

## Chapter 24

# Multigenre Narratives as a Healing Process

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter uses the theory of narrative inquiry and the practice of multigenre writing to explain the implications of using writing to assist in healing from physical pain. Dr. Jennifer Bird has always used narratives and journal writing with the college students she teaches. During her physical therapy sessions with Dr. Eric Wanner, she realized a neck pain journal read by her physical therapist provided additional insights into pain recovery. In this chapter, Dr. Bird and Dr. Wanner share their perspectives of their collaborative narrative inquiry qualitative research project and advice of how writing can lead teachers to develop a stronger self-awareness of what they need both physically and emotionally.*

### INTRODUCTION TO WRITING AS HEALING

My name is Jen, and I live in a multigenre world. My education students at Florida Atlantic University love pointing to page 177 in Tom Romano's *Crafting Authentic Voice* and finding an example of their professor's writing. They love hearing the story that Tom Romano taught my teaching methods class at Miami University, the place where I first learned the amazing multigenre ideas I now share with them in my own teaching methods class.

During the past few years, my life settled into a predictable and comfortable pattern. Each

semester my students read wonderful works of literature and created poems, scenes from characters' perspectives, mix CDs, artwork and various other innovative projects based on those wonderful works of literature. They wrote detailed rationales explaining their project choices and shared their masterpieces with classmates on presentation day. This was a day where I always skipped meals because several people in the class usually brought food for a genre connected to the text. My life and teaching progressed in a splendid manner until another twist of fate in my life led me to see multigenre writing as more than an academic research project. Multigenre writing became a way for me to help heal my physical pain. This is a story of using writing as healing

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4249-2.ch024

told from the perspectives of both the patient and the physical therapist; the lessons learned from this experience led to additional research and advice to help others.

## **BACKGROUND OF MULTIGENRE WRITING**

This chapter is an example of multigenre writing. Multigenre writing enables writers to see life from different perspectives. Romano (2000) defines the concept and explains, “a multigenre paper is composed of many genres and subgenres, each piece self-contained, making a point of its own, yet connected by theme or topic and sometimes by language, images, and content” (pp. x-xi). In the following pages you will read a first person narrative told from two perspectives and view artifacts such as a neck pain journal and a list of strategies of how you can apply life lessons from the narrative you read to your own life. You will also see everything tied together using the narrative thread of writing as healing. That’s multigenre writing.

When asking my students to complete a multigenre research project, I want them to illustrate their knowledge of a topic using a variety of pieces. They design numerous creative projects, such as poems from the perspective of a character and artwork representing a scene, which demonstrate both their creativity and their comprehension of the text. Romano (1995) elaborates, “each genre offers me ways of seeing and understanding that others do not. I perceive the world through multiple genres. They shape my seeing. They define who I am” (p. 109). I love multigenre papers because I can see a text from multiple perspectives.

Multigenre projects provide for innovation typically not seen in traditional research projects while simultaneously retaining the analysis required of research. Romano (2008) continues, “a multigenre paper arises from research, experience, and imagination” (p. 184). I enjoy seeing

my students’ unique writing voices shine through in their writing. I learn more about each student’s perspective and opinions when reading their multigenre projects than if I asked them to write a book report with no sense of voice. I also find it fun to complete my own multigenre research projects because they represent both the artistic and technical of writing. Multigenre papers provide the author with an opportunity for creativity while retaining the academic rigor associated with traditional research papers. Romano (2004) believes, “our very personalities shape our voices and determine how and what we put on the page” (p. 6). In addition to providing multiple perspectives on a text such as a work of literature, I learned multigenre writing can provide additional insight into life experiences.

## **BACKGROUND OF NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

Pain and I know each other well. My mom died an unexpected and tragic death during my time as a doctoral student. Refusing to sink under the weight of the emotional pain that gripped me, I used the theory of narrative inquiry as a lifeboat to help me heal. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) describe narrative inquiry as “stories lived and told” (p. 20). I forever remain grateful to my doctoral dissertation committee for giving me the opportunity to use writing as healing and complete a study that enabled me to tell the stories of other teachers as writers while simultaneously and most importantly living and telling my own story.

I used the theory of narrative inquiry and the practice of multigenre writing to analyze my story, as well as the stories of the teachers I interviewed. Romano (2000) argues, “theory about narrative thinking provides scholarly underpinning for multigenre writing” (p. 18). Both multigenre writing and narrative inquiry support the telling of stories as research. They encourage researchers to look not only outward at others but also

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