

## **My Epistemological Statement**

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As a doctoral researcher in Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching (ILT) at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), my epistemological stance is profoundly shaped by my history, military background, academic training, and worldview. My research for BBL7023 Qualitative Research Methods for Culture, Literacy, and Language aims to support veteran students in higher education, especially those facing cognitive challenges such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Moral Injury, and other learning disabilities as they transition into higher education. My epistemological approach stems from my lived experiences, disciplinary training, and commitment to fostering inclusive educational practices that enhance student success.

My epistemological foundation is deeply intertwined with my personal history. I grew up in a rural town in Florida where educational resources were limited, and I often struggled to find my identity, particularly as an LGBTQ+ student navigating a socially conservative environment. The isolation I felt during these formative years gave me an acute awareness of the importance of supportive, inclusive learning environments. This experience has fueled my commitment to ensuring that marginalized student populations, including veterans with cognitive challenges, have access to educational resources and support systems that empower them to succeed.

My experience as a U.S. Army combat veteran who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF-I) has profoundly shaped my perspective on knowledge and understanding. The challenges I faced, including PTSD, reintegrating into society, and acclimating to new academic environments, significantly influenced my transition from military service to higher education. This transition period underscored the barriers many veterans encounter when pursuing higher education, such as difficulties with memory, concentration, and academic self-efficacy. These experiences have enhanced my understanding of the cognitive and emotional challenges that

veteran students navigate and inspired me to seek effective interventions that support their educational success.

Throughout my academic and professional journey, I have taken on various roles that have shaped my understanding of teaching, learning, and student support. My experience as a freelance instructional designer and substitute teacher has exposed me to diverse learning environments and student populations. In my current position with UTSA's Student Success as a Graduate Assistant, I have collaborated on developing workshops on time management, study skills, and ethical AI use. Although these workshops are designed for all students, they emphasize the unique needs of military-affiliated learners, underscoring the importance of tailored, research-informed strategies.

Another formative experience was participating in the National Endowments for the Humanities (NEH) Valencia College Dialogues on the Experience of War program. This initiative used classical texts and performance-based art therapy to help veterans process PTSD and reintegrate into civilian life. This experience illuminated the power of reflective, experiential learning to support cognitive and emotional well-being, particularly for those with PTSD or Moral Injury.

Additionally, my mentor, Dr. Sean Lake, at Valencia College, significantly shaped my interest in education and the humanities. Without his guidance and encouragement, I might never have come out of my shell or recognized my passion for the transformative power of learning. Through his support, I developed a deeper understanding of how classical texts can serve as a bridge for reflective, meaningful learning experiences.

My worldview is shaped by my experiences as a veteran, an LGBTQ+ student, and someone who grew up in a rural environment. Learning is a personal, social, and interactive

process influenced by one's background, identity, and life experiences. I have witnessed firsthand how challenges like PTSD, Moral Injury, and learning disabilities can affect educational success, and I am dedicated to advocating for support systems that address these issues.

I also recognize the significance of inclusivity and accessibility in education. My experiences navigating various educational environments have increased my awareness of the need for spaces where all students, regardless of their background or cognitive challenges, feel acknowledged, supported, and empowered to succeed.

My academic and disciplinary training provides a solid foundation for my research focus on veteran student success in higher education. I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in Classical Studies and Humanities and a Master of Arts degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). These degrees have given me a strong understanding of critical thinking, educational theory, curriculum design, and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning.

Additionally, I have obtained Information Technology (IT) certifications and am pursuing a Graduate Certificate in Learning, Design, and Technology (LDT) while working on my Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching. My coursework has equipped me with skills in designing, implementing, and evaluating technology-enhanced learning environments. My interdisciplinary training includes Educational Psychology, which helps me understand the cognitive impacts of PTSD and Moral Injury on learning and memory, as well as Veteran Studies, which provides insights into the unique experiences and challenges faced by military-affiliated students. My ongoing research and professional development in trauma-informed educational practices further enhance my ability to create interventions that support the cognitive and emotional well-being of veteran students.

My proposed research for BBL7023 aims to explore how higher education institutions can better support veteran students with cognitive challenges during their academic transitions. This study will employ a qualitative, phenomenological approach to understand the lived experiences of veteran students with PTSD, Moral Injury, and learning disabilities. Through interviews, focus groups, and participant observations, I will investigate the challenges these students encounter, their perceptions of existing support services, and the factors that contribute to their academic success.

I connect with the participants of this study not only because of my shared military background but also through my personal experiences with educational transitions and identity development. My goal is to amplify the voices of veteran students, ensuring that their perspectives shape the development of inclusive, evidence-based support strategies. By approaching this research with reflexivity, empathy, and a commitment to academic rigor, I aim to contribute to a broader understanding of veteran student success and educational institutions' role in facilitating positive learning outcomes.

In conclusion, my epistemological stance is shaped by my experiences as a veteran and LGBTQ+ student, my professional background as an educator and instructional designer, and my academic training in ILT. My worldview, which prioritizes inclusivity and student-centered learning, motivates me to explore strategies for assisting veteran students with PTSD, Moral Injury, and learning disabilities. Through qualitative research in BBL7023, I intend to generate insights to inform the development of educational practices and policies promoting veteran student success in higher education. By maintaining reflexivity and engaging with diverse participant narratives, I aim to contribute academically rigorous and practically meaningful research for veteran students and the institutions that support them.