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Research Strategy Essay

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The research process for this assignment began with the theme mind and body and the task of creating a literature review. I had been interested in mindfulness and art therapy for personal reasons for the past couple of years, and I thought that the integration of the two into a literature review would address the mind and body theme. I began by using the library's A-Z database and doing broad searches like mindfulness, art therapy, art creation, and meditation. I didn't know which population I was going to address when I began my searches, so I was saving everything that seemed relevant and reading avidly. As my research progressed, I learned to carefully review the methods sections of the research articles to look for flaws that could lead to exclusion from use in my paper.

After I did background and history researching on these topics I wanted to look into their applications and efficacy. I began using Boolean operators to broaden and narrow the search results. I would search phrases like "mindfulness and anxiety" or "art therapy and PTSD." By the end of the semester, my EBSCOhost folder contained 484 articles that I believed could be useful. I also became very familiar with the ILLiad and requested over 60 articles, book chapters, and dissertations through the interlibrary loan system. It was easy to use, and the articles were quickly processed and available electronically within days. I noticed that the fields of mindfulness and art therapy had been used within many populations such as trauma survivors, cancer patients, those with depression or anxiety, and a variety of other mental health populations but overlooked professionals who aim to help these types of populations. I initially

started thinking about counselors, social workers, and teachers who were at risk for burnout and I was curious if mindfulness or art therapy could be helpful for them.

However, that idea changed with some guidance from Dr. Borshuk; she suggested that I see if emergency first responders had been studied within these areas. Since emergency first responders included so many populations, I had to do a variety of different searches to exhaust the possibilities. I had to include paramedics, EMTs, police officers, firefighters, and emergency service volunteers. I found that when I looked for background on these professions, the mental health risks had been documented but when it came to using mindfulness or art therapy within these populations very little literature existed. Due to the mental health risks of the population and their lack of inclusion in the published literature; they became my population of interest for this research.

Once I had established my population of interest I had to find articles about mindfulness and art therapy that could relate back to them even though they hadn't been included widely in the current research. I looked into other high-stress populations such as trauma survivors, war veterans, cancer patients, military trainees, and survivors of political violence. As I found research that I believed was promising for first responders, I noticed many common threads between mindfulness and art therapy. The two practices positively affected the same areas of the brain, they were both used to help trauma survivors, both were associated with resilience, and both could provide participants with positive coping skills. So I began to make connections between the two areas and wondered if they had been used together in current research. I found that indeed, these two fields had been used together and the results had been overwhelmingly promising. Unfortunately, fewer published studies exist that utilize both areas together systematically. This finding profoundly influenced the "Future Directions" section of my paper.

As I used the library resources, I found an overwhelming amount of information, and I read more articles than I imagined possible in a short period. My final count of cited references was 71, and narrowing down to that number was difficult. I had to evaluate the articles for relevance to my topics, strong research methods, and how recently the research was completed. Through this project, I developed a great deal of love and respect for the process of researching and I learned that there is always more to research.