Letter from the Editors

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Abstract: This letter from the editors introduces Volume 19, #1, the fourth issue published online at Cleveland State University. The editor draws on each contribution to reflect on the nature of the narratives published in this journal. Conceptual contributions to the literature in the helping professions from the included narratives are noted. A call for contributions to the Many Ways of Narratives series of the journal is issued.

Keywords: journaling; process recordings; human needs; narratives; meta-narratives; practice behaviors

Every narrative published in this journal makes a unique and substantive contribution to knowledge of practice within the helping professions. Each narrative also represents a methodological contribution to our understanding of the narrative process. Each is one example of the *Many Ways of Narrative* discussed in the series of essays inaugurated in Volume 18, Number 4.

The narrative by Jennifer Davis-Berman and Jean Farkas is rooted in a unique form of group work, namely a program for homeless adults that utilizes yoga. As is often the case with *Reflections* narratives, the authors reflect not only on practice but on their lives and the lives of those they worked with. This is a good example of a narrative where we encounter the unique voices of two authors, which are combined within one narrative. Each author comments on a variety of aspects of their work together. Finally, the two authors together discuss the lessons learned.

This narrative also illustrates how journaling can be a rich source of narratives. Journaling and the use of process recordings are much richer than the more discrete logs and practice records kept in this day and age of professional practice. After all, helping professionals have a perfect right, well established in law and ethics, to keep journals and write process recordings of their work with colleagues and clients, as long as no official records or client names or other identifying information are kept. When such journals or process recordings are written during work hours, it must be with the knowledge and consent of the employing organization, with arrangements being made as to where they will be stored. When they are written in the privacy of one's own home, they reflect the personal right of all helping professionals to draw on their professional lives to write about encountering the personal problems and public issues which arise in practice and community settings. This kind of work is not only required by most accredited programs of professional education, but is also well established as the basis for case notes and narratives published in medical, psychiatric, social work and other professional journals throughout the development of our respective professions. Finally, it must be said, we all have the human right to think and write about our lives, both personal and professional.

The publication agreement signed by all authors submitting manuscripts to this journal contains the following author warranties (among others): that this article contains no libelous or unlawful statements and does not infringe upon the civil rights of others; that the author(s) are responsible for any individual or organizational names that are mentioned, as *Reflections* disclaims responsibility for references to individuals, organizations, facts, and opinions presented by the published authors; that the author(s) have taken care to ensure that the article does not contain any identifiable information about clients or patients except as pursuant to appropriate permissions and forms of informed consent as provided for in all relevant laws and codes of ethics, and that the author(s) content in no way violates any individual's privacy rights.

Reflections narratives should be consistent with both the letter and the spirit of this publication agreement. An abundance of caution can and should be used when writing narratives. After all, the essence of narrative inquiry is not necessarily to portray the exact nature of practice settings and client characteristics. Rather the focus is on the nature of the interaction, the meaning of the encounters, and the lessons learned. In some cases

this can be achieved via composite descriptions as well as disguised descriptions. The journal will consider publishing narratives where one or all of the authors are listed as anonymous. However, the manuscript must be submitted non-anonymously, so that the editors can confirm the identity of the author. Such authors will be supplied with a letter confirming they are in fact the authors of the published articles. However, even anonymously published narratives must meet the standards of the publication agreement. All authors should fully consider the ethics of their respective professions and the rules and regulations of the organization within which the practice was done.

Tien Ung's narrative on becoming a bicultural professional and Susan Weinger's narrative on ethical issues and cultural sensitivity when working in developing nations both contribute to a long tradition of narratives in this journal that are relevant to international social work and cross-cultural social work, broadly construed.

Tien's approach to culturally responsive social work practice reflects on themes such as cosmopolitanism, growing, gathering, reclaiming, teaching, translating, transposing, transforming, and transcending. This narrative portrays the paradoxical patterns experienced by bilingual and/or bicultural practitioners. Translation is not an exact science, especially when seeking to convey the meaning of something that was written or said. And this is even less the case when seeking to translate behavior from one cultural context to another. As Tien concludes, some things are beyond translation.

Her article is also an excellent example of how narratives in this journal can make important conceptual contributions to the theoretical foundations for social work practice and social work education. For instance, she distinguishes between being and doing. Doing so has relevance for how social work education conceptualizes competencies. It is not just what we do but how we do it that counts when it comes to practice behaviors that comprise competencies.

At the heart of her narrative is a moving account of her work from many years ago. But she also reflects on a number of theoretical issues which are important for social work practice. Amongst these are how people have basic needs that are rooted in our relationships with each other, and the interdependency which they reflect. This journal portrays helping relationships in a day and age when the relationship between client and worker is often subordinated to measurements of outcomes, establishment of diagnoses, evaluation of program effectiveness, etc. Rarely is the nature of the relationship itself seen as important in its own right. Yet for two important and compatible theories of human and psychological needs, significant primary relationships and persistent caring relationships are basic needs, respectively (Doyal & Gough, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1980). Provision of relationship, even when limited by the boundaries imposed by the nature of professional practice and the nature of specific practice settings, can make an important contribution to addressing the human needs of clients, over and above the specific service needs addressed.

Tien's article and other narratives in this journal present practice behaviors which can and should inform social work education's formulation of practice competencies. Such competencies shouldn't just be dreamed up by the faculty responsible for designing the curriculum. They should be informed by the nature of practice in the field, as reported by field instructors or as derived from research rooted in practice settings. Arguably, as this journal re-publishes online the precious store of articles going back to the founding of the journal in 1995, the accumulated narratives can be mined for examples of practice behaviors and for accumulated practice wisdom that can enrich our practice and education today.

Susan Weinger's article draws on the concept of cultural intelligence. As is often the case with articles in this journal, she first firmly establishes the nature of the conceptual issues she wishes to consider, including as well culturally adaptive personal characteristics and cross-cultural competence in general. As is not always the case in discussions of cross-cultural social work, she recognizes the legacy of oppression and the legacy of colonialism and imperialism in setting the stage on which international travelers strut. She then provides a personal account of her visits to Bangladesh and Cambodia. Such visits produce many dilemmas rooted in culture, class and

privilege, something from which even social workers committed to cultural competence are not immune.

In the special section edited, compiled and contributed to by Monica Leisey, the journal for the first time uses a promising narrative technique: the collective biography. This work is the outcome of a retreat by a group of female macro social work academics. The method used seeks to present themes arising from the process of comparing the selving of each member of the group, as it evolved from the pre-professional, the early professional education, and the later academic life of each participant. One need not be female, or macro, or a social worker or an academic to glean from this unique article some lessons to be learned. These include the role of early life values in the choice of career and during professional education, as well as how hopes rooted in those values are not always realized in one's subsequent academic career. The collective biography shows that this process is not an isolated experience but one experienced in various ways by these women working as social work educators and engaged in teaching and research at the macro level.

Tien's article also serves as yet another example of the multiplicity of forms which the narrative content at the heart of articles in this journal can take. She seeks to utilize a variety of types of narrative content, including folktale and fairy tales, and she draws on cultural idioms and metaphors, as well as on personal and professional narrative.

In the Call for Narratives page at the end of this issue, we once again encourage the submission of additional contributions to this *Many Ways of Narrative* series. Submissions can be made by registering or updating your profile to be sure that the author option is chosen. Then when you submit you will see an option to choose the special section on *Many Ways of Narrative*. I welcome inquires about initial thoughts for how to contribute to this series. One thought: while this is one place in the journal where essays that don't have narrative content are welcome, why not consider writing a meta-narrative about the process of writing narratives, and narrative content within it?

Students in Renee Solomon's group work course produced poems just before we graduated from the Class of 1980 at Columbia University School of Social Work. As Student Union President, I was privileged to read from these poems at the School's graduation ceremony. One began, “Oh process recordings, how I hate thee!" Could not a contribution to the *Many Ways of Narrative* series involve a narrative of journaling and of creating process recordings? How does this enrich one's life and inform one's practice? How can journals and process recordings themselves be the root of reflections that can be transformed into published narratives in this journal? Please see this series as sort of the *Reflections* equivalent of the Writers on Writing series in the *New York Times*. What can you write that will help others write narratives for this journal? Your contributions are welcome.

Come to think of it, would not the writing of a process recording itself be a good vignette at the root of a narrative for this journal? The practitioner could show herself or himself writing that journal, and share what went before, and what came after.

One goal I have set for my term as editor of this journal is to promote increased attention to the role of process recordings and other forms of journaling in professional education. The permanent section on field education will reinforce this. Please consider going back to your dusty notebooks or long-saved computer files of your journals and process recordings. Draw on them to write and submit narratives of your practice. I did just that (Dover, 2009). But don't do it like I did it. Instead, ask yourself: Oh, process recordings, what do you tell me today that I may have forgotten or never really learned, about myself, about my practice and about the world around me? Then share it with us.

References

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