

Chapter 4

Reflections of Leadership Narratives

ABSTRACT

This narrative focuses on a classroom teacher called to forge a path for students during online learning by using journal writing as well as a variety of other methods including sharing life lessons, discussing time management, and organizing priorities. Transformative leadership requires vulnerability, courage, and innovation. During difficult times such as the recent pandemic, leaders need to demonstrate creativity and resilience. Anyone who wishes to enhance a leadership role can benefit from the strategies presented.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

How could I make sure my students learned literature and writing while making lessons as enjoyable as possible given the distance restrictions? How could I use writing to manage the anxiety students felt as well as the anxiety I felt? Brown (2018) believes, “at the heart of daring leadership is a deeply human truth that is rarely acknowledged, especially at work: Courage and fear are not mutually exclusive. Most of us feel brave and afraid at the exact same time” (p. 10). Therefore, I could demonstrate courage and resilience for my students while still feeling the fear of the pandemic. Every student in my classroom lived a similar yet different experience during the pandemic. Even though we lived a collective experience of dealing with the coronavirus, each person lived an individual experience too. To begin my role as a transformative teacher leader during this challenging time, I needed to learn my students’ narratives and honor them.

EDUCATIONAL NARRATIVES

Each person views his or her narrative through the lens of subjective experience. Asking questions and finding themes in stories involves inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) argue, “in narrative thinking, interpretations of events can always be otherwise” (p. 31). Narrative inquiry is the qualitative interpretive

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field of research where researchers find narrative threads in stories that reflect themes. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) elaborate, “try to understand a narrative unity as a thread or theme that runs through the narrative of experience and that provides a way to see how the rules, principles, images, and metaphors relate one to the other as they are called out by the practical situations in which we find ourselves” (p. 75). In other words, when a person shares a story, he or she selects what details to share or not to share. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the process of converting informal field texts into a formal research text by stating, “we find ourselves frequently engaged in writing a variety of different kinds of interim texts, texts situated in the spaces between field texts and final, published research texts” (p. 133). The interim texts of my journal entries don’t make those texts any less worthy than the formal research projects I designed and implemented. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) argue that education, especially when it comes to narratives, does not have to take place in the classroom and elaborate, “education, in this view, is a narrative of experience that grows and strengthens a person’s capabilities to cope with life” (p. 27). People view their lives through the lenses of narratives of experience, and sharing narratives enables people to own their stories. Brown (2015) discusses the value of owning stories and explains, “I know that it takes more than courage to own your story. We own our stories so we don’t spend our lives being defined by them or denying them” (p. 40). When people own their stories and find the strength to share their narratives with others, they find the courage to write new chapters to their stories and change the endings of their narratives.

Furthermore, when presenting narratives, writers can choose which genres best illustrate their ideas. Romano (2000) describes this format as multigenre writing and discusses narrative as a foundation as he explains, “multigenre papers, however, as I conceive them, demand that writers think narratively. Writers must meld the cognitive with the emotional” (p. 24). And writers also connect their artistic narratives with technical research. Romano (2013) writes, “I require students to incorporate research into multigenre papers, regardless of their subject, even if they write from deeply personal experience” (p. 43). Therefore, while I present the narrative information in the creative context of methods I use to help the high school students I teach, my goal remains for readers of this text to find helpful insights for life and leadership embedded within the strategies.

TEACHERS SET THE TONE

Teachers need to meet the needs of students, and teaching during a pandemic requires teachers to demonstrate additional creativity. As Romano (1987) observes, “in a classroom full of opinionated teenagers, the last thing a teacher wants to feel is more vulnerable. The job is tough enough” (p. 39). But when teachers share their stories, students experience the practice of learning instead of only the theory.

I felt proud when a visitor to my classroom commented that I gave students a place to be themselves. Students feel they can be themselves when teachers honor their voices. Just like everyone has a unique speaking voice, everyone has a unique writing voice. Romano (2004) defines voice as “our very personalities shape our voices and determine how and what we put on the page” (p. 6). It involves tone, word choice, and feeling. It’s the artistry involved in composing a writing piece that reflects the personality of the writer.

Teachers who give students a classroom that symbolizes a safe space for sharing provide a platform for voices to be heard. Romano (2004) reminds students, “voice will come. Voice will come when you heed passion, push forward with language, are brave on the page, everything else be damned” (p. 51).

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