

CREATIVE AND REFLECTIVE WRITING IN MEDICAL TRAINING

I. Reasons for using creative and reflective writing in medical education

- A. What we'd like to do at this point is generate a discussion to consider various rationales for incorporating creative and reflective writing into overstuffed curricula
- B. These all address in some way the following: questions
 - 1. What are our goals?
 - a. Narrative competence
 - b. Increased empathy
 - c. Greater ability to deal with ambiguity, uncertainty
 - 2. Why is writing a good way to achieve them?
 - a. Better than ruminating, cogitating
 - b. Talking, griping
- C. We'll offer one possible framework, but expect that you will both challenge our blinders and provide us with other possibilities

II. Writing has two phases, or dimensions that are of interest to us as educators

- A. Writing as an individual, solitary pursuit that requires both reflection and imagination
- B. Writing as a public pursuit, through sharing, that requires
 - 1. For the writer, vulnerability and risk-taking
 - 2. For the listener, presence and witnessing

III. Different ways of thinking about writing

- A. Writing as a reflective act
- B. Writing as a creative act
- C. Writing as a communal act
- D. Writing as a healing act
- E. Not a case of one or the other, but have a synergistic relationship to one another
- F. All occur in both the private and the public phases of writing, but somewhat differently

IV. Writing as a reflective act

- A. Medicine is a practice profession
- B. Importance of reflecting on events, interactions, others, self
- C. A way of discovering new meaning, insights
- D. A way of becoming aware of other points of view
- E. A way of exploring emotion in self and others
- F. A way of exploring the narrative structure of events
- G. The individual writer reflects on the situation; the group sharing triggers additional reflection

V. Writing as a creative act

- A. Writing as an end in itself
- B. It pursues beauty and truth
 1. More particularistic and local
 2. Less universal and general
- C. It seeks to create order from chaos
- D. Through imagination, it offers the possibility of going beyond the constraints of what is
- E. Individual efforts at creativity are supplemented by the group's interpretations of the creativity inherent in the work

VII. Writing as a communal act

- A. Writing always has an audience
- B. Shared writing involves offering and receiving
- C. Shared writing requires
 1. A safe environment
 2. A willingness to not only hear, but respect
- D. Shared writing involves
 1. Vulnerability and risk-taking for the author
 2. Presence and witnessing for the listener(s)

VIII. Writing as a healing act

- A. Research suggests that writing has beneficial psychological and even physiological effects
- B. Writing has been used with many at-risk groups (rape victims, trauma survivors, prisoners, cancer patients, college students, medical students, patients with chronic illness)
- C. Controversy as to whether such personal writing is empowering or socializing
- D. On an individual level, writing can be a way to reclaim voice
- E. On a public level, it can reduce isolation and alienation, and restore a sense of community

IX. Potential effects of writing on learners

- A. Narrative competence
- B. Imagination and creativity
- C. New insights from new ways of looking at things
- D. Increased empathy
- E. Reducing isolation/restore community
- F. Emotional healing for individual and for group