

Reflections from the Editorial Team: Who Controls the Narrative?

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Abstract: *Reflections* Volume 27 number 1 includes an update from the Editorial Leadership Team and Editorial Board. In this issue we pose the question, Who controls the narrative? We share our collective thoughts about why a platform for narrative writing is more critical than ever in an era in which false narratives proliferate. We are excited to publish our first poem submission and nine remarkable narratives by authors who embrace a common theme—the life changing insights gained from their experiences working with diverse population groups and teaching the next generation of helping professionals. Exuding curiosity and imagination, these authors share counter narratives that have emerged from fully listening to and interacting with clients, colleagues, and students. Their words illuminate our understandings, raise our consciousness, and call us to embrace change.

Keywords: counter narrative, insight, human relationships, learning, curiosity, transformation, change

We begin by thanking so many people who have made the publication of *Reflections* possible, particularly focusing on the importance of being a peer-reviewed journal for narrative writers. We then examine how the use of “narrative” as a concept has been transformed in the public discourse and offer our perspective on narrative as a force for change. Finally, we provide a brief overview of the articles in this issue and their interconnected themes.

Appreciation to the Dedicated People Who Make *Reflections* Possible

We have so many people to thank, and we are grateful every day for their dedication to *Reflections*. First and foremost, we want to express our sincerest appreciation to Michael A. Dover who has led our publishing team. He has steadfastly overseen the production process and enthusiastically supported us as an editorial team. Many thanks to those student team members who work so diligently behind-the-scenes in the copyediting and production functions of *Reflections*. Our deepest gratitude goes to Zoey A. Pincelli (Copyeditor), and to Assistant Copyeditors Madeleine Buhrow and Karla Seese. Special appreciation goes to Sarah Valek, Michael’s Graduate Assistant, whose thoughtful and high quality work reading final copy and issuing galley proofs in the production process is invaluable. For Robin Richesson we are most grateful for her creative skill in matching our cover art with the themes that emerge from each issue’s narratives.

A special thanks goes to our Section Editors who continue to volunteer their skills and time to facilitating the submission and review process. We are indebted to Beth Lewis (Field Education), Jon Christopher Hall (Practice), and Arlene Reilly-Sandoval (Teaching and Learning). Monica Leisey continues to serve as interim editor of the Research Section, and in hopes of clarifying the types of manuscripts we are seeking we have posted a new description of this Section on our website:

Although *Reflections* does not publish research results or literature reviews, the journal has a long history of publishing narratives of the personal and/or interpersonal aspects of the research process. Some examples of research narratives could be sharing the author's experience of collaboration during the research experience, engaging in the research project, or sharing lessons learned from the research project.

Section Editors maintain a never-ending vigilance as they assign manuscripts to reviewers, keep track of reviews as they come in, and correspond with authors. Theirs are gifts of dedication and commitment to *Reflections*.

Guest Editors & Special Issues

We have been thrilled to have so many guest editors who bring their passion, skills, and time to editing special issues. Much appreciation goes to Patricia Gray, Shakira Kennedy, Eric Levine, Lynn Levy, Amanda Saake, and Benjamin Sher who guest edited our previous issue, "The Effectiveness of Continuing Education: A Multi-Disciplinary Perspective." We look forward to an upcoming issue, "The Impact of COVID 19 on Preparing Future Helping Professionals and on Practicing with Individuals, Groups, and Communities," guest edited by Katherine Selber and Lynn Levy.

We are especially excited that three special issues on racial injustice and systemic racism are in process. Priscilla Gibson, Patricia Gray and Rebecca Chaisson are guest editing "Black Racial Injustice: Personal Reflections to Change Strategies." Patricia Gray is lead guest editor on "Practicing While Black" which remains open to submissions through April 15th. And as this issue goes to press, Tiffany Baffour and Shonda Lawrence's "Call for Social Work Educators to Confront and Dismantle Systemic Racism Within Social Work Programs" is soliciting manuscripts through May 15th.

The Importance of Peer Reviewers

Several months ago, we sent an "opt in" request to all our registered reviewers in order to update our reviewer list. *Reflections* would not exist were it not for our dedicated reviewers who volunteer their time and provide excellent feedback to authors, and we encourage anyone who is interested in reviewing for *Reflections* to join us. In this issue at least 19 anonymous reviewers provided feedback to authors. They are listed at the end of this editorial as a small way to recognize their important contributions.

In previous editorials we have emphasized the importance of being author-centric and that includes providing constructive feedback to prospective authors. *Reflections* is a peer reviewed professional journal in which anonymous reviewers make recommendations about the fit of each manuscript with the journal's criteria. The peer review process is a long-standing tradition of evaluating scientific, academic, or professional work by others working in the same or related fields. For the author, this process functions as a form of accountability, a credible filter through which submissions are carefully and thoughtfully assessed.

Reflections is unique, among numerous double-blind, peer-reviewed journals in which helping

professionals publish, in that it is dedicated to a narrative form of writing. The majority of peer-reviewed journals, ranked by their quality and prestige, privilege the publication of research and are viewed as avenues in which to publish if academic writers want to achieve career advancement (Hodge et al., 2020). Other journals welcome different forms of scholarship, choosing to provide a space for voices that have traditionally been marginalized in mainstream journals (Bhuyan et al., 2020). *Reflections* welcomes scholarship that is grounded in authors' experiences and provides space for highlighting those "aha" moments sparked by human interactions that transform authors' personal and professional narratives. Thus, as editors of *Reflections* we are committed to honoring a narrative tradition in which authors tell their stories as a force for change.

Narrative as a Force for Change

The subtitle of *Reflections* is *Narratives of Professional Helping*. Our review criteria indicate that a narrative is rooted in a rich and detailed portrayal of key moments, examples, and vignettes, that it conveys interpersonal interactions, witnessed events, and felt experiences, and is clear about the author's role. References are used to tie the narrative to the published literature, and conclusions raise issues emerging from the narrative that can be further studied. In short, the author is to place the narrative within the context of a well-told story that helps the reader to discover new ways of thinking about the personal, the professional, and the political in their lives.

It is in the raising of issues and discovering new ways of thinking that we envision *Reflections'* most important contribution to the literature. It is not enough to simply write the story or even for the reader to be emotionally flooded with tender emotions, angst, or even rage. It is in the writer's ability to move the reader to a greater understanding of the issues, to hear the voices of marginalized and oppressed people, and to be motivated to join with others in changing the narrative. Without direction for changing the dominant narrative that subjugates those voices, and using insights learned in the process, change will never come (van Ooijen et al., 2020). Thus, it is incumbent upon all of us to take what has been learned from these provocative narratives and construct counter narratives to those of the status quo.

Counter narratives arise from the vantage point of those whose voices have been marginalized or even erased; they are built upon resistance to domination. Helping professionals know what those narratives are because they advocate for the individuals, groups, and communities whose voices have been subjugated or ignored (Goodall, 2016).

Narrative writing is increasingly important if we are to learn from marginalized voices and if we are to raise consciousness about issues that are often subjugated in a cacophony of false narratives (Robinson, 2020). False narratives have always been with us, but never before have we had the capacity to so rapidly spread words of fury and vitriol, to post conspiratorial language, and to reach wider and wider audiences. Followers embrace assumptions underlying these narratives, sometimes stated but often implied, and momentum gathers. One has only to listen to "the news" to hear words like "we've never heard anything like this before," or that a particular group is "controlling the narrative" or that another group is engaged in "a counter narrative" to recognize that the term "narrative" has been hijacked by popular culture. Words

such as disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, and alternative facts riddle contemporary language.

Thus, there is a critical need for compelling narratives that introduce new perspectives, experiences, and sets of assumptions that encourage others to share their stories, raise consciousness, and call for us to join in the process of social innovation and change (Wittmayer et al., 2019). Cunningham (2021) talks about developing “a shared, strength-based narrative and identity so that everyone can see themselves in the picture . . . our stories shape us” (p. 2).

The year 2020 has been filled with multiple crises, some new (COVID-19) and others that are as old as our nation itself. The most egregious of these is the systemic racism that undergirds the structures within which we live, work, and educate the next generation. Especially during the past year, many voices have begun to be heard. These voices continue to explicitly acknowledge the harm that systematic and systemic racism perpetuates. Assaults on democracy and the integrity of the republic demand we acknowledge the pain and look for new ways forward. We at *Reflections* believe that we have a responsibility to support, amplify, and further the hard work required to begin to disrupt, even dismantle, the multiple structural and processual tragedies caused by this racism. We are firmly taking an anti-racism stance. We believe that the stories we share with each other can help us learn from one other, continue to grow collectively, and better prepare the next generation of helping professionals to voice a counter narrative.

Highlights of This Issue

We are excited to begin this issue by publishing our first submission to our new Call for Poetry, Art, and Photography. Miller’s narrative poem tells a composite story of insights learned from many years of being a university crisis counselor and survivor advocate for persons impacted by sexual or relationship violence. This poem sensitively reveals the transformative nature of beginning to love oneself by creating a counter narrative to shame and victimization. Miller’s poem provides a fitting segue into a rich array of articles that embrace a common theme: the life changing insights gained from authors’ experiences engaging with diverse population groups and teaching the next generation of helping professionals and their use of those narratives as a force for change.

Miller’s poem joins two articles written by professionals who recognize that the people with whom they intervene offer the wisdom of lived experience and are the true experts of their lives. DiReda and Maroney provide a day-by-day narration of their time in Albania. Invited as experts in substance abuse they emerge as co-learners, transformed as they discover new insights and revelations about a country that has fewer resources than the United States yet provides a more humane and caring approach to intervention. Their article is followed by Carrellas’ story of meeting a young boy with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome who becomes the spark that ignites a 40-year odyssey advocating for a group of children who face seemingly insurmountable challenges. Carrellas shares how much has been learned from children and families with whom the author has joined and from which has sprung an urgency to advocate with (not for) them. What is so compelling about these two narratives is the respectful way in which the authors listen to and learn from the people they are there to serve.

Just as the previous articles reveal insights learned from client populations, our next two articles focus on the transformative power of human relationships in which teachers and students engage in the educational process as co-learners. Recognizing that both instructor and student leave their encounters different than when they entered, Dougherty skillfully analyzes the development and growth that emerges through interactions and joint discoveries. Drawing from the ethics of care, in which sharing, understanding, and reflecting upon the experience of the other produces new energy, Dougherty's narrative challenges the reader to embrace a relational approach. Wang's narrative builds on Dougherty's call for engagement and collaborative learning, focusing on what was learned when an Asian social work educator encountered Orthodox Jewish students. Wang shares what was learned about a group with whom the author had no previous experience and says, "It is all about exposure." Recognizing how important it is to learn from those whom one is teaching, Wang tells an unfolding story of growth and development. Both articles offer guidance on how to reframe our assumptions and open our minds to alternative ways of thinking about human relationships.

Three articles are written about adjustments and accommodations helping professionals have had to make during the COVID-19 pandemic. If there was ever anything that challenged our capacity to sustain human relationships and forced us to reassess how we relate to one another, reading Fontenelle-Tereshchuk's narrative contextualizes COVID as a "borderless, genderless, colorless, and vicious" space (p. 80) in which "imagination and curiosity" are forced to reside (p. 71). Seizing the opportunity to rethink education as we have known it, Fontenelle-Tereshchuk explores how the multiple roles of being parent, teacher, and scholar merge within the context of home-learning in which the differentiation between separate roles disappears. Similarly, co-authors Swick, Dyson, and Webb examine how their unit faced the challenges of completely altering their approach to teaching in the face of a pandemic that accentuated and exposed racial disparities and social injustices in its wake. They describe how listening to their diverse student body provided a barometer to ensure that those persons significantly impacted also felt seen through a "call to action" that challenged ongoing racial injustices (p. 87). Silverman's introspective focus follows. In this article, our collective reaction and fortuitous learning during a crisis are seen as both an opportunity for growth and continuous learning in rethinking our own narratives and how we approach the world. All three articles engage us in reconstructing our narratives in the midst of a pandemic.

Our final two articles are written about the professional growth that occurs when the authors are forced to confront norms, values, and behaviors that support taken-for-granted organizational cultures. Fuchsel, Fletcher, and Hill provide four vignettes in which they detail the transition faced by professional educators who must balance administrative and scholarly roles. Committed to disseminating their work, yet having limited time due to administrative responsibilities, they walk us through the process of continually reframing and reconstructing their professional narratives in light of their behavioral, artisanal, social, and emotional habits. Similarly, Nevarez attempts to make sense of a first practice experience post-graduation, reconstructing a process in which moral and ethical challenges cannot be ignored. In both articles, the authors work through their reconceptualization processes and leave the reader with a better understanding of how professionals are called to continually reframe their personal and professional narratives.

These contributors tell their stories, revealing the assumptions that are laid bare when they truly

listen to others and begin to gain better understandings. Since helping professionals engage and interact with individuals and groups whose voices have often been subjugated within the dominant narratives, they are faced with finding ways to speak truth to power and claim the responsibility of giving voice to counter narratives. Let the change begin...

We trust that you will find this issue as you find all of *Reflections*—full of compelling narratives that offer insights that will be useful to educators, practitioners, students, and others alike. Once again, we look forward to hearing from you!!

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We appreciate your commitment to this journal and its authors.

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