Working Assumptions

national writing project

HOW-TO

Narratives in Focus: A Lesson for Educators

IN COLLABORATION WITH THE NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT

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Working Assumptions is a cultural non-profit that explores the everyday give-and-take of family and care through visual storytelling, encouraging reflection and dialogue.

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This **how-to** is designed **for all current educators**.

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Overview

Care in our work and personal lives is interconnected. As educators, we constantly navigate the emotional and intellectual needs of our learners while also tending to our personal responsibilities.

Amid this balance, the concept of care — how we give it to others, how we receive it, and how we extend it to ourselves — influences how we present ourselves each day. By pausing to observe the flow of care across both personal and professional contexts, we can better understand what sustains and challenges us, and how we might cultivate a more balanced self.

In this activity, you will reflect on the role of care in your life by reflecting on how you give, receive, and practice care both at work and at home.

You will create a triptych by selecting three photographs, writings, or a mix of both that collectively express your relationship to care.

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Reflect and Prepare

1. Consider what it means to be an educator by reflecting on the relationships with your colleagues, your students, and the broader community. What form of mutual support exists?
2. Think about the times and spaces of your day that make you think, “This is what it means to be an educator.”
3. What is it like when work and your personal life blend?

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Writing Prompt

Take a moment to freewrite and respond to these three prompts:

1. **The care you give:** Think about how you care for others at home and at work. Are there conflicts between them?

   Example:
   The quality of care I provide at home and work is similar, but the time and attention I offer are significantly different. My job demands a lot from me; attending to the diverse needs of my students often leaves me feeling drained. When I return home, I feel like I'm half a person, which means I give less care in that environment.

2. **The care you receive:** How do you accept care? Do you allow yourself to be cared for? What forms of care feel most meaningful to you?

   Example:
   I practice self-care by engaging in activities I enjoy, like reading. However, I struggle to accept care from others at work due to my role as a classroom leader, where I primarily provide support for my students. While they express appreciation, it's challenging to let my guard down. I value thoughtful comments, such as "I appreciate your help with the difficult lesson," and I want to be more open to receiving care at work.

3. **The way you care for yourself:** How do you care for yourself physically, emotionally, and mentally? What do you do to recharge, set boundaries, or show yourself kindness?

   Example:
   I take care of myself in various ways. In the classroom, I practice deep breathing, avoid excessive multitasking, and take mental breaks as needed. I also mentally reward

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myself when a student makes progress in a certain area. These affirmations help me feel positive about the work I am doing. I often recharge by learning from my colleagues for support. I show kindness by reminding myself that I am human and that making mistakes is part of the process. I try to take it easy.

Now that you have written your texts, revise them for clarity. If you choose, make your texts creative by adopting a style:

- Use **descriptive writing** for detailed text filled with sensory imagery.
- For dreamlike or imaginative text, use **magical realism**.
- Use **narrative writing** to create a storyline and describe characters or events.
- A **Shakespearean sonnet** is a great style to use for rhythm, rhyme, or structure.
- For powerful or concise imagery, try writing a **haiku**.
- Use a **limerick** for a light sense of humor.

Here is an example of a haiku adapted from the response to “The way you care for yourself”:

Breathing, caring, breaks.
Accepting support from peers.
Taking it easy.

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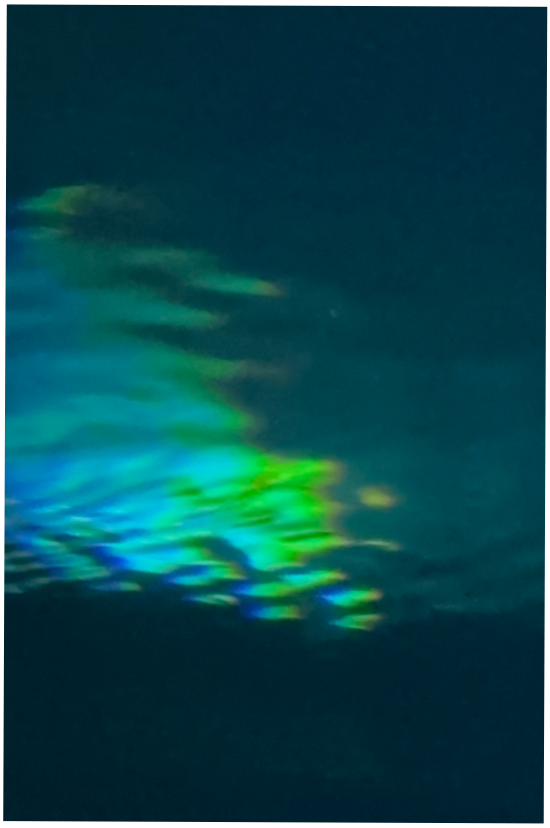
Photography Prompt

Use your writing as inspiration to take at least three photographs that capture these elements of care:

- Giving
- Receiving
- Practicing

Your photographs do not need to be literal; instead, they can show abstract or symbolic ideas. They can also express the feeling of care.



Giving:
A photograph I took of water. My care, like the water, ebbs and flows. The care I give finds its way back.

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Receiving:
A photograph of a gift from an arts program I helped run.



Practicing:
A photo of my bookcase. I read as a form of care.

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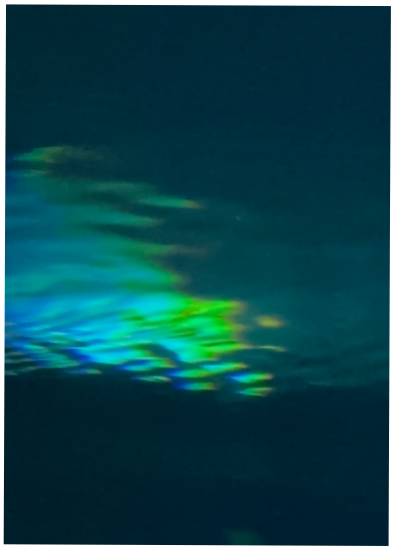
Creation of a Triptych

Select three pieces to create a triptych: two photographs and one writing, or two writings and one photograph. Arrange them in a meaningful sequence that tells a story of care in your life.



Breathing, caring, breaks.
Accepting support from peers.
Taking it easy.



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Reflection

Now reflect on your triptych:

- How did working with both words and images affect your understanding of care?
- What does your triptych say about you at work, at home, and in between?

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