Chapter 8
Reflections of Anxiety Narratives

ABSTRACT

This narrative discusses a research study using both qualitative and quantitative methods to illustrate the connections between writing and healing. College students who answered survey questions about their health reported anxiety as a concern. Writing in journals became a method of coping with anxiety, which led the research to evolve into a social action project of managing stress and eliminating the stigma surrounding anxiety. Resources to help anxiety include exercise, nutrition, and belonging to a supportive community.

PANDEMIC ANXIETY

We conducted the research for this chapter several years before the pandemic began, but the strategies we implemented for helping people cope with anxiety continue to make a lasting impact. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major effect on our lives. Many of us are facing challenges that can be stressful, overwhelming, and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Public health actions, such as social distancing, are necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19, but they can make us feel isolated and lonely and can increase stress and anxiety. Learning to cope with stress in a healthy way will make you, the people you care about, and those around you become more resilient. (https://www. cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html)

We continue to share this research to help anyone experiencing pandemic anxiety, which includes surviving the pandemic and coping as life after the pandemic slowly returns to resembling life before the pandemic. Although life may look similar, people transform as a result of their experiences.

CURRICULUM INQUIRY USING RESEARCH NARRATIVES

Curricular change begins when researchers develop ideas with the purpose of implementing enduring effective change. It is one thing to notice a problem, another to solve it. Researchers can benefit from envisioning ideas from different perspectives and borrowing ideas from other fields. The field of city planning follows a research process that leads to implementation of detailed plans; city planning shares similarities with the qualitative interpretive research fields of narrative inquiry and curriculum inquiry, since both rely on narratives to illuminate issues. Illuminating issues can lead to bringing purpose to life, whether a city planner looks at a piece of land and uses plans to create a new housing development or an educational researcher looks at data indicating college students experience stress and anxiety and uses plans to create a curriculum of healing.

Education endures multiple curricular incarnations throughout the decades, since the only constant in the curriculum of schools remains change. Marshall, Sears, and Schubert (2000) discuss the evolution of curriculum and provide the history that "more than any other philosopher, John Dewey influenced the thought of curriculum scholars throughout the twentieth century, and at the century's end curriculum questions remain easily related to his definition of education. The enduring curriculum question thus becomes, "What adds meaning and direction or purpose to experience?" (p. 2). The question still remains today. What experiences bring purpose to life?

While researchers often study texts or programs from an existing curriculum, the stories of the people participating in a curriculum add another dimension to the inquiry process because looking at policies and procedures cannot take the place of witnessing the implementation of such policies and procedures when adding people to the process. Marshall, Sears, and Schubert (2000) believe, "through biography as curricular text we can see how individuals reconstructed themselves and their work, including the need to reread past decisions and changes" (p. 199). An idea may appear one way in theory on paper, but watching the idea unfold in practice may tell a different story. Educators want their stories to possess purpose; students may repeat the words of an excellent teacher years after that teacher's lifetime.

This curriculum inquiry research story alternates from the perspectives of the researchers being both participants and observers. Narrative inquiry is the qualitative interpretive discipline which encourages researchers to use first person when describing events and intertwine their own narratives with the narratives of the research participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define narrative inquiry and explain, "it is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social" (p. 20). Therefore, in narrative inquiries, researchers learn about a story, report on the story, and subsequently seek to offer their own contribution to the story already in progress. The sharing of stories serves as the methodology as Clandinin and Connelly elaborate, "in our work, we keep in the foreground of our writing a narrative view of experience, with the participants' and researchers' narratives of experience situated and lived out on storied landscapes as our theoretical methodological frame" (p. 128). Think of it as the researchers reading a poem and then adding their own verse at the end. The researchers are changed by the research setting and also change the setting by being part of it.

Curriculum inquiry uses narratives to study an existing curriculum and determine how the stories of the participants can lead to curricular change. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) discuss, "curriculum inquiry is a process in which teachers read and study curriculum materials in the same way that they

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