believed the examiner wished to hear. The researcher also used a reflexive diary, which assisted in developing bracketing skills and supported decision-making throughout the course of the phenomenological investigation (Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, and Poole, 2004). Primeau (2003) describes how the researcher, in using a reflexive diary, conducts an honest examination of any values and interests that could influence the research, and then brings that reflexivity into consciousness. In this study, the researcher used the reflexive diary to note thoughts, emotions, and insights, and to scrutinize thinking when concerns were elicited that could confound the investigational progression.

Information gathered through the interview process was transcribed and coded using NVivo software. Coding allowed a detailed analysis of the data, which offered insight into themes and patterns in the material. Using Moustakas's transcendental phenomenology as a research guide addressed possible limitations inherent in the interview process, and the analysis encouraged less focus on participants' personal interpretations and more on the actual lived experiences themselves (Moustakas, 1994). Tufford and Newman (2012) refer to this as bracketing: a method employed to mitigate

the possible deleterious effects the researcher might have on the analysis due to unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research. Analysis included searching for significant statements, breaking those into themes, and then developing a textural as well as structural description of those experiences (Moustakas, 1994). These descriptions were combined to convey an overall essence of the experience. Moustakas (1994) allows that the researcher might include a passage about his or her own experiences with the phenomena, although the formal analysis was achieved through bracketing.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative project addresses a steadily increasing population in higher education resultant, in part, from the Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008 (Buckley & Cleary, 2010). The results of this study provide insight into what pedagogical tools are most useful for student combat veterans looking to complete the first year of college. Insights from this study may help educate instructors in appropriate pedagogical tools to ensure military combat students' success. Active duty veterans and those returning from duty comprise a growing segment of college classes (Buckley & Cleary, 2010). Veteran combat students are underperforming and dropping out at higher rates than non-veteran students (Ellison et al., 2012). Information is needed to understand what actions college instructors can take to ensure military combat veterans complete college courses successfully in a timely manner. Educator awareness of effective pedagogical resources increases the likelihood of the implementation of those resources (Hagedorn, 2010). Use of these resources will help ensure student veterans' college completion and establish a launching point for a positive, productive future.

Further, the results of this study provide insight regarding effective tools for educating administration personnel, faculty, and staff of postsecondary institutions to better serve the needs of military combat veterans. A concern for this population exists among people who understand the crisis the United States is facing by allowing servicemen and servicewomen to be simply dropped into an environment unsuited to deal with their unique needs. Helping this population return to society as stable, educated citizens promotes positive social change by decreasing the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and homelessness (Bandura, 2002). Not educating returning combat veterans poses a risk to society in general. Ongoing research addressing educational considerations must be conducted to better serve all involved.

Summary

Administrators, staff, and faculty of institutions of higher learning can expect to serve more than two million military combat veterans in the next decade (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). However, a lack of research about military combat veteran students in community colleges likely impedes development of best practices in pedagogy. Colleges thus may lack an understanding of the learning challenges of these students (Herrmann, Raybeck, & Wilson, 2008). This study focused on veterans serving or returning from service in combat in the military during recent conflicts. It sought to explore the unique learning needs of this group of veterans in an effort to reveal the most effective pedagogies for combat veteran students, and to examine the extent to which colleges are providing those pedagogies and supports.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the unique learning and transitional needs of combat veterans returning from duty to use their educational benefits to explore the most appropriate pedagogies and supports colleges can use to meet those learning and transitional needs, and to interview veterans to determine the extent to which colleges are using those pedagogies and supports. The need for this study was clear: The United States has been involved in wars for over a decade and returning veterans of these wars are now entering postsecondary institutions in increasing numbers. In fact, administrators, staff, and faculty of institutions of higher learning can anticipate working with over two million veterans in the next decade (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). Many of these veterans will be navigating the effects of physical and psychological disabilities that were caused by their combat service, and which may impact veterans' ability to master course content in the classroom (Church 2009). Indeed, the United States has been sending combat service men and women to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2002, and there is much pressure being exerted on the teaching profession to create and sustain an academic environment appropriate to the harsher realities of the special needs of veterans returning home with multiple psychological and physical barriers to their education (American Council on Education, 2008; Cook & Kim, 2009).

This chapter reviews the literature (a) concerning the specific learning needs of military combat veterans returning to postsecondary schools, and (b) concerning the effectiveness with which educators, pedagogical practices, and support personnel serve these veterans. Theories of adult education are reviewed first, as veterans are first and

foremost adult learners. This chapter then reviews literature regarding veterans' learning needs related to military culture; the impact of psychological and physical disabilities on learning; the need for outreach and transitioning support; and the connection between self-concept and motivation for combat veterans returning to school. Finally, this chapter reviews the literature regarding colleges' responsiveness to combat veterans' needs. This study sought to address gaps in the literature by generating data directly from these veterans, which can then be used to help curriculum developers design appropriate courses and use applicable classroom pedagogical tools to better serve military combat veterans.

Search Strategy

Literature for this study was identified using the following search terms: *Educating military veterans, military veterans in the classroom, pedagogy in the college classroom, andragogy in the college classroom, college learners with PTSD, military and higher education, at risk students in college, military culture, female combat veterans in community college, curriculum for at risk college students, adult learners, motivation in college students, instructor response to students with disabilities, psychological needs of military veterans, collaborative learning, utilizing classroom pedagogies, male and female learning strategies.* The following databases were used: Walden Dissertations, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Psychology: A SAGE Full Text Collection, SocINDEX with Full Text, Military & Government Collection, MEDLINE with Full Text, and ProQuest Central. The official website of the Department of Veterans Affairs was also valuable.

Veterans' Needs as Adult Learners

As noted in Chapter One, since the 1960s, educational policies and practices have resulted in more people from nontraditional academic backgrounds seeking access to higher education (Brock, 2010). At the same time, during the 1960s and 1970s, developments in educational psychology emphasized the significance of students and their outlooks on learning (Rodgers, 1969). Educational pedagogy and methodology evolved during the 1960s and 1970s which lent support to the development of classes that accommodated students' interests and needs (Halliday, McIntosh & Strevens, 1964; Ewer & Latorre, 1969). The belief was that using materials and methods that students related to had an effect on students' enthusiasm to learn, and consequently on the efficiency of their learning.

Knowles (1973) further developed this belief by differentiating theories of adult learning from the learning theories of children and animals, and developed the theory regularly cited as "Knowles' andragogical theory." Knowles' theory drew data from psychotherapy as well as studies on effective teaching. He proposed a shift from the previously accepted Skinner-based philosophy of education, grounded in identifiable childhood reactive learning theories, to a more proactive theory. Divisive at this time in the 1970s, his proactive approach to teaching adults evolved into many methods emphasizing process over product, and qualitative change over quantitative change (Knowles 1973). This theory of adult learning held that teaching and learning necessitates consideration of adults' experience, self-concept, willingness to be taught, and learning style (Knowles, 1973).

Consideration of their experience, and in particular their self-concept, is exactly what combat veterans have reported as necessary to their success (Morreale, 2011). Morreale (2011) found that community colleges that focus on veterans' academic self-concept may further develop motivation in veteran adult learners by using adult-oriented pedagogies that emphasize and build on the strengths these students. Motivating adult learners by accommodating their interests and needs is particularly important when working with combat veterans. Lemos and Lumadue (2013) describe veterans' reported dissatisfaction with the gaps in support available to student veterans who are moving from warfare to an educational setting. As adult learners, combat veterans may lose motivation if they become frustrated when they feel their needs are not being met.

Furthermore, Morreale (2011) concluded that military veteran students have characteristics similar to other nontraditional, adult students. These include being older, delaying college entry, being parents, being first generation students, and perhaps most important, being of lower socio-economic status (American Council on Education, 2008). Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) transition theory and Cross' (1992) theories of transition and chain of response models, as psychosocial development theories based on studies of nontraditional students and adult learning, also apply to veteran students. These educational theories provide a framework for understanding how psychosocial backgrounds influence college classroom experiences, and they offer a foundation for understanding military veterans' college transitions.

The work of Morreale (2011), Lemos and Lumadue (2013), Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995), and Cross (1992) form a neat bridge that connects today's combat veteran students with the adult learners Knowles (1973) had in mind. Knowles' (1973)

ideas relate to twenty-first-century military combat veterans' unique educational needs in

that his ideas recognize adults' needs to see education as relevant. According to Knowles,

when college coursework is made real and adult students develop a personal relationship

to the people and the ideas in the classroom, enhanced learning will result (1973). His

statement that our traditional educational system is "progressively regressive" served as a

call to action for educators and administrators (p. 41), and it should continue to do so for

community colleges serving the growing subpopulation of adult learners who are combat

veterans.

Yet, a space exists in the literature pertaining to the needs of combat veterans as

adult learners. The needs of adult learners generally have been well studied and are well

understood. However, given the unique circumstances and cultural ethos of the military,

it is necessary to interview veterans directly to find out which aspects of adult learning

theory and practice are most relevant and beneficial to them. This study seeks to address

the gap in literature by generating data directly from these veterans.

Veteran's Learning Needs Relative to Military Culture and Experience

Camaraderie and Collaborative Learning

Veterans have specific and unique learning needs related to aspects of military

culture such as camaraderie, power hierarchy, and communication styles (DiRamio, et al.,

2008; Kara, 2003; Tannen, 1990; Leaper, 1991 and Barkalow 1990). DiRamio, et al.

(2008) interviewed 25 postsecondary students who had seen combat action in

Afghanistan and Iraq. Their often-cited, multi-campus study aimed to discover the

expectations of veterans when they came to college campuses. A particular concern that

the researchers found was the issue of veterans connecting with other students whom they

considered to be quite different. Even though the ages of veterans might not be that different from other students, their experiences certainly were (DiRamio, et al., 2008). Veterans said they could always spot another veteran, but the setting was not conducive to socializing in the way that the military structure offered. The military esprit de corps did not exist on campuses, and no clubs were available. Some veteran students even tried joining fraternities or sororities but found no sense of belonging (DiRamio, et al., 2008).

A recurring comment from the military combat veterans attending college for the first time since serving in a battle situation was that they simply wanted to blend in (DiRamio, et al., 2008). They were not comfortable being identified by faculty as student-veterans and did not want to share their experiences or political opinions with the class. When faculty violated their anonymity, they often dropped the class (DiRamio, et al., 2008). Veterans pointed to political science classes as feeling particularly invasive (DiRamio, et al, 2008).

Veterans' reservations are a matter of concern for a number of reasons, including higher education's increasing use of collaborative learning techniques in the classroom. Abundant literature exists in educational studies that reinforce the belief that collaborative learning should be at the core of academic experiences (Cockrell, Caplow & Donaldson, 2000; Tinto, 1987). Researchers found that pedagogical practices which encourage meaningful collaboration among students contributed significantly to student success (Cabrera et al., 2002). Collaborative learning fostered by commonality of purpose and shared values helped students establish a support network inside and outside the classroom. It is not difficult to imagine, however, that combat veteran students who lack a feeling of connection with their non-veteran classmates might not meet all of the

learning outcomes in a class whose instructor utilizes collaborative learning techniques. Yet little literature exists to address this question. To fill this gap in the literature, it is necessary to ask successful veteran students how they navigated collaborative learning techniques and how they perceived instructors' adaptation of these techniques to meet combat veterans' needs.

Mayer and Salovey (2004) provided helpful exercises designed to improve emotional relationships between teachers and students. Their suggestions, released in a series of books and articles, were that instructors needed to be flexible, creative, and motivated to help emotionally challenged students – in this case veterans who feel isolated or unconnected to their non-veteran classmates. More information is needed, however, to determine if these types of exercises would be viewed by combat veteran students as sufficiently "camaraderie-like" to be beneficial.

Communication Culture: Military Versus Academia

Combat veterans transitioning into the classroom may find the communication culture of academia poses a barrier to their learning. Tannen (1990) suggests that the military has a unique language developed to shape the minds of its personnel. People who spend time in the military develop a distinct vocabulary, which does not readily adapt to an academic environment (Tannen 1990). Tannen (1990) and many other socio-linguists have established male and female communication differences that have profound effects on successful interactions in business, social settings, and the classroom. An examination of the literature concerned with communication reveals reasons why military veterans, and especially female veterans, have difficulty shifting from one *language* to another. Transitioning from the "directness" of the military communication to the "indirectness"

of the classroom causes misunderstandings and frustrations (Leaper, 1991).

Understanding the differences in gender communication can help instructors support both male and female veteran students.

Barkalow (1990) described her military experience in her book *In the Men's House*. Barkalow (1990) pointed out that military language used entirely male oriented metaphors: sports or military. Expressions such as "stick to your guns," "under the gun," or "struck out" demonstrate the style of discourse men often use among men. As she struggled to acclimate at West Point, Barkalow (1990) learned that how to communicate was a course of its own. She said she could not be an officer in the same way men were, so she had to be more adaptive. Both male and female veteran students accustomed to this male-oriented communication style will have to adjust to higher education's growing insistence on gender-neutral language. It is not hard to imagine that trouble in transitioning to the language of the classroom can translate into trouble learning in the classroom. Hence the need to query veterans directly – as this study proposes to do – on the language of instruction that veterans found most conducive to learning.

Power Structures

The need for the power structure and chain of command many veterans come to rely on in the military – at times for their very survival - does not necessarily end when veterans enter classroom. Kara's (2003) study discussed a teacher's influence because of his or her position of power in the classroom. Returning combat veterans, accustomed to having officers above them in positions of power, might be more influenced by an instructor as the authority figure than non-military students. Furthermore, the good traits

of a warrior in battle, such as being cautious, evasive, in control, and on guard are not necessarily good traits of a college student (Bartone, 2005).

Shay (1994) discussed the extreme dependency on others that is fundamental to modern combat. His studies were conducted after Vietnam War veterans had begun college and their long journey back to psychological and physical health. His information seems pertinent to the soldier of today especially its comprehensive examination of PTSD among veterans. Every man and woman depends on another in combat because life and death is at stake: sleeping while another watches, maintaining audio contact for warning (Shay, 1994). The military construct has shared values and needs much like a college campus. While no one wants a "mortal dependence" on academic staff or faculty, if this interdependency can be established in the classroom among military and non-military students, the support might create a peer group mentality that would contribute to student success. Helping veterans navigate these differences in culture and power is crucial to their success, but first it is necessary to understand which strategies and teaching styles successful veterans identify as beneficial.

Veterans' Learning Needs Relative to Psychological Combat Injuries

Elliott et al. (2011) said military combat is among the most nerve-wracking and damaging involvements conceivable with physical, cognitive, as well as emotional challenges. The aim of their paper was to employ stress process theory to measure the effects of stressors and resources on military combat veteran students' experiences on university campuses (Elliott et. al., 2011). Their findings included the information that countrywide efforts to assist student veterans are not being made (Elliott et al., 2011). The potential consequences of this lack of a systematic effort are significant. The trauma

of combat experiences can potentially cause students to disengage from their classes; veteran narratives included stories of professors being insensitive, uninformed and ill-prepared (Elliott et al., 2011). Few institutionalized resources exist on campuses that employ professional staff, trained to deal with lingering effects of stress and chronic disability (American Council on Education, 2008).

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Causes and symptoms. People experiencing PTSD are those having undergone a traumatic occurrence that caused them to fear for their lives, experience horrific events, and possibly feel helpless (Koenigs & Grafman, 2009). When experiencing a heightened emotional state because of these events, the brain structure called the amygdala tags the ensuing memory of the event as important (Shin, Rauch, & Pitman, 2006). Shin et al. (2004) theorizes that this is an evolutionary response to fear allowing faster, more efficient recall of memories containing scenarios in which the individual was threatened. This quick recall offers a better chance to make an appropriate decision as to whether one should attempt to "fight or flee." The natural rush of adrenaline during the heightened emotional state is thought to solidify or "set" the memory making it quickly and easily recallable (Shin, Rauch, & Pitman, 2006).

Symptoms of PTSD are categorized into three types including reliving the trauma, avoidance, and heightened arousal. Reliving the trauma entails recurring, upsetting memories of the traumatic event that cause both emotional and physical reactions (Hull, 2002). These memories can seem so real that the individual feels as if the event is actually happening again. These memories are referred to as flashbacks. Avoidance symptoms include attempting to avoid going near places where the trauma occurred or

avoiding similar places that spark the original memory (Koenigs & Grafman, 2009).

Affected individuals may avoid newscasts that might potentially cover similar traumatic

events. Arousal symptoms include being constantly alert after the traumatic event. This

perpetual state of heightened emotional arousal makes sleeping difficult and may evoke

outbursts of anger (Koenigs & Grafman, 2009). This emotional state makes concentration

- and thus learning - difficult and may leave the individual chronically irritable.

Impact in the classroom. Postsecondary education has the responsibility to

educate military veteran learners who may have complications associated with Post-

Traumatic Stress Disorder. For example, PTSD can cause sensory difficulties such as

reduced vision and hearing (Church, 2009). Having the classroom completely dark might

trigger fearful responses for these military students with traumatic experiences in combat

(Perry, 2002). Sinski (2012) said the experience of just being in the classroom itself can

trigger violent reactions. Desks and backpacks crammed together, blocking aisles, can

prevent a quick exit and to combat veterans, a blocked pathway could have been deadly

(Sinski, 2012). She advised instructors to ask students to keep aisles clear and even assign

a safety officer for the classroom. Sinski (2012) further reported on research that noted a

correlation among PTSD and specific learning tasks, including trials for veteran students

in a conventional academic situation. Mental health issues resulting from military combat

service cause a lack of focus and concentration; therefore, lengthy lectures might be

unproductive in their learning. Sinski (2012) emphasized the need for pedagogical

planning to avoid triggers: avoiding seat assignments, placing veteran students facing a

doorway, circumventing attention to combat details such as questions focusing on

veteran's combat action.

Amanda Meuer (2012), a veteran of Iraq, wrote in the newspaper at her community college (*The Bluegrass Courier)*, a personal account of her problems in the classroom. There, she experienced hyper-vigilance, flashbacks, jumpiness, and the feeling of always being on guard (Meuer, 2012). For example, she stated that if someone walked through a classroom door unexpectedly, she would be unable to refocus on the task (Meuer, 2012). Any noise was a distraction, and she needed to sit so she could face the door, to be prepared if an enemy came through. Meuer's experiences bring to mind a study by Queensborough Community College in New York, which found the veterans' transition from soldier to student was extremely difficult because of an inability to concentrate (as cited in Meuer, 2012). The ignorance of non-military students resulted in their asking personal questions such as "Did you get shot at?" or "Did you kill anyone?" (as cited in Meuer, 2012). These questions may trigger flashbacks. Meuer (2012) clearly demonstrated the difficulties for students and faculty in these situations and reported that combat veterans, both male and female, felt that fellow students often do not try to help them, thus making their transition to the classroom harder.

Clark (2014) specifically observed experiences veteran students had, and the categories of mental and physical effects influences exhibited while attempting postsecondary educational participation. The initial assumption of the study was that military combat veteran students were arriving at college with varying degrees of combat trauma and possibly PTSD (Clark, 2014). Clark's (2014) purpose was to learn how combat experiences affected learning. Because of the multiple life threatening situations veterans have experienced, many as students present challenges to classroom environment and interaction. Any sort of stressor can trigger a combat veteran's fear and

anticipation of a life threatening experience. Given that, it is crucial to hear more from academically successful veterans about the pedagogies and support services that they found helpful in managing their PTSD in the classroom.

Female Veterans' Learning Needs Relative to Psychological Injuries

An examination of the literature finds little that differentiates between the needs of female and male veterans related to psychological injuries, but the research that does exist suggests a deeper, deliberate look is needed, particularly in the realm of sexual assault and harassment. Cook and Kim (2009) revealed that in the future, increasing numbers of female veterans will be returning from combat seeking a postsecondary education. This subgroup of veterans deserves special attention because it has different responses and needs. One in seven returning combat veterans in 2005 had served in Iraq (as cited in Cook & Kim, 2009). Cook and Kim (2009) stated that subthemes emerged from interviewing female veterans that had not been significant with males: the incidences of sexual violence and the pressure of financial strain. Single mothers were especially vulnerable to both these concerns.

Sexual violence. O'Campo et al. (2006) determined through quantitative research that psychological health problems of females having experienced sexual violence have "received little attention in large-scale studies" (para. 1). In addition, the majority of the studies that have been done had focused on non-military women who have suffered sexual abuse. However, existing surveys of domestic violence within the households of military women confirmed a significantly higher rate of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV): "at least 22% among active duty military women" (O'Campo et al., 2006, para. 1). The authors concluded that female veterans with IPV reported worse psychological issues

such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD (O'Campo et al., 2006). These female military

veterans suffered from symptoms commonly related to those psychological complications

such as feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, and lack of interest in anything or

anyone (O'Campo et al., 2006). The inability to focus (a symptom of depression, anxiety,

and PTSD) is particularly relevant to a lack of successful transition into a college

environment

The O'Campo et al. (2006) statistical information confirms the comorbidity of

sexual violence against women. The writers considered sociodemographic differences

among participants and adjusted for how those differences affected the conclusions about

the psychological damage done by IPV to women in and out of the military (O'Campo et

al., 2006). This article concludes that PTSD is greater in abused women and currently

58% of military veteran females report sexual abuse of some nature (Marshall, Panuzio,

& Taft, 2005). Alarmingly, these authors warn that if programs are not developed that

effectively and directly treat trauma and PTSD, there will multiple consequences, and

failure to institute newer models of intervention will lead to ineffective treatment of

victims of sexual abuse (Marshall et al., 2005). Marshall et al. (2005) confirmed

significant injury and psychological damage resulting from abuse of females in the

military. IPV resulted in substance abuse, PTSD, and antisocial characteristics.

According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2012),

females comprised 15% of the combat force in Iraq. Their findings indicated women are

at high risk for sexual assault and harassment. After trauma, "Women are more than

twice as likely as men to develop PTSD" (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012,

para. 4). This study stated the need for future studies to understand the effects of

"women's exposure to both combat and sexual assault" (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012, para. 8). According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2012), women are more likely to blame themselves and not report such incidents.

Suris, Lind, Kashner, Borman, and Petty (2004) found higher rates of PTSD due to sexual assault in women while in active duty. A total of 385 military females were included and interviewed. Their study showed that one out of four female veterans reported having experienced sexual assault (Suris et al., 2004). Further discussion relates sexual assault and military service to many disorders that would inhibit college success for female veterans: PTSD, alcohol abuse, major depression, panic disorder, and lack of motivation (Suris et al., 2004). One notable point in this study is that women from the military often need more medical attention and have higher health care costs than nonmilitary women (Suris et al., 2004). They are likely to take more medications, visit doctors more often and generally seek physical health care instead of mental health care or legal services (Suris et al. 2004). These additional needs can undermine any student's success. The quantitative information obtained by this research indicated conditions in the military exacerbate the incidence and severity of sexual assault and a lack of reporting incidences (Suris et al., 2004). They often admitted to pretending to be sick—sick-role—to get physical medical help (Suris et al. 2004). Differential impacts were recorded but are not significant for the purposes of our study.

Social anxiety disorder in female combat veterans with psychological injury. Mather, Stein, and Sareen (2010) stated the lack of military mental health research into the effects of social anxiety disorder (SAD) in women would eventually result in serious problems for the societies to which military veterans were returning. Mathers et al.

(2010) presented data from a Canadian Community Health survey in 2002 of 8441

military personnel who were analyzed to assess how often social anxiety disorder was

diagnosed among those serving in combat. Many Canadian soldiers have served

alongside those from the U.S. Therefore, conclusions might be applicable. Mather et al.

(2010) discovered social anxiety disorder to have profound effects and serious

consequences among the overall population. Social anxiety disorder is associated with

depression, panic attacks, extreme anxiety, and PTSD (as cited in Mather et al., 2010).

This study found that single females aged 35-44 had increased probabilities of developing

social anxiety disorder, and 70.6% reported some impairment in work or school (Mather

et al., 2010). This has the potential to significantly impact female veteran students'

success in the college classroom; more information is needed on how female veterans

have navigated the challenge of social anxiety disorder. This study proposes to shore up

that gap in the literature by asking successful female veteran students what college

pedagogies and supports worked best for them.

Veterans' Learning Needs Relative to Physical Combat Injuries

In an analysis conducted by the Council on Education, military combat veterans

revealed problems meeting expectations of college while at the same time dealing with

service-connected injuries, especially Traumatic Brain Injury (as cited in Steele, Salcedo,

& Coley, 2010). As Brunning, Schraw, and Ronning (1999) noted, "There are very few

educational decisions to which the cognitive issues of memory, thinking, and problem

solving are not relevant" (p. iv). Traumatic brain injuries (TBI) can cause difficulties such

as reduced vision and hearing impairment (Church, 2009). Veterans suffering from

sensory impairments may have difficulty in hearing lectures, discussions or even advising

sessions; they may not be able to see the board, read course materials, create written assignments or even access the course website (Church 2009). Veterans suffering from TBI may have trouble sustaining attention and concentration; processing new information; and may develop slower thinking (Church 2009).

Furthermore, TBI contributes to a "sensitized hyper arousal response" which can "trigger" a memory of the initial traumatic injury or event (Perry, 2001, p. 7).). Suggestions for avoiding a trigger in a classroom included never leaving the classroom completely dark; never assign seats; and constantly observe students for signs of distress (Perry, 2001). All create difficulties for military student veterans in a classroom atmosphere. Cognitive-behavioral techniques within the classroom applying memory tactics concentrated on concentration and retention bolster educational achievement (Barker-Collo & Feigin, 2008; Church, 2009). Yet more information is needed in order to help colleges support veterans.

Research by Ceci (1987), Harris and Qualls (2000), and Snodgrass and Kinjo (1998) indicated that all at-risk, ineffective learners could be helped by providing study-skills instruction and strategy use. Exploration as of late has centered on elaborative, individual strategies used to enhance memory for TBI patients (Lengenfelder, Chiaravalloti & DeLuca, 2007). Active learning techniques encourage students to create their own personal logical links to new information that will increase retention of new material encountered in postsecondary disciplines (Odem, Glenn, Sanner, & Cannella, 2009). Additionally, Sinski (2012) presented thoughtful and useful classroom applications. Instructors and administrators rarely consider the fact that the physical layout of the classroom can be crucially important to veteran students (Sinski, 2012).

This study proposes to ask academically successful veterans which classroom arrangements worked best for them.

Veterans' Needs Relative to Transition Support

Veterans have unique learning needs relative to the process of transitioning from combat to classroom, in part because they may not reliably ask for help. The "Moving In, Moving Through, Moving Out Model," offered by Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) provided a structure for grasping how people manage transition. Schlossberg (1984) stated an individual's successful transition to any life event is based on the person's awareness of the value of the transition (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, et al., 1989). Self-evaluation and attitudes toward education are as important in deciding to attend college as goals or expectations are (Cross, 1992). Successful transition is related to the nature of the occurrence resulting in change, the available coping resources, and a prospective student's personal and demographic characteristics (Schlossberg, 1984). What is difficult to quantify is just how the combat veteran's ability to make transitions is compromised by combat experience such as trauma, and how many other transitions these veterans are being expected to make (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

Critical information in Morreale's (2011) study was statistical data that showed the lack of research concerning the transitions of veterans from the military into college. Literature concerning readjustment has scarcely touched the experiences of these veterans or veterans in general (Cook & Kim, 2009; Covert, 2002; Shipes, 2002; Stalides, 2008). Most military veteran students have experienced at least the transitions from civilian to military and from soldier to civilian; further transition from civilian to student can be abrupt and stressful (Covert, 2002; Ursano & Norwood, 1996). Successful transition is

dependent on the resources and deficits the veterans have in their civilian life and in college (Stalides, 2008). A study by Walck (2008) stated successful veteran combat students cited several factors that contributed to their resiliency in transition to the classroom: positive student role models, a close supportive family, lower socio-economic beginnings, and engagement in religion. Unfortunately, Walck and other studies are small, and the literature on military students is limited and dated (Morreale, 2011; DiRamio, et al., 2008). Cook and Kim (2009) offer information on programs and services in place to serve veterans in colleges and universities. Their research stated that the faculty, staff and administration on campuses near military bases need to be better trained to assist in transition from military to college. The proposed study seeks to address this identified gap by identifying the pedagogical and support strategies that are most likely to support veteran' unique learning and transition needs when they leave combat and enter the classroom.

Veterans' Learning Needs Relative to Self-Concept and Motivation

Self-Concept

Veterans have unique learning needs related to the relationship between their self-concept and their motivation, particularly where these concepts intersect with military culture. Educational theorists studied self-concept extensively (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2002). Having an academic self-concept, crucial to academic motivation, encourages students to be interested in learning (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This research contributed to an educational understanding of the importance of students' feelings about themselves in relation to their classroom performance (McInerney, Dowson & Young, 2005). Cognitive outcomes for students with strong academic self-concepts include psychological health

and general satisfaction with school resulting in creativity, improved problem solving, and improved learning (Deci & Ryan, 2008b). Lacking that awareness of themselves as learners, students do not clearly perceive how learning can benefit them.

This raises concerns for combat veteran students in particular. DiRamio et al. (2008) noted veterans' reported concern about connecting with other students whom they considered to be quite different. Even though the ages of veterans might not be that different from other students, the experiences certainly were (DiRamio, et al., 2008). If military combat veterans cannot see themselves as students, their confidence level, self-belief, and general self-concept levels suffer. Self-concept is critical for desirable educational outcomes (Byrne, 2002; Manning, 2007). Indeed, Morreale (2011) found that for combat veterans in particular, academic motivation is tied to academic self-concept. Morreale (2011) further found that community colleges that focus on veterans' academic self-concept may further develop motivation in veteran students by utilizing pedagogies that emphasize and build on the strengths these students bring to the table. The particular value of Cook and Kim's (2009) article to research in the field is its insistence that more work has to be done because these veterans are value assets and should be treated as such.

Motivation

Maslow (1943) introduced the concept of human motivation. Society promotes a higher level of education for the individual, so that he or she may achieve a higher level on Maslow's pyramid of needs. Educators, however, realized motivation was not merely a result of needs or recognition of needs nor is motivation merely dispositional and biologically inherent, but influenced by a person's environment and experiences. Gardner

and Lambert's (1972) influential study of motivation recognized two types of motivation: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation is the realization of a *need* to know certain things, while integrative motivation derives from learners' desire or *want* to learn. Gardner and Lambert's (1972) conclusion was that both types are probably present in all learners but each (instrumental or integrative) exercises a different level of influence depending on the student's age, experience and social needs. Yet what does this mean for combat veterans?

An examination of the literature suggests a gap in the understanding of what motivates combat veterans to return to school following their service. For some veterans there likely is extrinsic motivation in the form of incentives such as the GI Bill and other educational benefits designed to facilitate post-military career changes. For other veterans, however, the motivation may bee deeply intrinsic. For those veterans who may be too disabled to pursue a career, the "lifelong learner" status that college courses provide may be what gives their post-combat life meaning and purpose (Grossman, 2009).

Motivation for entering college is the first factor to be researched when querying problems for veterans in transition. While a college education has been generally regarded as a sign of a well-rounded individual, few students have specified what a college education encompassed or was worth (Morreale, 2011). The lack of purpose cannot be discounted as a reason for failure. While attorneys, teachers, doctors and other professionals know why college is necessary, today's military veterans are often unclear about why college is important. Reasons for college are not well defined. While the current trend in colleges toward cost-effective courses with clearly defined goals are

helpful, they may not serve the unique needs of military veterans returning from war. Thus, there is a need to ask successful veteran students what their motivations were in returning to the classroom and what pedagogical practices and strategies they found motivating.

Colleges' Responses to Veteran's Needs

An examination of the literature reveals gaps in understanding of how – or even whether – colleges are responding and adapting effectively to meet the needs of returning combat veterans. Vance and Miller (2009) in their article "Warriors: Current Practices in Postsecondary Education" reported study outcomes of 2,500 affiliates of the Association of Higher Education and Disabilities on contemporary practices for aiding military personnel with disabilities. Only 237 responded, and the only clearly supported conclusion was that appointing a "point" person to assist veterans in moving from the service to the classroom was extremely valuable for students' success. Vance and Miller (2009) did not clarify why there were so few respondents to this survey. The method and instrument used in the Vance and Miller (2009) study appeared adequate and clear.

Queen and Lewis (2014) assembled data regarding accessible social backing and general institutional strategies aimed at assisting military personnel in making a move to the classroom. Their compilation included colleges that provide services directly to veterans (educational backing and coaching; career development skills; psychological counseling; mentoring; customized admittances and coordination events; in-state tuition for veterans; courses designed specifically for veterans) as well as preparation provided to college faculty and staff who instruct and serve veterans (Queen & Lewis, 2014). Combat veteran students may need specific campus support services to achieve that first

round of success. However, many veterans do not self-identify as disabled nor do they take advantage of the services that are already offered to students with disabilities on campus (Church, 2009; Grossman, 2009).

Elliott, Gonzalez, and Larsen (2011) posted in their quantitative survey data suggestions that professors attend workshops that explain that some military personnel are reactive to specific visuals, topics and other stimuli. The study included quotations from student veterans as to what caused them to feel alienation. They concluded that instructors need to be cognizant of the impact of what they say and what they do; however, it was recognized that it is impossible, and likely not appropriate, to repress faculty to the point of preventing free expression (Elliot et al., 2011). Elliott et al., (2011) included several suggestions for tools and resources for faculty and administrators that are helping such as learning communities, mentoring, dedicating space specifically for veterans, and sponsoring service related speakers. A pedagogical tool such as one-on-one, teacher-to-student tutoring addresses these concerns. As noted in Cook and Kim (2009), very basic faculty professional development can give faculty tools to provide a calm and veteran friendly classroom, and their research indicated that institutions were not tending to the requirements of service personnel and military veterans by doing so. This study to asked veterans directly if they feel their learning and transition needs are being met.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

In summary, a review of the literature suggests a need to explore the academic needs of the current cohort of Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans in order to better support these individuals and give them the greatest chance of academic success. Abundant information compiled by the branches of the service show the need for

immediate help for the vast number of soldiers returning from combat, but little evidence exists that concrete research is being conducted on educational theory and classroom practices related to these veterans. This review illustrated how little is known about military veteran students in higher education and the psychosocial issues that help or hinder student success.

Chapter two reviewed research discussing problems of transition, motivation, and academic self-concepts that affected military veteran learners and presented theory and research pertaining to education's efforts to understand and assist this group of adult learners. Few researchers have explored gender differences in veteran students' needs. The literature review emphasized the fact that veterans are entering higher education in unprecedented numbers, with the possibility of student and institutional failure. Coursework, pedagogy, and transitional support strategies created with the unique needs of combat veterans in mind are crucial to serving these students, and research indicated that development of these courses, pedagogies, and supports is not apparent.

Research presented in Chapter Two is important because it was instrumental in uncovering the vulnerability of students and teachers. Additional studies are needed to help educators understand the specific causes of student and institutional failures and successes. Chapter Three outlines the qualitative method of this study's research design and reinforces the conclusion that more research is needed. This chapter covers the research design, questions, participants, roles and ethics, including the statistics gathering and exploration.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This project addressed a demographic in higher education that has grown steadily since the implementation of the Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008 (Buckley & Cleary, 2010). The results of this study provide insight into the most useful pedagogical tools for assuring that student combat veterans complete the first year of college. Insights from this study assist in educating teachers about the most appropriate pedagogical tools for ensuring combat veteran students' success. Information was needed to understand what actions college instructors and administrators might take to ensure military combat veterans complete college courses successfully in a timely manner.

This study engaged the phenomenology method to create a thorough depiction of those pedagogical tools found by student military veterans to be helpful for completing the first year of undergraduate studies. By using the phenomenology method, the researcher assigned meaning to the participants' descriptions of the pedagogical tools. The researcher sought to identify repetitive themes from the data collected, and used these themes to derive the essence of the phenomenon. Specifically, this study followed Moustakis' (1994) guidelines for using a transcendental phenomenological approach to produce a statement about the overall essence.

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this research was to examine pedagogical resources available to all students, and to determine those resources most useful in ensuring academic success in student military veterans. Drawing on previous research on pedagogical resources and student military veteran needs, the following research questions addressed this purpose:

1. What do military combat veteran students who have successfully completed one year of community college identify as the most helpful practices of their classroom teachers and support staff?

2. What do military combat veteran students identify as practices that hindered their learning?

A variety of methods are involved when working with qualitative research and each requires the researcher to act as the instrument for collecting data through multiple sources such as natural observation, participant artifacts, in-depth interviews, and documents. Participants' lived experiences are vital in facilitating the development of a theory (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory research requires that the researcher produce a theory about a phenomenon that is grounded in the information from the contributors' lived experiences. This theory would pertain to a specific method, action, or collaboration and would be formed through the in-depth interview process (Creswell, 2013). With a narrative approach, the researcher explores the stories told by groups or individuals through interviews and compiles the information in chronological order, thus assembling and creating the individual's story (Creswell, 2013).

The nature of this study was qualitative because the goal was to record students' descriptions of the pedagogical tools and how each participant found them useful. Experiments employed in quantitative studies would not reveal the nuanced specifics that proved valuable to the outcome of this study. Qualitative research is consistent with understanding what pedagogical tools help ensure college success in military combat veteran students, which was the primary focus of this dissertation. In particular, Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology was employed as this technique

concentrates on recounting the phenomenon rather than stressing interpretation. In the phenomenological method, the investigator explores the meanings of the lived experiences of a group of individuals in order that he or she might identify a universal essence (Creswell, 2013). Using Moustakas's transcendental phenomenology as a guide for the research analysis ensured less focus on the researcher's interpretations of the experiences of the participants and more on the actual lived experiences themselves (Moustakas, 1994). Tufford and Newman (2012) refer to this as bracketing: a method employed to mitigate the possible deleterious effects the researcher might have on the analysis due to unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research.

Role of the Researcher

The main source of data for this study was primary in nature and came from participants through personal interviews. The students' lived experiences of all aspects of each pedagogical tool were discussed and recorded. The transcendental phenomenological approach prescribes that the role of the researcher is one that describes rather than interprets the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher's role in this study was to recruit study participants and conduct in-depth interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Participants

Information to identify potential participants was gathered from the veteran students' office at Tacoma Community College. Discussions with appropriate administrative personnel at the college confirmed the approval for access to student records for potential participant selection. Faculty status at Tacoma Community College allowed for access without violating FERPA laws. The sampling technique for the study

was a combination of convenience and criterion as a means of insuring the reliability of data because participants were required to meet inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for this study were as follows: participants must have successfully completed three terms of classes at Tacoma Community College with a minimum of 10 credits per term; participants must have served or are currently serving in the Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines and have participated in or witnessed combat or casualties in recent military conflicts in Iraq or Afghanistan; and participants must be identified by Tacoma Community College's veterans' services offices as military veteran students. Communications with veterans' services personnel at the college, and pre-screening interviews with initial respondents about their military experiences, confirmed that participants met the criteria.

The sample for this study consisted of ten student military combat veterans who had successfully completed one year of study. This study focused on veterans serving or returning from service in military combat during recent conflicts. A list of all students meeting the criteria for the study was provided by the veteran students' office, and each potential participant was contacted by email. Respondents participated in a prescreening interview via email to learn the purpose of the study and confirm their eligibility to participate. A random selection of ten participants was chosen from the resulting pool. The selected participants who met the study criteria were scheduled for single sixty-minute in-person interviews.

Ethical Procedures

An informed consent form was provided for each participant outlining the purpose of the study and noting that participation was voluntary and that he or she had

the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. It was made clear that all personal data would be removed from the final report and that he or she could expect full confidentiality throughout the study. Due to the potentially sensitive nature of the topics that would be discussed during the interview process and the possible resultant emotional distress of the participants, licensed clinical counselors were immediately available for brief counseling.

Data Collection Procedures

As participant recruitment and interview procedures took place at Tacoma Community College in Tacoma, Washington, the researcher sought IRB approval from the appropriate administrative board at TCC, and then submitted IRB approval from TCC to Walden University's IRB. After gaining approval number 09-24-15-0017424 from Walden, the researcher began conducting in-person interviews. The researcher thoroughly covered the informed consent with each participant and ensured his or her understanding before obtaining a signature. Participants were informed that the interview would last sixty minutes. A reiteration was made that he or she may terminate the interview at any time for any reason. Interviews were recorded using a digital recording system to be transcribed and analyzed for meaningful themes using NVivo software. Because it may not have been intuitively clear to each participant what pedagogical tools or practices helped him or her in the first year of study, a list of examples was provided. This list aided the participant in the identification of tools and practices used as well as those that could have been used but were not. Successful completion of the first year of studies was defined individually for each participant based on his or her chosen academic

path and the school's specific GPA requirements for that path. The open-ended structure of the interview was guided by seven questions.

1. What processes or procedures used by administration proved helpful in your matriculation into a program of study, and which were hindrances?

2. Which classroom instructor policies facilitated and which hindered your completion of the class?

3. How did the structure and layout of the physical classroom help or hinder your participation in the class?

4. What type of assignments created the most positive learning experiences for you and which were least helpful?

5. What types of in-class learning activities (lecture, group work) were most helpful in facilitating your learning and which were least helpful?

6. How did having access to lectures or other instructor presentations outside of class, such as through an online platform, make a difference in your capacity to learn the material?

7. Was there anything about the classroom environment that proved distressing, thereby decreasing your ability to concentrate?

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and the text from each interview reviewed to identify significant words, statements, and phrases. NVivo software was employed to aid in recognition of themes and patterns in the transcriptions. This phenomenological analysis followed the guidelines of the heuristic theories of Moustakas (1994), who noted the importance of researchers isolating any personal experiences with the phenomenon in

order to avoid any bias the researcher might transfer to the participant concerning his or her experience with the phenomenon. This study further used the following strategies for data analysis: thick description, member checking, and peer debriefing. Thick description allows a researcher a plausible means by which to gain validity. Creswell (2014) noted:

> Rich, thick description may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences. When qualitative researchers provide detailed descriptions of the setting, for example, or offer many perspectives about a theme, the results become more realistic and richer. This procedure can add to the validity of the findings. (p. 202)

Member checking provides a means to ensure the accuracy of the information collected from the participants. Creswell (2014) advises:

> Use member checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report or specific description of themes back to participants and determining whether these participants feel that they are accurate. This does not mean taking back the raw transcripts to check for accuracy; instead, the researcher takes back parts of the polished or semi-polished product, such as the major findings, the themes, the case analysis, the grounded theory, the cultural description, and so forth. This procedure can involve conducting a follow-up interview with participants in the study and providing an opportunity for them to comment on the findings. (p. 202)

Peer debriefing offers the insight of a disinterested party to ensure the omission of researcher bias. Creswell (2014) advises:

Use peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of the account. This process involves locating a person (a peer debriefer) who reviews and asks questions about the qualitative study so that the account will resonate with people other than the researcher. This strategy—involving an interpretation beyond the researcher and invested in another person—adds validity to an account. (p. 202)

Qualitative Research Trustworthiness

There are key differences between qualitative research methods and quantitative research methods. Quantitative research emphasizes objective validity and detachment. In qualitative research, the investigator is the instrument collecting the data in a process that involves observing and studying research participants in their natural settings. Thus qualitative research requires an alternative standard of validation suited to these circumstances (Creswell, 2013). To verify the data of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the concept of trustworthiness. Trustworthiness sets the standard for qualitative research to be confirmed through documentation, and it allows other researchers to vet the authenticity of the data by arriving at similar conclusions. As noted above, this study will rely on the techniques of thick description, member checking and peer debriefing to safeguard the trustworthiness of the data.

Use of Thick Description

In this work, the researcher used thick description by observing specifics of the situation, teasing out the intricate strata of understanding that constitute the social realm of the study's veteran participants. For example, the researcher elicited details from the participant regarding the experiences he or she brought from the battlefield to the classroom. The researcher asked additional questions to ascertain how much or how little

the participant "feels" these events and whether his or her feelings about the events have affected or changed his or her life inside and outside the classroom. The researcher achieved this through the use of open-ended questions. The researcher refrained from acting in the role of psychologist; rather, the researcher simply gained an understanding of the participant's theory about why he or she was impacted by military service. The researcher then sought specific details about how the participant saw those events hindering or helping with success in his or her courses. From there, the researcher asked about what worked in the classes in which the participant was successful in order to gain a thorough sense of how and why certain pedagogies and support services worked.

Use of Member Checking

For this study, the researcher transcribed the recorded interview of each participant and then analyzed that data. The researcher then went back to each individual participant in a follow-up meeting to go over the data (for that specific participant) to ensure all of the facts were correct and to allow each participant to acknowledge that the data represents what he or she meant to say. In this study, the researcher endeavored to construct a connection with the participant to the end of procuring candid and straightforward replies. Throughout interviews, the researcher repeated or recapitulated information continually querying the interviewee regarding the summaries to ensure precision.

Use of Peer Debriefing

In this study, the researcher used peer debriefing by working with three disinterested peers. One was a psychologist, one was a sociologist, and one was a veteran's administrative manager. These individuals examined the research data to

validate the researcher's methodology, interpretation, and analysis of the data. Each disinterested peer offered a report on his or her thoughts on validity. Information from these three reports guided a thorough reexamination of the study by the researcher and acted as a litmus for researcher bias, and overall structure and validity of the study.

Data Interpretation

This study synthesized the data derived from the participant interviews to create a composite written textural and structural description of the pedagogical tools found most helpful in guiding the participants through their academic journeys. This description explored the essences of the participants' experiences related to academic resources, such as pedagogical strategies used by instructors, support services offered by the college and outreach utilized by the college veterans' services office. The description identified specific themes that emerged from participants' descriptions of their own lived experiences of administrative and curriculum related processes in community college following military duty in recent conflicts. From those themes, this study identified pedagogical tools found to be both beneficial and hindering in the academic environment for the student military veteran population.

Summary

This chapter described and discussed research design and approach; qualitative research methodology; the setting and sample; ethical standards and the protection of study participants; a review of assessment instruments; and data collection and analysis procedures and processes. Chapter 4 continued with the detailed presentation of study results.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine pedagogical resources used by student military veterans at Tacoma Community College and to determine those most and least useful in ensuring academic success. This study focused on veterans serving or returning from service in combat in the military during recent conflicts. Current literature supports the assumption that combat veterans may have unique barriers to acclimating to an academic environment. The goal of this study was to contribute to the literature concerning obstacles blocking academic achievement by student military veterans and to facilitate the creation of fruitful pedagogical and administrative practices. Moustakas's transcendental phenomenology was used as a guide for the research analysis to ensure less focus on researcher interpretations of the experiences of the participants and more on the lived experiences as reported by the participants themselves (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, three women and seven men were interviewed, providing comprehensive information concerning their experience. This chapter details the methods by which participants were recruited, the setting of the study, and the data collection methods. Data analysis procedures were utilized to verify accuracy and quality and the identification of themes.

Recruitment

The veteran students' administrative office at Tacoma Community College provided identification of potential participants. The sampling technique for the study was a combination of convenience and criterion as this method contributed to the reliability of data because participants were required to meet inclusion criteria. The

inclusion criteria for this study were: Participants must have successfully completed three terms of classes at Tacoma Community College with a minimum of 10 credits per term; participants must have served or are currently serving in the Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines and have been deployed to a combat zone during Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom; and participants must be identified by Tacoma Community College's veterans' services offices as military veteran students.

The sample for this study consisted of ten student military combat veterans who had successfully completed one year of study. This study focused on veterans returning from service in military combat during recent conflicts. The veteran student's office provided a list of all students meeting the criteria for the study, and each potential participant was contacted by email. The email contained an invitation to participate in the study along with a list of questions to confirm his or her eligibility to participate based on the inclusion criteria. The veteran students' office provided three hundred seventy-seven names and emails of potential participants. To make certain that potential participants met all inclusion criteria for the study, the school's registrar electronically screened them. Fifty-six potential participants responded to the invitation over a two-week period. A random selection of ten participants was chosen from the resulting pool. The ten participants who met the study criteria were scheduled for sixty-minute in-person interviews on Tacoma Community College's main campus.

Demographics

Participants consisted of three women and seven men with an age range of 26 to 32 years. Eight were Caucasian, one African American, and one Mexican American. Two were born and reared in the Tacoma, Washington area where the study took place. One

was from the southern United States, four from the eastern United States, and three from the midwestern United States. Three of the participants were on active duty while the remaining seven were retired military. The three on active duty all stated that they intended to move back to their hometowns to continue their education after retiring from the military. Those participants currently retired from the military and attending Tacoma Community College stated they intended to make Tacoma their home. Tacoma Community College is in close proximity to Joint Base Lewis McChord where all participants were stationed at one point during their military career.

Setting

Tacoma Community College is a community college with a main campus located in Tacoma, Washington, a smaller campus in Gig Harbor, Washington, and the Bridge Program in partnership with the Evergreen State College, Tacoma. TCC opened its doors to students in 1965, becoming one of 34 community and technical colleges in Washington State (TCC, 2015). Its demographics are as follows:

- Nearly 14,000 students enroll at TCC each year.

- Gender: 61% women, 39% men.

- Median Age: 25.1.

- Ethnicity: 41% self-identify as students of color (59% white, 13% African American, 13% Asian/Pacific Islander, 10% Hispanic, 5% Other/Multi-racial).

- 519 International students.

- 650 students with disabilities.

- 37% part-time and 63% full-time students.

Data Collection and Storage

Each participant engaged in a sixty-minute interview. The informed consent form was read aloud to each participant to ensure his or her understanding before obtaining a signature. Each participant was informed that a licensed counselor provided by Tacoma Community College was immediately available during and after the interview should he or she require that service. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, and transcribed verbatim from that recording. Seven scripted questions guided the open-ended structure of the interviews. The questions included a list of examples of potential pedagogical tools to ensure that each participant understood what pedagogical tools or practices might have helped him or her in the first year of study. This list aided the participants in the identification of tools and practices used as well as those that could have been used but were not.

All interview recordings are in a secure database on a password protected thumb drive and stored in a locked safe. Each verbatim-transcribed interview is stored in a locked filing cabinet. All identifying information was removed from the transcript prior to peer debriefing.

Data Analysis

Each interview recording was transcribed verbatim and the text reviewed to identify significant words, statements, and phrases. The transcriptions of each interview were entered into NVivo software to aid in identifying meaningful statements and phrases related to the participants' lived experiences. This identification process aided recognition of themes and patterns in the transcription. Additionally, a textual description of the participants' experience of the academic process from matriculation to the

successful completion of the first year of study was composed for each participant. This phenomenological analysis was based upon the heuristic theories outlined by Moustakas (1994), who has noted that it is important for researchers to isolate any personal experiences with the phenomenon to avoid bias the researcher might transfer to the participant concerning his or her experience with the phenomenon. This study used thick description as a means of gaining validity by providing detailed descriptions of the participant's experiences as a student military combat veteran matriculating in a program of study at Tacoma Community College.

Data Verification

Member checking was the means used to ensure the accuracy of the information collected from the participants. Follow up sessions with each participant, where the overall themes were discussed, ensured the true essence of each member's experience was captured and would be conveyed in the final write-up. This study used peer debriefing by engaging three disinterested parties to examine the research data to validate methodology, interpretation, and analysis of the data. Peer debriefers included a psychology professor, a sociology professor, and a veteran's office administrator.

Emergent Themes

Extensive analysis of the ten verbatim interview transcriptions identified seventy-two meaningful statements revealing five emergent themes: ease of matriculation, veteran's office, classroom assignments and policies, distressing environments, and being treated as a competent adult. The resultant themes grew out of an exploration of the participants' experiences related to academic resources such as pedagogical strategies

used by instructors, support services offered by the college, and outreach by the college veterans' services office. Specifically, participants were asked seven questions:

1 What processes or procedures used by administration proved helpful in your matriculation into a program of study and which were hindrances?

2 Which classroom instructor policies facilitated and which hindered your completion of the class?

3 How did the structure and layout of the physical classroom help or hinder your participation the class?

4 What type of assignments created the most positive learning experiences for you and which were least helpful?

5 What types of in-class learning activities (lecture, group work) were most helpful in facilitating your learning and which were least helpful?

6 How did having access to lectures or other instructor presentations outside of class, such as through an online platform, make a difference in your capacity to learn the material?

7 Was there anything about the classroom environment that proved distressing, thereby decreasing your capacity to concentrate?

Common statements by participants were aggregated via NVivo software, analyzed for their salience regarding meaningful positive and negative experiences, and qualified for inclusion as to thematic expression.

Theme 1: Ease of Matriculation

The participants' responses to the interview question related to whether school administration helped in their matriculation into a course of study varied depending upon the degree of involvement of the student veterans' office. U.S. Army veteran BP shared:

The sign up was incredibly easy. I mean especially for using the GI bill. I just kind of showed up and talked to one of the advisors and they just stuck me in some classes so I was pretty much good to go. But as for being helpful, I came here basically knowing what I wanted to do to begin with so there wasn't a lot of counseling that needed to be done or assistance that needed to be done. I mean occasionally I needed to either add a class or drop a class what have you. But it was a fairly pain free process.

BP went on to discuss how it was mandated that he take placement exams for math. He stated that he had not taken math since high school but felt capable of entering an advanced set of classes. Placement exams put him in lower math. He commented:

Math uh, we had to do the initial testing and what not since I hadn't taken math in quite some time. I ended up taking a series of, God, 90 and it ended up setting me about a year and a half behind on all math and a lot of the reasons that my grades are lower there is I'd show up and take the test and do nothing else. Get A's on the test and never have to do any of the homework or show up. So having to take some of those classes, I understand that standardized testing is necessary to determine your ability level but after that point to be unable to advance past it if you believe yourself to be capable, you being unable to take classes a bit more advanced and, I don't know, have some risks in your daily life. Seemed to be a

little bit hindering. They wouldn't let me skip ahead even though I proved I could with my exam scores. That cost me a year of math classes.

U.S. Army veteran AE was stationed in California and trying to gain acceptance to the University of Washington, Tacoma. He met with difficulty because of his inability to physically come to the school before matriculating. He asserted:

I would definitely say first and foremost just applying for college here was very easy to do online. I was still stationed down in California and I applied for UW Tacoma and TCC and the University said they needed me to come up and do an interview. And I said well I'm stationed here in California I can't just do that. So the fact that I was able to apply online at TCC and they gathered all the transcripts and then said hey you're good to go, made that process very easy for me.

U.S. Navy veteran AL said she had a relative who previously attended Tacoma Community College so she came feeling somewhat prepared for how matriculation would go but found it not as easy as she expected. She contended:

I had a brother-in-law who also went to TCC. So I had asked him advice on getting set up. I did not know the first step to being enrolled and he told me he had a pretty easy time. He said that the advisor he talked with was very helpful and got him ready for his classes. So I did the online portion and then I guess I was a bit shocked when I went to the main campus. I asked the registration what I should do and they directed me to the VA office, the veterans' office and I spoke to them and then, well the registration office had my classes wrong so the VA office got them figured out but by then some of the classes I actually needed were full.

AL was not alone among the participants in having to seek help from the Veterans' office in the fledgling stages of matriculation. This subject is covered in the next theme.

U.S. Army veteran AG shared, "Getting signed up for classes was a breeze. No problems at all. Everyone I dealt with in the financial aid department was very helpful and there was never a time when I was confused about what was going on." U.S. Army veteran AH reported:

> I started online, and you know just going through that process was easy. My sister actually went here before me so she kinda like helped me out, helped me get through the sign-up process. The sign-up on line was really easy and then I just got an email saying you know, I got accepted and stuff like that. That's when I came and did the first placement test.

U.S. Navy veteran CW reported an easy experience getting signed up for his classes when first coming to TCC. He shared, "I mean they provided everything. They told me I had to take my placement tests and told me where to take them. They helped me figure out a degree program, signed me up and away I went."

U.S. Army veteran EH had a very different experience coming to Tacoma Community College. He had a job lined up coming out of the military but found the position not available when he got home to Tacoma. This was mid-September and Advising told him that he would have to wait to start winter term. He responded:

> I was basically told, good luck: Try to sign up when winter quarter starts. Um, so I went over to the VA, the little department over there. I was panicked because if I didn't start school, I wouldn't get GI money. So I went to the veterans department over there and they said that it's not the case that I can still sign up for classes and

everything. They basically walked me through the entire process like baby steps, like hand walked me through the entire process of registering for classes and I started in September. They were very helpful. Every time I've been to the advisors' office looking for advice it's been pointless. They either just blow me off or tell me it's all up to you.

U.S. Army veteran MK had a difficult time with transcripts for classes he took while in the military. He said:

I would say the biggest hindrance was when starting at TCC and they needing your transcripts and stuff. Getting military transcripts is not as easy as some people may think. So it's not as easy as just you know sending them an email of my official transcript. Like the Army has to write them up usually and it's not like you know, going from a previous college to another college where they just kinda mail the transcript. There is a little more paperwork involved on my part. So just trying to get my transcripts into the school system so they knew what classes I needed and didn't need. That was the biggest hindrance.

I asked MK to clarify if he thought it was a hindrance because it created extra work for him or because of lack of help from TCC administration. He replied:

I think the only snag here at TCC is when they update your transcript to see what classes you need and don't need, so trying to build my schedule with my advisor you know she kind of had to take it on my word on what classes I did and didn't have. But on the helpful side she did look at my unofficial transcript and she tried her best to you know, compare my military career to what I'm taking here at TCC.

So she did help on that aspect. It was just a pain for her trying to get my transcripts from the military so I would say she was very helpful in that regard.

U.S. Marine veteran RW recounted her experience getting classes set up for the first time as being, "amazingly easy." She noted:

Right away, they set me up with an advisor. To just kind of walk me through what classes I should start with and they looked at the placement test, ah, the placement tests. When I was still in the military I did them all in Fort Lewis and they took those even though it was through a different college but they took them and they just kind of um, what's the word like um translated them to this college. It saved me so much time.

U.S. Navy veteran TH had a similar experience as MK with transcripts of classes he took in the military. He had his transcripts in hand so the advisor was able to work from those. TH's problem came when, like EH, advising told him that it was too late to register for the upcoming term. He shared:

When I first moved up here I went over to the administration building and I haven't had hardly any experience with an actual college you know. I'd done some classes in the military you know like basic general stuff and I did have an associate of arts but just general studies. So first thing I did when I got here was go down to the office and they were super helpful. A woman helped and I can't remember her name but she was super nice, I brought it in, I brought my transcript and she went to evaluate my placement off that transcript and what I did after that once I got notice back it was already too late to start in the fall and this was two years ago. But I started, I finally got started in the winter quarter.

EH was not as reliant on funding for daily living expenses from the GI bill as was EH so he did not mind the late start. In fact, he commented that he enjoyed the time off waiting for winter term to start.

Theme 2: Veterans' Office

The student military veterans' office at Tacoma Community College houses the administrative staff responsible for coordinating GI funding for veteran students. The staff are there as a liaison between the United States government, Tacoma Community College, and the student military veterans attending TCC. While the veterans' office facilitates veteran students' matriculation, it is the duty of advising to work with military students to take placement tests, choose appropriate classes, and get registered for the upcoming term. While this process went smoothly for most of the vets interviewed for this study, some had a negative experience.

U.S. Army veteran AE was scheduled for classes and because of a glitch in a new accounting system at TCC, the veterans' administration was not notified that he would be taking classes. The VA notified him that his funding would cease. AE shared:

> That was a bit of a nightmare. So as far as the VA was concerned I was no longer enrolled at TCC. TCC knew I was enrolled and they were trying to get them [TCC and the VA] both on the same page. I was freaking out quite a bit but I went to the VA's office and asked for help because my classes had been dropped since I hadn't paid. They [VA office] got it all straightened out with my GI bill and got my classes all figured out too. Had my classes all set up, they sent a letter off to the VA saying he's all good he's still enrolled here. It took a little longer this quarter to get my funding so I didn't get my books until about a month into the

classes. Fortunately, all my teachers are really good really understanding about it. Also the way TCC has things set up for a lot of the things I was able to get a courtesy copy of like the e-book so that got me through that first little bit. Like that first month of class. But the VA's office got it cleared up.

AE's negative experience occurred because of the glitch with TCC's registration system and he did not fault TCC for that. Rather, he praised TCC's veterans' administration office for making what appeared to be a possibly stressful situation, relatively painless.

U.S. Army veteran MK experienced difficulties getting his military schooling transcripts delivered to TCC's registrar. He said:

It seemed odd that the VA office couldn't seem to help get my transcripts [military]. The lady helping me in registration was finally able to get them. She's the one that worked with me just going off what I told her I had done in military school.

MK does not see his experience with the VA's office as necessarily negative especially since the registrar was able to meet his needs in this situation. He went on to say, "All subsequent experiences with the VA's office were very positive."

U.S. Army veteran EH states that he has had continuing issues with advising and has chosen to go directly to the VA's office to figure out his classes. The required registration code must be obtained from an advisor. EH shared:

I just go right to the VA's office first off. I mean if I have any questions I don't even bother with the advisors, I only go to them so I can get the registration number or whatever. Then I walk over to them [the VA office] and I'm like, hey

what do you guys think? It's awesome because they actually have more to say and give advice about what they've seen.

The remaining seven student veterans in the study reported that they all had positive experiences with the veteran's office both with help in registering for classes and dealing with GI bill funding. All of the participants stated that they visited the veteran's office at least once a term to ensure their funding is on track and they will receive their housing benefits.

Theme 3: Treated as a Responsible Adult

Respectful treatment by faculty and administration is of the utmost importance to many student military veterans at Tacoma Community College. All participants commented on their views and values of being treated as adults. While most felt that the college administration conveyed a feeling of respect, many expressed irritation with faculty in this regard. U.S. Army veteran BP shared:

Most of the time I felt like they were coddling me. You know, treating me like I don't know anything. Part of the reason I say that is that I mean I feel like a lot of people that I've talked to around here especially veterans, they really don't like having their hand held through every single step of the process and when you have kids that are basically still living in their parents' basements that haven't you know, had any life experiences outside of video games...ah and they obviously need their hand held. I mean I've had to assist some of them around here myself. I mean, they're kids there's no other way to put it. But I mean you have people like me that have been through you know 4, 5, 6, 10, 20 years of military service, you know especially something like marine corps or combat army or what have you,

they feel as if they know what they can do. Especially myself I feel like I know

what I can do and to have to go and check in with people all the time about it. For

instance, the first year I'm here I need to get the access codes in order to be able to

sign up for classes. Well the first year is the easiest part. You can take any number

of things. It's in a big sheet that you can find on every wall. It seems like, you

know, depending upon what you want your major to be. Oh man that was a bit

frustrating, I mean to go do the walk in and I would show up fifteen minutes early

and I would still have to wait for an hour and a half because everyone else showed

up a half hour early. Just to get a code in order to sign up for classes that I already

knew I needed.

BP's frustration stemmed from the rigors of the registration process. Students are

required to meet with an advisor to ensure they are signing up for appropriate classes. A

code then issued allows them to enter the registration website and select classes. BP was

meticulous about researching his academic career path and selecting classes very specific

to his goals. He was resentful of having to have that information checked by a gatekeeper

rather than just being permitted to sign up on his own.

U.S. Army Veteran AE found it frustrating that he was not allowed to turn

assignment in late. He spoke of his full schedule and his difficulties getting work done on

time because of multiple responsibilities. He related:

I do really like the idea of you can turn in homework late and just get docked

some points. That makes total sense. Everybody here is an adult outside the kids

from running start. But just about everyone is at least 18 or older and if you treat

them like kids with strict deadlines, they're just going to act like kids. Treat us

with respect. Let us turn stuff in late if we need to and dock some points. We're adults here, things come up in life, and we shouldn't have to miss all the points on assignments just because we have stuff that gets in the way. One of my teachers lets you turn stuff in late if you email him and tell him what's going on. Or if you miss an assignment beforehand just let them know hey an emergency came up, and he'll like adjust it accordingly. I really appreciate that because that's like directly showing that he kind of gives a crap about what you're doing as opposed to just sayin' this is my policy right here and that's the way it is. But I really appreciate that kind of system of just treating people like adults. Especially, from the military that was one of those things that really bothered me, not being treated as an adult. I was sent back as a college student but 25 years old as a college student you know I've been out of school for a little bit so I know what I'm doing. Please treat me that way.

U.S. Navy veteran AL expressed frustration with younger students in her classes. She feels too much time is wasted "babysitting" the younger students. She shared:

I get a little irritated when the instructor has to call out some of the kids in the class. It just seems ridiculous that I have to sit there having my time wasted on that kind of stuff. Even though I'm not the one in trouble I mean, you know he's yelling at the younger students, I feel childish, like I'm being scolded as well. I hate that. I know the instructor has to keep control of the classroom but I just hate it that I have to take classes with the younger people. I wish they offered classes just for older people. It would be really cool if they had classes just for veterans.

U.S. Army veteran AG shares her experience in talking with representatives in the veterans' office,

I love that the veterans' office treats you with respect. I mean, everyone in there acts like I'm really important and make me feel like it's really important for the school that I'm here, you know. I don't feel that way so much when I'm you know in classes or whatever but those guys over in the vet office are really great about that.

U.S. Army veteran AH shares his feelings of being "controlled."

There is that aspect of coming from like a controlling environment [the military]. It's like I don't want to be controlled anymore. I don't want to be told what to do anymore. That's why I left that part of my life. I know the teacher has to give assignments and what not but I don't want to be bossed around like a kid. I've gotten that feeling from several professors over the last year and I don't know if they're just on a power trip or what but I don't need that in my life. I left that crap back in the Army.

U.S. Navy veteran CW states that he feels like he is treated as an adult by both administration and faculty alike and offers a possible reason.

I haven't had much trouble with being treated more as a kid here. I mean certainly not in the VA's office but not even in classes really. I feel like the teachers respect me and most of the people around me do too. I think part of it is that I look a lot older than I am and I guess I act older than I really am so, no it's not really a problem for me.

U.S. Army veteran EH states that not only has he experienced a lack of respect in the classroom but at times has been made to feel "dumb." He shares:

I just feel like the rules are a little silly sometimes. I mean you know, in the classroom. I have one teacher who makes us sit in assigned seats. It's just ridiculous. I'm an adult and I'm paying for this class, well… the government's paying but I'm the one going. I don't like that stuff. Being made to sit in arranged spots. And it's not only that; sometimes they [instructors] make you feel like you're, I don't know, dumb I guess. It just makes you feel childish. I don't think they should be treating anyone that way but especially a war vet.

U.S. Army veteran MK shares his exasperation with attendance policies. MK is currently enlisted in the Army and is required to report for drills. He pointed out,

Well I'm still in the military and I have to be certain places at certain times. The Army comes first so when I have to be absent, I absolutely have to be absent. The Army doesn't take no for an answer. So this whole late policy crap or you know, mandatory attendance thing really messes me up. They know I'm an adult and I'm a military student and yet they act like I'm being irresponsible for not showing up. It makes me furious. I know I need to talk to the folks in the VA's office but I don't feel like I should have to, you know.

U.S. Marine veteran RW shares her observation of the disparity in treatment between male and female student veterans.

I think it's funny how the instructors will treat my guy friends who are military different than me. I mean, there are quite a few of us who take classes together and the guys mostly get treated like little kids. Maybe because they act more like

little kids but I don't know if it's just because I'm a girl or what. I guess I do act

more mature than them but still, I guess it really isn't cool that they get treated

with less respect especially if it's because I'm a girl.

U.S. Navy veteran TH takes a lighthearted approach to respect in the classroom

and offers his thoughts on why he feels he has his teachers' respect.

I feel like I get respect from my teachers. I've never felt like they treat me bad but

maybe it's my accent. I don't know if I scare them or what [TH speaks with deep

Southern drawl]. Maybe it's 'cause I talk a lot in class. I mean, you know, I raise

my hand and try to add to whatever we're talking about. I guess that looks good to

them so they think I'm smarter or somthin'. I guess I got 'em fooled.

Theme 4: Classroom Policies and Assignments

Each instructor brings a unique set of policies to the classroom with some being

variations of standard academic practice. Assignments are as varied as classroom policies

and the production of the work related to those assignments is governed by those very

class policies. Participants shared a wide range of policies and assignments affecting

them at TCC and while there was some common ground pertaining to likes and dislikes

with both, there was also some divergent thinking as to which were helpful and which

hindered student learning.

U.S. Army veteran BP noted that the ability to do homework online through Canvas, the

school's learning management system was an important policy and aspect of any

assignment. He shares:

The ones that facilitated were on-line turn in stuff. That is awesome. Because, and

once again I have god-awful handwriting as you can tell by my signature. Just

terrible and it takes so long to do everything. So especially for the humanities,
classes or the less hard sciences where you have to write paragraph after
paragraph all the time instead of just showing your mathematical notation. It is
super nice to be able to type it out and hit send. So that is great. I love that.
Canvas has been amazing for that.

As noted in theme 3, BP is adamantly opposed to an attendance requirement in
any class. His feeling is that if he happens to be well versed in material that is to be
presented on a specific day, he should be able to miss the class for that day and not be
penalized.

BP notes that he does not enjoy working in groups but gains the most diverse
knowledge when made to do so. He is majoring in chemical engineering and says the labs
he is required to do in biology, chemistry, and physics are the most enjoyable as he
relishes the hands on experience combined with group work.

U.S. Army veteran AE expressed disdain for attendance policies though his
concern was more that he often has to be late to class and does not appreciate being
docked points for being tardy. When asked about classroom policies concerning
electronic such as cellphones in class, he stated, "Other people texting in class doesn't
bother me. I need to text every once in a while so it's no big deal." AE states that he does
not like doing his homework online through Canvas. He claims that he does not learn as
much as doing work on paper with his book because of his proclivity to "cheat." He
shares that when doing work online, he can open the e-text and just put questions into the
search window. The system then gives him the answer without looking through the text

to find it. He claims he misses out on much of the context of what is being taught but cannot resist the temptation to take the shortcut when doing homework online.

AE mentions that online discussion boards are helpful for him as he is not always able to quickly come up with responses during in-class discussion. He likes having the ability to think about his reply before "speaking." Because of the nature of many of the classes AE takes, he has the opportunity to go on several field trips per term and notes that they are very educational aside from simply being enjoyable outings.

U.S. Navy veteran AL notes that online quizzes were very troubling for her. She has taken several online class where online quizzes were the standard but said that she does not understand why so many professors teaching face-to-face classes require online quizzes. She shares, "The quizzes, you know, the online ones, they're always timed and it makes me so nervous. I wind up doing a bad job because I'm so worried about running out of time." She notes that she actually enjoys in-class quizzes and usually performs well on them. She mentioned that she really enjoys pre-quiz assignments and spoke of her current math class where the instructor gives assignments the day before a quiz and the assignments use the exact formulas that will be on the quiz so she can better prepare for the upcoming quiz.

AL was one of the few participants who claimed to enjoy lectures. She stated that she learns best from listening to the instructor talk about the subject while she takes notes. Hands-on work is less effective for her than absorbing the material through lecture. Committed instructors use a variety of techniques to address learning styles, but teachers cannot always address every student's unique needs.

U.S. Army veteran AG was in the minority of participants appreciating an attendance policy. She stated that she appreciates being held accountable for being in class and being on time.

A policy AG has found very hindering is that of not being allowed to work ahead in her online classes. Most of the classes she takes are full online and most of the instructors will not allow students to work ahead. She states that she understands that it is important for the class to stay together though several of her math classes did not require this. She was able to finish the entire term's work in a few weeks and then devote more time to her remaining classes.

AG talked of several classes where she was required to go on what she called "individual field trips." These were trips to museums, galleries, and other facilities outside of class. She found them very troublesome because she lives a great distance from the school and most of the venues are near the school. AG takes most of her classes online to avoid the commute to campus and resents having to make the trip for an online class. She further explained that for most of those field trips, an essay assignment was required. She found those to be difficult and she does not feel she learned any valuable information from having completed them.

AG noted that when she was involved with a face-to-face class, it was helpful when the instructor gave in-class time to work on projects. She notes that several classes she has taken had included both individual and group projects. She notes that her time is limited and because of her long commute, arranging meetings with class members outside of class is difficult.

AG stated that it is very important the class have a required textbook. Without a text, she did not feel "grounded" with the subject. She shares:

Definitely a textbook. Yes, just even if the professor isn't using it like every day if you're confused about anything like any of the subjects that they're going through you can go read it for yourself in the text. That's always easier. Just so you're not confused about what's going on. Like I said in that Socratic dialogue class there was a textbook that it wasn't used every day so if you left class confused which a lot of people kinda were you know, he wasn't really putting notes on the board he would always say if you're lost read chapter 3. So that's just what we did and that was helpful having the textbook.

U.S. Army veteran AH states that he does not really care what the assignments are as long as they are varied. In contrast to many other students he does not like having the same type of assignment each week as many classes do. He claims most of his classes do the exact same assignments every week with different topics, and it gets very monotonous. He expressed that he likes it best when the professor randomly puts different assignments up each week so you "never know what you're going to get." He acknowledges that the classes he has taken where this was the standard were great for him but "horrific" for most other students. He shares, "I know people want a routine and to have things go regular. Knowing what's coming each week. I just like to have things shaken up a bit. It makes it much more interesting for me."

AH notes that he really enjoys online assignments in particular, online quizzes because he enjoys having the instantaneous feedback. "When you turn them in during class, you have to wait to see how you did."

U.S. Navy veteran CW noted many of his professors were not clear on their expectations for classwork. He would complete and turn in assignments only to have the instructor tell him they were not what was to be done. He talked of one professor who would offer suggestions for how to do a particular assignment and then grade the work down for him having followed the suggestion. He shared, "Clear expectations on what they want me to do is just something that should be automatic. I mean, tell me exactly what you want me to do and I'll do it. Don't leave me guessing."

CW shared that he felt the most effective assignments for him were any type that requires him to do research. He enjoys research and says he learns the most from "digging" for information related to a topic he is working with. He shares, "I discover so much more about the subject if I'm digging through the text or magazines or whatever. I get more out of it that way."

U.S. Army veteran EH shared his appreciation for presentations. He learns effectively through preparing and executing projects that require him to put something together such as a poster board or other type of physical project and then discuss it in front of the class. He observed:

> I've never been afraid of talking in front of people. I really like getting something ready to show the class. The whole process of getting it ready really gears me up, I mean I'm able to really get a lot of, you know, information together and then I can just tell the class about it while I show them the work. I learn the most with those types of things.

EH also shared that he enjoys individual, outside of class field trip types of assignments. He attended a multicultural communications class where he was required to visit several

art museums and write about his experience. He reported this was a valuable learning experience.

U.S. Army veteran MK shared that he prefers to take math classes as full online. He has taken all of his required math classes at TCC online because he claims the built in help links make it much easier than working one-on-one with an instructor. He explains:

> You know if I'm having an issue with a math problem like when I'm on the website with my math lab or something, you know when I'm doing equations on there there's the help button. So it can lay out step-by-step how to solve certain equations and if I'm doing that on paper or by myself if I do get stuck. When that happens, I'm kinda just stuck. I usually have to wait 'till the next lecture day or go to the tutoring center or even try to Google it's. So when it comes to math and math assignments I do much prefer them being online.

MK went on to talk about one of his professors whose lectures contain distinctively different information than that offered in the required reading. He tells me the issue is that the professor assigns homework from the text but then quizzes over only the information offered in lecture. He shares, "It's very confusing for all of us. Lecture should follow the material in the text so we are all on the same page. It shouldn't be completely different information."

U.S. Marine veteran RW stated that she is very appreciative of the accommodations policies the school has in place,

> I get really nervous when I'm taking a test or quiz. When I'm in class, it just makes me nervous having everyone sitting around me and I keep looking at the clock. For the online classes it's worse. Those are timed and the timer thing is

right in your face while you're trying to take the quiz. It just makes it so I can't hardly do the work. So the school, TCC, you know they have this thing where you can get, I guess they call them accommodations, you know, where you can go to a separate place by yourself and take the quizzes. They give you extra time too. When you take quizzes online, the teacher has to give you more time. I mean, they make the teacher allow you more time because you've proven to them that you need it. When I figured that out, I was so relieved. I do so much better on tests now.

U.S. Navy veteran TH expressed his appreciation for instructors who hold students to high standards in terms of both policies and schoolwork by saying:

I find instructors that hold you to a higher standard and are kind of strict about stuff like when assignments are due, and attendance policies and what not, or your late for class or you miss a lab or something because ya, I'm not the only one in the world that likes to procrastinate with stuff so if they're more strict I will make sure I follow the rules.

TH further shared that he appreciates when an instructor drops the lowest quiz score for the term. He shared a recent class experience,

One of my teachers actually has a very interesting policy. So we have two quizzes a week and you can drop up to three but you have to do three hours in the MARC [math tutoring center] and it's tracked. So to get a dropped quiz you have to go to the marc. So basically if I don't go to the marc at all or anything like that then I won't get any dropped quizzes but if I go to the MARC which will help me learn anyway, then he will drop a quiz for every three hours up to three quizzes. I kind

of like that. It doesn't force you to do anything but it is an incentive to do something.

Theme 5: Distressing Environments

Interview question number three pertains to a visceral reaction to the layout of the physical classroom while number seven queries about the stressors related to the classroom environment. As the interviews progressed, it became clear that these factors were intertwined. All ten of the participants expressed a need to sit close to a classroom exit. Seven stated that having other students between them and the exit door caused mild anxiety. Three expressed moderate to severe anxiety when unable to sit close to an exit door. All participants expressed a strong desire to have the classroom door closed and locked during the class period. U.S. Army veteran AE shared:

I can't have anyone at my back. What I mean is, I have to sit in the back row so there's no one sitting behind me. It's really tough in some of these classes because I also have to sit by the door or I get really, you know nervous. The older buildings are really bad because the doors are at the front of the class so I have to choose between sitting in the back so nobody's behind me or sitting by the door. I hate that. In my sociology class, I was able to sit by the door and turn the desk sideways so I could see everyone. I don't think the teacher liked it and I guess it did look kinda weird to everyone else but it was better. I mean better than having to choose you know.

U.S. Navy veteran CW expressed similar feelings and explained further,

Those rooms in building 15 [TCC's newer science building] are great 'cause there's a door in the front of the class and a door in the back so I can sit in the

back row without having anyone behind me and still be by the door. I don't really

like having windows in the doors though. That makes me a little nervous. I hate

those older buildings with only one door.

U.S. Army veteran AG shares that she finds being in any classroom hard because she does not like people sitting behind her. She is slightly deaf so she has to sit in the front row to hear the teacher,

I have to sit in the front or I can't hear. It's really, really hard for me because I get

so strange, I mean I feel so strange having people sit behind me. You know,

people that I don't know. I don't know what they might do. I lost all of my

hearing in my left ear and my right ear doesn't work all that great. I know I should

check into hearing aids and that would probably fix the problem.

All participants expressed the pressing need to have windows in the classrooms so they could see what was happening outside at all times. U.S. Marine veteran RW was an exception. She stated:

I like the lecture halls were there aren't any windows. I don't really like it when

they turn the lights down for videos but I like being closed off where nobody can

see in. It's cool too because those doors lock behind you so nobody can get in and

nobody can see you. It feels real secure.

Significantly, all participants stated that having the lights lowered for presentations made them feel uneasy.

U.S. Army veteran EH expressed that he does not like having classes in the lecture halls because the desks are bolted to the ground. EH said:

Ya, I don't like the idea of the desks being bolted in because they're not efficient shelter that way. What I mean is, if someone busts in, you know with a gun or something, I can flip a desk on its side and use it for cover. I can't do that with those things in the lecture halls.

Evidence of Quality

Various procedures were used to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity of the study findings. Careful analysis ensured the accuracy of the data from the transcribed interviews via a progression of reading and rereading verbatim dictations of the interview dialog to categorize meaningful groups and developing themes. Triangulation offered a comparison and contrast of the experiences of ten student military veterans by analyzing the responses to the seven in-depth interview questions. To further enhance trustworthiness, thick description was used to provide details about the recruitment of participants, context of the interviews, and to unfold the experiences, opinions, perceptions and views of the participants. The employed methodologies and careful recording of data will allow independent researchers to confirm the study's believability and to verify that the research methods are dependable. Peer debriefing by a doctoral-level psychology professor, a doctoral-level sociology professor, and a master's level veteran's administrator, was used to enhance the accuracy of the thematic findings. The debriefers reviewed the interview transcriptions and the thematic separations developed using Nvivo software, and concluded unanimously that the findings appeared accurately related to the interview data.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to discover the pedagogical tools deemed most helpful and those most hindering to the academic success of student military veterans at Tacoma Community College. Transcendental phenomenology was used to acquire and interpret data provided through participant interviews. The seven foundational research questions provided the detail needed to allow for a rich description of the participant's lived experiences. The identification of seventy-two meaningful statements using the process of horizontalization through Nvivo software resulted in five emergent themes: ease of matriculation, veterans' office, treated as a responsible adult, classroom policies and assignments, and distressing environments.

Included in Chapter 5 are discussions, analyses, interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter includes a general summary of the research and an overview of the findings. Implications for social change and suggestions for future study are indicated.

Research into specific, effective pedagogical tools and tactics for student military veterans entering college for the first time is insufficient. Although there is abundant literature addressing psychological therapeutic practices used to support the needs of returning combat veterans, the same cannot be said for published literature that proposes or documents actual classroom methodology that leads to success in student military combat veterans (Morreale, 2011). A guiding assumption supported by searches of current literature is that combat veterans have unique barriers to education. According to Persky (2010), societal ills such as homelessness, alcoholism, suicide, and drug abuse positively correlate with military veterans having served in combat. Post-trauma embitterment disorder ([PTED]; "Bitterness and Resentment," 2008), and battlemind ("Army Behavioral," 2008) have recently been recognized as subclassifications of reactive and maladaptive disorders (Persky, 2010). Students faced with these issues may require specialized forms of pedagogy and support services in the academic environment. The aim of this study was to contribute to the literature identifying the barriers to education faced by military combat veteran students and to be a guide for faculty looking to establish day-to-day pedagogical and support practices. This study was guided by two research questions:

1. What do military combat veteran students enrolled in community college identify as the most helpful practices of their classroom teachers and support staff?

2. What do military combat veteran students identify as practices that hindered their learning?

A transcendental phenomenological approach was followed to grasp and describe the lived experiences of ten Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans regarding their experiences with pedagogical tools that they encountered during their first academic year of studies at Tacoma Community College. A semi-structured interview style was used, which gave the veterans the freedom to answer the seven interview questions openly and in a style of their own choosing. The interviews were transcribed prior to being analyzed to identify the five emergent themes: ease of matriculation, veteran's office, classroom assignments and policies, distressing environments, and being treated as a competent adult. Analysis revealed preferences among the participants for classroom settings offering a sense of physical security and ease of egress. A consistent theme that emerged from participants' interview responses was that of appreciation for an environment where participants felt they were being treated as adults without feeling coddled. Gratitude was expressed for succinct instructions from both administration and faculty without condescension.

Findings

This study focused on those student military veterans who were successful in their academic endeavors. Morreale (2011) suggested that for combat veterans, academic motivation is tied to academic self-concept. Church (2011) noted that certain pedagogies

and supports are likely to lead to positive outcomes when they provide opportunities to experience and build on smaller successes, bolstering both learning and a positive self-concept. The current study also found that certain supports are more likely to lead to success. As noted in chapter one, home support is widely regarded as important to student success, and veterans may have varying degrees of support systems at home where family members' resources and reserves may be taxed by caring for a loved one with TBI or PTSD (Church, 2009). The current study supports the idea established in previous studies that, while emotional support is important for any college student, it is crucial for those returning from deployment to areas of combat (Church, 2009). Previous studies (Church, 2009; Morreale, 2011) have shown that the need for community colleges to thoughtfully and deliberately scaffold the cognitive, communal, and emotional needs of veteran military students is essential; the descriptions given by participants in the current study align with previous studies' findings. Participants in this study commented on the new stressors they found when returning home from deployment. All ten participants in this study's cohort entered college (most for the first time) within a short period of time after returning from deployment. Morreale (2011) noted that many veteran students were married during their deployment and had never lived with their spouse prior to returning home after their final military tour. This was also evident in this study. U.S. Army veteran BP, for instance, noted:

> I've got a wife and a dog to take care of at home and soon it's going to be more than the dog 'cause she's pregnant so… It's all good, it's just sort of you know, stressful. I mean I get money to go to school and we get a little bit to help pay for rent and food but it's not enough. I have to work while I'm going to school and

that's fine but it just adds more stress. When the baby gets here it'll be, I mean,

it'll be cool but that's just one more thing to worry about you know.

BP noted that while he does enjoy going to school, it adds another stressor to his life and

he says his wife is preoccupied with the pregnancy and does not spend any time

considering his "concerns."

Previous studies (DiRamio, et al., 2008) noted that veterans transitioning back

home often miss in their school and even home life the camaraderie that is ingrained in

military life. Responses given by participants in this study support this idea. U.S. Navy

veteran TH shared that he will soon marry his fiancé and that the added stress of thinking

about a wedding did not mesh well with his academic career. He stated:

[M]y finance's not much interested in hearing about my military stuff. You know,

what went on when I was gone and she isn't the least bit interested in school….

It's kind of getting to be a problem because most of my new friends I've met at

school so we talk about what's going on at TCC and she's not into that. She tries

to listen and act interested but I know she's not.

U.S. Army veteran AG shared similar concerns and noted:

My husband is not military and I think he kind of gets mad because most of my

friends at school are military and they're all guys so we hang out a lot and talk

about our schoolwork and we just sort of have that same type of camaraderie we

shared in the military.

For student veterans, a feeling of inclusion and being treated as an adult is

important (Morreale, 2011; Knowles, 1984). This study's findings support that idea; as

noted in chapter four, one of the most important aspects, which overshadows all the

dissected themes of this study, is the need of this group to feel respected and treated as competent adults. When faculty and staff act in such a way as to portray respect in their words and actions, it scaffolds the student military veteran's self-concept as well as his or her desire to continue to participate in his or her education despite any lack of support outside of the school environment.

This study lent to efficient thematic findings because clear patterns quickly emerged as the participants became comfortable talking about their experiences. Each of the ten participants understood the basis of the study and quickly embraced the chance to share his or her experience and saw it as a chance to foster change where needed to ensure that their fellow military comrades would have the best opportunity to excel academically. Once analyzed, their responses helped fill the gap in existing literature regarding the unique needs of combat veterans returning to higher education.

Several veterans in the current study shared their challenges with matriculation. Military veterans entering college after discharge from duty tend to be older, given that they would not have entered the military until at least eighteen years of age. Most have served at least one tour of duty and, depending on their age at enlisting, will be at least twenty-two years of age. In previous studies (Covert, 2002; Ursano & Norwood, 1996), veterans expressed concern about returning to school after a number of years away. That was also evident in this study. Most of the participants in this study were closer to thirty, and expressed reservation about even stepping foot on campus after being away from high school for so many years. Morreale's (2011) study provided critical statistical data that showed the lack of research concerning the transitions of veterans from the military into college. Literature concerning readjustment has scarcely touched the experiences of

these veterans or veterans in general (Cook & Kim, 2009; Covert, 2002; Shipes, 2002; Stalides, 2008). The current study provides relevant data to help fill that gap. This study found that all participants in this study reported having fairly positive experiences getting signed up, getting registered for classes, and getting their financial packages finalized. There were only minor glitches for some, and all participants reported being treated with respect by all administrators in each of the departments leading to final matriculation. It is noteworthy here that seven participants, while stating later that they do not like being coddled or having their "hand held" normally, were very appreciative of being specifically directed through every step of the matriculation process. Previous studies have found that successful transition is dependent on the resources and deficits the veterans have in their civilian life and in college (Stalides, 2008). The descriptions given by this study's participants align with previous studies' findings. Many participants comments resonated with one who claimed that it was a "stressful time and being shown exactly what to do and where to go relieved most of that stress and made it a positive if not exciting experience." Three of the participants have close family members who have attended college. These three stated that they had been "shown the ropes" by relatives and knew exactly what do. They did not need or appreciate "hand holding" when attempting to register for the first time.

According to all participants in this study, the school veteran's office is a safe haven for student veterans at Tacoma Community College. This is in keeping with what participants of previous studies have reported: Successful transition is related to the nature of the occurrence resulting in change, the available coping resources, and a prospective student's personal and demographic characteristics (Schlossberg, 1984). Each

participant in the current study stated that he or she is always able to find help and guidance at the veteran's office for any issue pertaining to both academic and administrative affairs.

The consensus among the participants in this study is that the administrative staff in the veterans' office at Tacoma Community College holds the veteran students at the school in high regard. Each participant spoke of feeling respected not only for his or her service to the country but as an intelligent adult seeking higher learning. Each participant made it abundantly clear that being treated with respect was important to him or her. TCC administrators in the student veteran's office are clearly meeting that mark. Their commitment to ensuring each student completely understands the matriculation process and sees a clear path to graduation is evident by report of participants in this study.

As noted in chapter four, respectful treatment by faculty and administration is of the utmost importance to many student military veterans at Tacoma Community College. Previous studies have noted that the feeling of being treated as an adult is important to veterans The work of Morreale (2011), Lemos and Lumadue (2013), Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) and Cross (1992) form a neat bridge that connect today's combat veteran students with the adult learners described by Knowles (1973). The current study confirms those findings: All participants commented on their views and values of being treated as adults. While most felt that administration conveyed a feeling of respect, many expressed irritation with how they perceive faculty to be lacking in this regard. A common theme among the study participants is a feeling of being unnecessarily coddled by administration after initial matriculation. Each expressed gratitude for the initial help but say they only need to be shown how to do something once. The military

taught them to learn quickly and they were chided if they did not. The inference is that by being required to check in with an advisor and get a code to register each term there is a feeling of mistrust in their ability to facilitate their own educational path.

Classroom attitudes varied depending on the instructor. Study participants noted that they had some instructors that treated the class as a whole with the utmost respect and there was never a feeling that any one student was being singled out for being "childish." U.S. Army Veteran BP shared:

I did have a couple of classes where the teacher really treated everyone the same. I mean you know, like we were grownups. That was nice except for the fact that there were a bunch of high schoolers from that program where they can get college credit during high school. Those kids were always horrible. They acted like little punks and they were the ones that should have been treated like kids. It was irritating when teachers wouldn't say something to them when they were acting up.

This was a common experience for all participants in this study as there is a large number of students from local high schools participating in the Running Start program. High school students are able to attend college classes during their last two years of high school and have the opportunity to graduate from high school also having finished an Associate's degree. U.S. Army Veteran AG shared:

I like it when the teacher knows I'm a veteran because most of them treat me better if they know. We have to have them sign the veterans form at the beginning of the term for you know, proof that we are in the class, and I always take a minute to introduce myself and let them know who I am and that I really want to

be in this class. I've never felt like I was being treated like a kid but maybe that's because I make the effort right at the first.

Making themselves known as military veterans may set a precedence with some instructors and foster a relationship of mutual respect at the beginning of the term. Mayer and Salovey (2004) provided helpful exercises designed to improve emotional relationships between teachers and students; their suggestions in a series of books and articles were that instructors needed to be flexible, creative and motivated to help emotionally challenged students – in this case veterans who feel isolated or unconnected to their non-veteran classmates. U.S. Navy Veteran AL spoke of her irritation with younger, disruptive students and how she often feels as if she, along with the rest of the class is being lumped together for "mass discipline." Her sense is that self-disclosure concerning military status would foster a more respectful relationship with the professor. The general theme in the findings is that student veterans at TCC often feel they are suffering admonition by faculty for actions by other students. It is noteworthy that none of the participants reported feeling as if his or her grade suffered as a result of this admonition.

All participants discussed classroom policies and assignments. The classroom policy found to be most hindering to all participants was that of attendance, which current study participants reported had an impact on motivation. Gardner and Lambert's (1972) influential study of motivation recognized two types of motivation: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation is the realization of a *need* to know certain things, while integrative motivation derives from learners' desire or *want* to learn. Gardner and Lambert's (1972) conclusion was that both types are probably present in all learners but

each (instrumental or integrative) exercises a different level of influence depending on the student's age, experience and social needs. Similar to earlier studies, the current study documented the same struggles adult veteran students have with motivation when faced with restrictive policies such as mandatory attendance. Each participant emphatically proclaimed that attendance policies harmed his or her grade more than any other policy imposed by professors. All stated that they are often required to attend functions hosted by military departments and these cannot be missed without serious repercussions. Six of the participants stated that they should be able to decide whether to attend class based on self-inventory for knowledge of the assigned material. U.S. Marine Veteran RW noted that she is a dedicated student who follows the pace of the class closely and carefully monitors her learning through self-assessment. She believes the decision to attend class or not should be hers without penalty.

Seating assignment is another policy noted as being a hindrance. Three of the participants noted that they are currently enrolled in or have had a class where a seating assignment was in place. All three stated that it was troublesome because it did not allow them to sit either in the back of the class so other students were not sitting behind them or by an exit door. The remaining seven stated that they had never taken a class where there was a seating assignment policy but noted it would be a significant issue for them. U.S. Army Veteran BP noted, "I would drop the class if I came in the first day and found out there was a seating assignment."

Elliott, Gonzalez, and Larsen (2011) explained that some military personnel are reactive to specific visuals, topics and other stimuli. The current study's findings align with this idea. For example, having quizzes and exams timed is a policy that all

participants noted as being a hindrance to their learning. It was noted that timed quizzes during class are troublesome but the main issue is timed quizzes done through Canvas, the school's learning management system. All participants claimed that most of their classes regardless of whether online or face-to-face involved quizzes administered through Canvas and were timed. U.S. Army Veteran AH noted:

> It doesn't even matter if I know the stuff or not, it's that danged timer in my face. I get so nervous that I'm not going to be able to finish that I wind up not doing as well on the quiz. It just seems ridiculous that it needs to be timed. I mean what difference does it make?

Professors typically impose time limits with online quizzes to deter cheating. Many also restrict the quiz further by only allowing one question at a time to be viewed and not allowing the student to go back to previous questions once a question is answered. As noted in Cook and Kim (2009), very basic faculty professional development can give faculty tools to provide a calm and veteran friendly classroom.

For example, six of the participants stated that they appreciate the policy of being allowed to turn in late work for reduced credit. Those six mentioned having many responsibilities and not always being able to get work done on time. They are appreciative of professors who accept late work. Four of the participants stated that they do not like the policy of work being accepted late. Their claim is that when a strict no late policy is in effect, they are more apt to get work in on time and get full credit. They appreciate being held accountable for following through with all class requirements.

The flipped classroom is a concept becoming popular with professors. This is a class, in any discipline, where the instructor tapes his or her lecture and posts it to the

learning management system. The student is then required to watch the taped lecture on his or her own time outside the class. In-class time is then spent asking and answering questions, going over problems or examples, and engaging in discussion. Two of the participants have been a part of a math class where a flipped design was in use. Both claim that it was very efficient for a math class as it allowed them to watch the instructor go over formulas step by step and they could pause or rewind as needed. This then allowed more time in class for questions to the instructor and for working through problems. Neither of these participants had been involved in any other discipline using a flipped design but stated they did not think it would be useful other than for mathematics. The remaining eight participants had not been involved in a flipped classroom but all stated they did not perceive they would benefit from the practice. Surprisingly, lecture classes are a favorite among the ten participants. Each claimed that he or she learns effectively from well-structured lectures. Each claims to be efficient in note taking and able to combine lecture, notes, and assigned reading to get a strong sense of the course material.

Barkalow (1990) notes that the military has a unique language consisting mainly of male oriented metaphors. This language is absorbed even by female military personnel. Most of the participants in this study entered the military directly from high school becoming immediately immersed in this "military speak" allowing no time or means to learn the language and writing styles of academe. U.S. Army Veteran RW spoke of her challenges with academic writing coming from an environment where language is male oriented and focused specifically on military engagement. For her,

instructor provided examples of writing expectations are crucial for her understanding of what college level writing looks like. RW notes:

> I get really anxious about doing a writing assignment if I don't have an example that I can go by. I've had some professors that give examples and some who don't and I always feel more confident and actually do better on the assignment if I have something I can, you know, see and go off of. Obviously, with math, we have to have examples and they always give examples with that but not always with written types of assignments.

Student veterans making the transition to an academic environment directly from that of the military will need examples of what is expected and how their cognitive environment is about to change.

Abundant literature exists in educational studies that reinforce the belief that collaborative learning should be at the core of academic experiences (Cockrell, Caplow & Donaldson, 2000; Tinto, 1987). Researchers found that pedagogical practices that encourage meaningful collaboration among students contributed significantly to student success (Cabrera et al., 2002). The current study found that Collaborative learning or group work met with mixed ratings among the participants. Some stated that they did not learn well in group settings while others found it helpful. U.S. Army Veteran MK noted:

> I actually like group work. I know that sounds crazy to some but it really helps me to hear others' thoughts on whatever it is we're working on. I don't even mind when there's a slacker or two in the group as long as there's at least a few who are contributing. I don't even mind doing most of the work if the others will at least share their thoughts.

U.S. Army Veteran BP talked of his negative feelings toward group work and how he seems to always be the one doing the work while the rest of the group gets credit for his efforts.

When asked about presentations, all participants claimed to enjoy the process and find presentations a good learning experience. This unanimity was unexpected as many students are not thrilled about speaking in front of an audience; People who spend time in the military develop a distinct vocabulary, which does not readily adapt to an academic environment (Tannen 1990). In the current study, each participant mentioned military training and the necessity to learn how to lead and be outspoken as a driving influence. U.S. Army Veteran AG spoke of her experience in the military learning to be confident and outspoken. AG found she had acquired a new skill though the language of that skill did not transfer seamlessly to the classroom. Through example and practice, she has come to enjoy being a part of the process of classroom presentations.

Poster boards are another form of presentation currently popular with college professors. These are boards which, are generally a collage depicting a theory or topic. Poster boards as assignments were not as well received by the participants in this study. This data connects to Knowles' (1984) theories about adult learners and motivation. Only two of the participants had been required to do poster boards though the other eight stated they would not find them useful if made to do them. U.S. Army Veteran AE noted that he is not good with art projects and has no desire to be. He is a science major who sees no academic value in "gluing magazine clippings together." U.S. Navy Veteran CW said he has done poster boards in some of his classes and felt like it was busy work. He felt the

time spent assembling and presenting poster boards would have been better spent on other types of assignments.

Eight of the participants in this study are science majors involved in various lab classes with chemistry, biology, physics, and other hard-science classes. All eight reported labs as being a vital part of their learning experience. As noted above, this data aligns with Knowles' (1984) theories of adult learning and motivation. U.S. Army AH is a chemical engineering major who claims he looks forward to lab classes because he needs the tactile experience to fully lean chemical theory. U.S. Army Veteran AE also learns effectively from the hands-on experience of the lab though he would like a system of tenure so that students are not starting from "ground zero" each term. He noted that at least one lab period is wasted each term going over basic lab safety which, he learned in the initial introductory lab.

Field trips as assignments were noted as being useful when they were done during class time. Three of the study participants have been involved in fieldtrips and noted the only drawback is when a fieldtrip is required outside of class. U.S. Navy Veteran AL noted that field trips are enjoyable because they break up the rut of the classroom. She talked of a trip with her microbiology class taken to a nature park that allowed for relevant, hands-on work with the very subject matter being studied in the course. U.S. Navy Veteran TH confirmed his enjoyment of field trips though he finds those required outside of class time to be bothersome. He claims that self-directed field trips consume too much personal, out of class time with no instructor guided learning.

While none of the participants expressed joy in taking exams, they did show preferences for the types of exams administered. U.S. Navy Veteran CW explained that

he prefers multiple-choice assessments because his recall of answers is better facilitated with a list of possible choices. For him, fill in the blank type assessments cause anxiety and create a block to the successful recall of needed information

U.S. Marine Veteran RW claimed that both multiple choice and fill in the blank assessments cause her anxiety and block her from demonstrating what she has actually learned. Her preference is for essay style exams. She notes, "Essay questions allow me to start writing and let the answers come to me naturally." She prepares carefully for each exam and essay questions allow her to more easily retrieve the theories and terms needed to answer each questions.

Church (2009) noted that PTSD can cause sensory difficulties such as reduced vision and hearing. These deficits are consistent with a student's need to sit near the front of the classroom in order to effectively see and hear the professor. Many classrooms have the exit door situated toward the rear of the classroom forcing the student veteran to choose between being near the professor and being near an exit. Most of the participants in this study noted that they do not feel comfortable sitting in the front row where they are unable to visualize the actions of the rest of the class. A diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was not part of the inclusion criteria for this study. The study was designed to be inclusive of those with or without the disorder to emulate the natural chance effect of any student military veteran at Tacoma Community College having PTSD. Randomization in the participant selection process allowed for the possibility of each participant to be affected with PTSD. Though they were not queried about their specific deployments, all participants, when asked about possible distressing classroom environments shared their experiences with PTSD and possible effects relating to the

classroom setting. Eight of the participants stated that though they were involved in

military combat, they do not suffer any symptoms of PTSD. It is noteworthy that each of

those eight stated that even though they do not suffer from PTSD they do have specific

classroom environmental needs that, if not met, make for an uncomfortable atmosphere.

U.S. Army Veteran BP noted that while he does not suffer from diagnosable PTSD he

does have mild symptoms relating to his military combat experience. He claims that he

does not have specific classroom environmental needs such as the room having windows

or not having the lights lowered during video presentations but he does feel more

comfortable if he is able to sit next to an exit.

Two of the study participants shared that they meet criteria for diagnosis of PTSD

and certain classroom situations can evoke anxiety for them. U.S. Army Veteran AH

stated that he had difficulty sleeping and experienced recurring nightmares when first

returning from military service. While the quality of sleep has improved for AH, his

heightened reactivity has not. At present, he does not have a preference for where he sits

in a classroom but states that he feels the door must remain closed and locked or he will

feel anxious for the duration of class. Meuer (2012) notes that for many student veterans,

a person walking unexpectedly into the classroom can be a distraction that makes it

difficult to regain concentration. AH also expressed disdain for classrooms where the

passageway between desks are narrow and often laden with student's personal

belongings. He sees this as a barrier to quick egress. This resonates with Sinski's (2012)

findings concerning blocked egress and the advice for instructors to keep aisles clear and

free for easy access to the exit as well as lowering anxiety for student veterans.

U.S. Army Veteran EH stated that he has moderately severe PTSD and finds sleeping difficult. He stated that he has been taking sleeping aids for the past year and is working closely with a therapist. He talked of "triggers" in daily life that can be upsetting and finds them at times in the classroom. Clark (2014) found that any sort of stressor can trigger a combat veteran's fear and anticipation of a life threatening experience. Sudden noises from fellow classmates or the instructor are particularly troublesome as can be class videos or presentation. EH has made use of Tacoma Community College's Access Services program that allows students with documented disabilities the affordance of accommodations such that they may participate in the academic environment in an alternate fashion to accommodate their disability. Classroom layout and faculty policies are of major concern for student military veterans regardless of a PTSD diagnosis. All study participants noted that some level of accommodation is required for their comfort and ability to learn effectively in the classroom setting.

Conclusions

The findings produced by this study show a need for a deeper understanding of and commitment to student military veteran's feelings and thought processes. The solution to helping these students be successful in their academic endeavors is clearly not as simple as adding helpful pedagogical tools and subtracting those tools found to be hindering. While the thoughtful, skillful application of pedagogy is important, it appears a guttural understanding of human emotion is paramount. All of the topics discussed in this study relating to pedagogical and administrative tools and actions are those salient not only to student military veterans but to all students at Tacoma Community College. The ultimate outcome of the study was to enumerate those tools and actions used by

student military veterans who have been successful through one academic year of study, dissecting out those found to be most helpful and recommended, from those which hindered and hence should be avoided.

Each participant in this study spoke of the camaraderie experienced while in the military and how a feeling of belonging and togetherness became very important during that time in his or her life. Each also expressed a loss of that feeling when leaving the military and especially when entering college. While some were able to take classes together with other veteran military students, the feeling of camaraderie once experienced was not the same as that of an organized military unit. U.S. Navy Veteran AL shared:

> It was nice when I could be in a class with other military folks but it was never anyone that I knew personally from the military. I mean, we at least had the military in common but I rarely met anyone on campus who had been in the Navy like me.

U.S. Army Veteran BP shared:

> I don't really want to talk about the military with other students and I wouldn't want the teacher to bring it up unless it was something the whole class was talking about I mean, you know, like the topic we were discussing because of what was going on in class. I guess what I'm saying is it was just hard leaving my buddies behind when we all went our separate ways you know. Then I come into a whole different world [school] and I don't know many people. The new people I meet are usually younger than I am and have no idea what I've seen or would even care. I understand that and I'm cool with it but it's just kind of a weird environment for me.

Being thrust into an unknown environment is nothing new to these students but without the familiarity of comrades who have shared similar experience over much of their adult lives, it can be disheartening. Each of these participants worked to gain the respect and admiration his or her peers as he or she moved through the ranks of the military. In a sense, that "rank" was stripped away when the left the military and certainly when they entered college. An important factor for college faculty and administration would be to understand and empathize with the mindset of this student population concerning the differentiation between accepted treatment of civilian students and that which, might be expected of military veteran students.

Student military veterans are no more likely to be outspoken than civilian students so assuming they will ask if they do not understand something is not prudent. Understanding that student veterans may have different needs than civilian students is the first step in approaching this population. The initiation of conversations by staff and faculty with student veterans concerning what each is experiencing is vital to forming relationships which foster academic success. Asking often what works and what does not work will ensure each individual student veteran is heard and feels appreciated. This too can be a learning opportunity for the faculty or staff initiating the conversation to add to his or her repertoire of effective pedagogical tools.

The importance of being aware of which students are military veterans is exemplified in participant's discussions of where they need to sit in the classroom in order to feel comfortable and not threatened. Faculty who introduce themselves to student veterans and ask whether they have a seating preference will start each term with less anxiety for their students. Regular conversations with these students throughout the term

will serve as a litmus for what continues to be helpful academically and what might benefit from adjustment.

Attendance flexibility surfaced as the single most important policy for the ten participants in this study. Military obligations that keep them from class was the most discussed. This student population is often required to attend military functions and feel they should not be penalized for missing class as a result. Important too is an overall trust by the faculty that each is capable of deciding his or her competence with material covered on specific days and whether or not to attend those classes. Many of the participants found inflexible due dates a hindrance with a preference for assignments accepted late with point deductions. Family and work obligations were cited as necessitating factors for a policy of accepting late work.

An overarching thematic desire with classroom assignments was that of tactile experiences. Participants expressed gleaning the most learning from assignments that required them to take action in the form of research and presentation. Seeking information on their own whether from the professor, classmates, social media, library resource, or any other form, and then processing that information was reported to be most helpful in gaining insight. Presenting this information through class presentations, essays, or other forms of media was reported to solidify the learning and produce the best results upon assessment.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study contribute to social change by facilitating the efforts of faculty and administrative staff at Tacoma Community College to support the academic endeavors of student military veterans. McBain, Kim, Cook, and Snead (2012) inform us

that institutions of higher learning can expect to serve more than two million military

combat veterans in the next decade. Tacoma Community College will see a portion of

that as it is located adjacent to military Joint Base Lewis McChord. Educational funding

for this student population will come largely from outside the institution through the GI

Bill. This creates a competitive atmosphere with other local colleges and heightens the

need to foster an attractive, inviting setting that offers a top notch educational experience.

Creating a climate where student military veterans feel welcomed and respected is the

first step to ensuring their academic success.

Social change will come as a result of scaffolding student veterans through a

successful journey toward their desired goals. Creating and maintaining open dialogue

between this student population and school personnel to continuously monitor those tools

and policies that are proving helpful will be vital to this support. By employing faculty

who are willing to be flexible in applying pedagogically sound assignments and policies

in the classroom, Tacoma Community College will be a driving force in educating

military veterans. This process will enrich the lives of this population by opening the

door to better jobs, higher pay, and a higher quality of life for both the student and his or

her family.

Recommendations for Future Study

The purpose of this study was to determine which pedagogical tools and

administrative practices are helpful and which are hindrances in the academic process for

student military veterans attending Tacoma Community College. Each participant in the

study receives financial aid through the GI Bill and all have similar socioeconomic

standing in the community. To explore the phenomena in greater depth, it is suggested

that this study be replicated by considering its limitations and implementing the following variations:

1. Screen participants based on socioeconomic status. For example, run the study with subjects who are financially able to solely attend classes without the added responsibility and stress of working to support a home and family

2. A diagnosis of PTSD was not a requirement or an exclusion of this study. Those student veterans meeting criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD may show a variance in effective learning practices. This may be especially important when considering socioeconomic status

3. This study did not account for extracurricular activities on campus not considered part of the academic process. Organized clubs and special activities outside of academic requirements may be an important motivator for student military veterans and should be considered in future studies.

4. The age of the participants was not an inclusion criterion for this study though all participants were close to the mean of twenty-seven. All participants were entering college for the purpose of obtaining a degree for the first time. Older student veterans may also be entering college for the first time though many may be entering college seeking a second or third degree with the desire to change careers. Future studies would benefit from surveying student military veterans from that demographic.

Summary

This study investigated the experiences related to faculty and staff of ten student military veterans at Tacoma Community College. Pedagogical tools and administrative

leadership were examined to determine the most helpful and most hindering aspects related to the academic success of student military veterans having successfully completed at least one academic year at TCC. Based on the narratives presented by each study participant, the research was able to uncover five emerging themes: Ease of matriculation; Veteran's office; Treated as a responsible adult; Classroom policies and assignments; and Distressing environment. Implications connected to the emerging themes can assist in the school's efforts to identify administrative policies that foster confidence and instill a sense of direction. This information can assist faculty in identifying classroom policies and pedagogies that scaffold learning while not undermining respect or discounting prior learning.

The veteran's office at Tacoma Community College, by student report, is efficient and respectful when dealing with student military veteran's academic needs. This level of efficiency is not always in place with advising and registration. Advisors and registration personnel could benefit from a clearer sense of the experiences and needs of student military veterans. Regular meetings between the veteran's office team and college administration staff could close this gap and create communication channels focused on mutual education geared toward better serving the student military population.

This study's identification of themes offers faculty a first-hand account of the practices he or she is using that are creating stress and breaking down the learning process for student veterans. It affords an opportunity to evaluate curricula and policy that may not be working or worse, hindering student performance. The expression of beneficial tools, assignments, and policies by student veterans offers faculty a launch pad for building a course rich in pedagogically sound assignments, projects, and expectations.

The overarching premise of this research reveals that the characteristics of respect,

affirmation, and communication are vital elements in creating and maintaining a campus

environment where student military veterans can thrive.

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