



Student to Student: Writing Plays and Building Community

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(This [blog post](#) is a part of series highlighting the work of recipients of TCG's [Blue Star Theatres grant program](#). Young Playwrights' Theater is the recipient of Blue Star Theatres grant funds supporting their Military Child Education Coalition.)

On my second day at Young Playwrights' Theater (YPT), I was asked to attend a conference at the National Harbor. I was told that I would be meeting a new and special population of students that we were excited to work with. When I arrived at the convention center, I was whisked into a ballroom full of bright-eyed students who were all attending the annual conference for the Military Child Education Coalition. I was new to YPT, and so were they, and I watched them leap into action by writing monologues and playing games, culminating in a final performance that afternoon of their monologues at their keynote presentation. I was inspired by the students who were so eager to participate, and so eager to share their stories.

YPT is proud to be a Blue Star Theatre. Our programming reaches over 2,000 students in public schools in DC, Maryland and Virginia each year, including schools in close proximity to military bases such as Bolling Air Force Base in Southeast DC and Fort Belvoir in Northern Virginia. We estimate we reach over 100 hundred youth from military families each year through our programming.

This year, through a grant award from TCG/Blue Star Theatres, YPT was able to partner once again with the Military Child Education Coalition, bringing our signature programming to students participating in MCEC's Student-2-Student Program (S2S) program in Washington, DC during Spring 2015. The S2S program works with civilian and military-connected high school students to create and sustain peer-based programs in their schools to support youth from military families as they transition between schools. Through this project, YPT worked with twenty military-connected students at Wilson High School in Northwest DC through arts-integrated workshops, led by a professional teaching artist.

Students learned the fundamentals of playwriting through eight interactive workshops, including visits from professional actors, and worked individually and in groups to create original dramatic pieces on topics of personal significance. Our goal for this project was to engage military-connected students in a challenging and interactive arts-integrated learning environment where they could share their stories and discover the power of their own voices.

One of the workshops in YPT's program curriculum involves an activity called the "Story Circle." In this workshop, students go around the circle and each share a 2-minute story following the prompt: "Tell a story about a time when you felt either very connected to a group, or very disconnected from a group." Students are then able to use this story as inspiration as they write a monologue or dialogue to be shared in the final performance. Our teaching artist found this activity to be especially relevant to military children, who struggle with a sense of belonging as they transition between schools and must integrate into new communities, often several times in one year. By sharing these stories with their peers as part of the activity, students were able to recognize that both their military and non-military peers struggle with similar issues. By giving students the opportunity to delve more deeply into these stories by creating dramatic pieces inspired by these stories, this workshop provided students with the direct experience of using writing as a tool for positive self-expression – an important lesson they can carry with them beyond their experience in YPT's program.

Our teaching artist shared in the culminating workshop report, "After performing their original scenes in front of the rest of the students, and a moment of reflection, students concluded that regardless of how different or unique a person's background may be from someone else's, a mutual understanding can always be found as well as a benefit to reaching a common goal."



The program culminated in a sharing of the students' work, open to the school, their peers, teachers and families members. This performance gave students a platform to share their unique perspectives on the issues they face in their own lives and discover the power of playwriting and the arts as a tool for self-expression. Ultimately, this project served to validate our belief that playwriting and theater arts can be a powerful tool to reach young people who may feel isolated in their communities – including communities that are sometimes less-visible, such as youth from military families.

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Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for theatre, and Blue Star Families, the country's largest chapter-based military families non-profit organization, are pleased to support the

inaugural round of the Blue Star Theatres Grant Program. Through support from MetLife Foundation, the Grant Program funds efforts that deepen the relationship between participating Blue Star Theatres and their local military community: veterans, children of active duty military, military spouses and/or active duty military. Each theatre received \$5,000 to support activities that could include talkbacks, outreach programs, sponsored tickets, performances, playwriting workshops, readings or workshops that focus on military themes and service.

