Enacting Reflexivity through Poetic Inquiry

Theresa Chisanga
cinisangat2000@yahoo.com
Wendy Rawlinson
Sibongile Madi
Nkosinathi Sotshangane

Abstract

Recent years have seen a growing acknowledgement and acceptance of the significance of arts-based research. Poetic inquiry is one such form of arts-based research fast gaining momentum in qualitative research. Among other processes and outcomes, it can involve the creation of found poems. This article explores how reflexivity can be enacted through collective processes of creating, performing, and writing about found poetry. Using tweets and intense collaborative interactions at a workshop, a number of found poems were created and performed through highly educative encounters in groups. We share the process, the outcomes, and the positive experiences and suggest that reflexivity in this type of context is indeed an innovative way to transform our educational research practice and bring about change in sometimes highly challenging educational situations. Additionally, this article is a contribution to the growing body of literature that highlights and promotes knowledge creation that confidently places the researcher at the centre of the work—a researcher who is not shy to observe and report with sincerity from a deep concern for personal and social change.

Keywords: poetic inquiry, reflexivity, self-study, arts-based research, found poem(s)

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a move towards the acknowledgement and acceptance of the significance of arts-based research. Researchers now recognise that, in today’s diverse world, many ways of doing research are acceptable. There is an understanding that both subjective and objective types of research have a common aim: the search for, and the communication of, truths (Elliot, 2012; Furman, Langer, Davies, Gallardo, & Shanti, 2007; Kincheloe & Berry, 2004). Poetic inquiry, for example, is a form of arts-based research that is receiving increasing attention. According to Barone and Eisner (1997, p. 73):
Arts-based research is defined by the presence of aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its writing.

Part of that aesthetic quality emerges from reflecting deeply on the researcher’s own observations and discoveries. Elliot (2012, p. 1) noted that poetic inquiry, in particular, “can be used to describe many kinds of thought engagement.” She specifically used the term thought engagement to describe a process of “contemplative truth-seeking, followed by the creative expression of those truths discovered” (p. 14). Elliot (2012) further noted that as a mode of research, poetic inquiry in its own way “seeks to communicate truths” (p. 1). Similarly, Naidu (2014) shared the point that poetic reflection and interpretation allowed her to realise that:

the use of poetry could be helpful in understanding the life experiences of research participants and myself (as researcher) and [in assisting us to] arrive at new realisations. (p. 1)

One approach to poetic inquiry is to work with found poetry. According to Walsh (2014), a found poem is “a poem ‘found’ from words and phrases in the environment that are then (re)arranged in particular ways” (p. 59). Found poetry takes the words of others and transforms them into a poetic form and, as stated by Richardson (1994), is used “to recreate lived experience and evoke emotional responses” (p. 521). The concept of found poetry is linked to the revision of the concept of authorship in the 20th century. Hollander (1997) explained that “anyone may ‘find’ a text: the poet is he who names it ‘text’” (p. 215). Prendergast (2006) contended that “found poetry has a long history of practice in poetry as the imaginative appropriation and reconstruction of already-existing texts” (p. 369).

This article attempts to show how reflexivity can be enacted through collective processes of creating, performing, and writing about found poetry. It chronicles a particular process of poetic inquiry in which we, a group of university researchers, arrived at forms of found poetry through various layers of reflexive activities that became, in a sense, a creative expression of experiences and truths that we have discovered. The poetry, as well as the thoughts and the passions underlying them, were shared as the group individually and severally shared in the whole process towards becoming change agents in transforming educational research practice.

The “We” of this Project

We are part of a larger community of academic staff members pursuing master’s and doctoral studies (staff–students), together with our supervisors, who are all engaged in the self-study of practice in higher education. We are participants in the Transformative Education/Al Studies (TES) project, which is a National Research Foundation (NRF)-funded project led by researchers from three universities in South Africa: a university of technology, a rural comprehensive university, and a research-intensive university.1 We therefore form part of “an interinstitutional, transdisciplinary learning community” (Harrison, Pithouse-Morgan, Connolly, & Meyiwa 2012, p. 12). The overarching research question for TES is: How can I improve my practice as a . . .? Thus, we are concerned about “change, social justice, and professional action” (Pithouse, Mitchell, & Weber, 2009 p. 58). Studying ourselves as “the self” has led us to critically reflect on these concerns and to continually seek alternative ways of improving our practices in order to transform our specific higher education contexts.

At a two-day workshop, Preparing New Paradigms to Transform Educational Landscapes (with guest facilitator, Peter Charles Taylor of Curtin University), held in Durban in November 2013, thirty TES staff—

1 Durban University of Technology, Walter Sisulu University, and University of KwaZulu-Natal.
students and supervisors engaged in a tweet poem activity. This activity was facilitated by TES supervisors who had developed it as part of their own ongoing research process (see Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2014). We were each individually required during the session to write an anonymous tweet (a message of not more than 140 characters) reflecting on our experiences in TES and what that has meant to us. The tweets were scrambled and shared between groups of six to eight people. Every group was asked to create a found poem using sections of the tweets they had received. The words and phrases in the poems came directly from the tweets we wrote, which were based on the question, “What have you learned about yourself during self-study research?” The tweets were reshaped collaboratively to produce one composite poem in each group.

Our particular group consisted of eight participants (seven women and one man). It was a mixed group of master’s and doctoral staff-students, and two supervisors from three different universities. The participants had a variety of experience in research, but all were novices in self-study research. We were also a diverse group in terms of race, age, gender, and discipline. The other groups were roughly similarly constituted.

At the end of the workshop, we (Theresa, Sibongile, Wendy, and Nkosinathi) decided we would like to extend the poetic inquiry process by coauthoring an article about the tweet poem activity. With the permission of the other workshop participants, we gathered together data sources from the workshop and used these as prompts for our subsequent email conversations. Because we are located in two universities located in different provinces of South Africa, our collaborative deliberations and writing had to be a mostly virtual process.

The data sources we draw on in this article include the tweets the workshop participants wrote, the participants’ spoken reflections on the tweet poem process (as video recorded at the completion of the workshop), the participants’ anonymous written workshop evaluations, the found poems that came out of the exercise, and video footage and photographs of the poetry performances enacted by the different groups. We also draw on our email correspondence with each other during the process of coauthoring this article.

**Our Aim in Writing this Article**

In this article, we aim to explore how reflexivity can be enacted through poetic inquiry. We demonstrate the process and end product of found poems created collaboratively by groups of TES participants as a means to start conversations with other researchers. Reflecting on and sharing the process of creating, performing, and writing about found poems may serve the purpose of prompting ourselves and others to think and feel more deeply about our taken-for-granted frames of meaning within which we experience research. This may in turn lead to a greater sensitivity in describing the details and nuances of our research experiences. Helping others understand what we do, what our struggles are with research, and what it feels like to engage in research is another reason for our writing this article. Outlining the challenges we experience in representing ourselves, may make us more sensitive to the struggles of representing others.

According to Prendergast (2009), found poetry is a public form of representation. She claimed that:

> [T]he use of poetry is a means for educational scholarship to impact the arts, influence wider audiences, and improve teacher and graduate student education. (p. 548)

Indeed, one of the written responses by a TES participant to the question, “What (if anything) did you learn from the workshop?” was that:
poetry, of all things, can be used to teach Mathematics.

Another participant wrote:

I . . . also learned and loved the idea of twitter poetry and how we can use it to write and for me it has given me an idea on how to read academic work because I find most of it boring.

Like Richardson (1993), we argue that poetic inquiry is one way to challenge traditional definitions of validity. As Richardson (1994) further observed, “poetry is a practical and powerful method for analysing social worlds as it presents knowledge in a different form” (p. 522). Poetry can touch us where we live in our bodies and invite us to “vicariously experience the self-reflexive and transformational process of self-creation” (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). She also claimed that poetic forms of writing “[inscribe] emotional labour and emotional response as valid” (1993, p. 695).

One of the aims of found poetry is, therefore, to make a space for a different kind of research that contributes to knowing and understanding, and that is written in a broader range of discursive form. Leggo claimed, “I promote poetry as a discursive practice that invites creative ways of writing a life in order to interrogate and understand lived and living experiences with more critical wisdom” (2010, p. 67). Because experience is the only thing we as humans share equally, everyone is able to identify with this form of representation.

One of the rationales for including arts-based representation in qualitative research is that form mediates understanding. This means that what we know and how we know are interconnected. Representing our research in the form of a found poem allows an open-mindedness of interpretation. The nontraditional form of found poetry may help disrupt the hegemony inherent in traditional texts and evoke emotional responses that may bring the audience or reader nearer to the work. This may further allow voices that are silenced or marginalised, to be heard.

Evident in nontraditional forms, such as found poems, is the use of metaphor. Egan and Ling (2002) contended that we make use of metaphoric fluency in the arts. This metaphoric fluency begins in childhood and is what allows a child, for example, to see something in terms of something else, such as a word representing an action. Metaphor, which is often used in found poems, enables the experience of the aesthetic. Although necessitating some risk-taking, aesthetic experience is obtained to some degree by engaging in imaginative play (Greene, 1998).

**Brown’s Seven Questions as a Framework**

We have used Brown’s seven questions (Brown, 1994) as a framework to explain the process of creating the found poems and to demonstrate how reflexivity can be enacted through collective processes of creating and performing found poetry. The questions are: “What did we do? Why did we do it? What happened? What do the results mean in theory? What do the results mean in practice? What is the key benefit for the readers? What remains unresolved?” Below we take a closer look at each of these in turn.

In order to enhance trustworthiness in our inquiry-guided research, we draw on Mishler (1990) who argued for making visible our thinking and actions during research processes. Thus, instead of merely recounting our research process, reflexive accounts of educational research—in this case our poetic inquiry process—should allow readers to engage in a participatory manner with the process undertaken by the creators of the found poems.
What did we do?

Every workshop participant individually wrote down on a piece of paper an anonymous tweet of not more than 140 characters in response to the prompt: “What have you learned about your self during self-study research?” The individual tweets were then collected and redistributed amongst the whole group so that each participant received someone else’s tweet. Four smaller groups were formed to examine the tweets. Each individual in the smaller groups was asked to select words, phrases, or sentences that inspired or “spoke to” her or him. These were recorded by a scribe onto a separate sheet of paper. Collaboratively, the selected words, phrases, and sentences were rearranged. We played with the segments, arranging and rearranging them and then finally organising them into a found poem. On completion of the found poem, every small group was requested to read aloud or perform the found poems to the rest of the workshop participants. Collectively in each group, we looked at creative ways of presenting or performing our found poem, being aware that poetry is performative in nature and, as described by Prendergast (2006), deeply rooted in the sense of voice—as the performances and photographs in the YouTube links below show:

YouTubes 1 and 2: Enacting Reflexivity through Poetic Inquiry
http://youtu.be/VPLyDNHLqek
http://youtu.be/bm8GRqh9tOk

Figures 1 and 2: Photographs of Group Performances

Below are a selection of participants’ tweets and the four tweet poems.

Examples of tweets

I realize that there are connections between my life experiences and my research. My self-study has deep connections to my emotions as I seek ways of improving my teaching and researching.

I dislike reading academic stuff it makes me lose focus, because I have to read it over more than once.

I work best with others, and my best ideas arrive through dialogue. I wish I could co-author my PhD, or just discuss it with the examiners, rather than writing it.
The found poems created from tweets.

Poem A

Reflect Dialogue Create
It’s harder to look at meself
Be able to reflect what I find there
Contradictions that play in my life
Espoused values and lived values

My best ideas arrive through dialogue
Inspired and innovative
I wish I could co-author my PhD
Learned that I can!

We create what I alone could not!

Poem B

Read it over more than once,
Read it over more than once,
Read it over more than once,
Read it over more than once,
Read it over more than once.
Writing is so difficult,
I was self-conscious of telling my story,
Stories keep the testimony alive
Read it over more than once.
Being on the margins is productive,
My work is my life passion,
I don’t need to sound like other academics.
Read it over more than once.

Poem C

Grumpy
Intolerant
Sarcastic
Not a good side
ANGER
My self-study—concerned...
Life experiences
Research
CONNECTIONS
Emotions lead practice-led
Seek ways of improving
Different tools
Argue points
Back it up
Seemingly uncomfortable situations
Enhance learning
Lead to
Better reflective outcomes

Poem D

Exposure
I am
Tension
I am afraid?
I am not comfortable
Inflexible
Not visible
I am a rebel at heart
Seeking order in chaos
Loving stories
Seeking answers within
I am knowledgeable
I am different
I am different below the surface

The poems have no titles. We have tried to reproduce them as they were given, including keeping the written structure as close to the original as possible. The reading and the performances reflected some of these, for example, capitalisation, pauses, zigzag structure, and so on.

Why did we do it?
Workshop participants wrote in the form of a tweet, which is a form of microblogging that allows the writing of brief texts of not more than 140 characters. A tweet may be sent to friends and interested observers via text messaging, instant messaging, email, or the web. This tool provides a lightweight, easy form of communication that enables users to broadcast and share information about their activities, opinions, and status. The brevity of the tweet requires focus and an ability to succinctly summarise one’s research. Tweets foster connections and help build a community because they link people instantly and easily. However, the participants must be willing to share, to engage, provoke, and discuss. Most of us practitioner researchers in the Transformative Education(al Studies (TES) group are engaged in self-study research, which involves improving our practices. Writing the tweet, which we found to be a tool that supports reflection, gave us a chance to critically reflect on our experience or journey of doing research. It enabled us to think about words used to describe experiences of research. In addition, it enabled us to share what we came up with and allowed for a fun way of learning, where we experimented with a new form of expression.

What happened?
Some of the participants in our group had never tweeted before and so the activity allowed us a chance to understand how a tweet works and why. Tweets can be used as a tool for research or can be used in our practices with students. We learned about the characters one can use to replace a word, such as abbreviations, much like in text messages. Some participants found it difficult to stick to fewer than 140 characters and felt restrained in their expression. Other participants enjoyed the limited wording and vernacular language required to communicate their ideas.
Reading other people’s tweets made us aware of the commonalities of our experiences despite participants’ backgrounds from different disciplines and institutions. Reading participants’ interesting experiences made us appreciate difference. Overall, the tweets fostered interaction about the given topic.

Working in smaller groups, selecting and reorganising the tweets, helped us work together as a team and created a platform for metacognition. As we shared different ideas on what words, phrases, or sentences to use for our found poem, innovative ideas emerged on how we were going to present or perform our poem. We were engaging in a creative process of learning how to create a found poem and having fun whilst learning.

What do the results mean in theory?
Reflexivity, according to Grumet (1989), requires thinking about your own thoughts and as Kirk (2005, p. 233) explained:

> the praxis of reflexivity . . . includes a sustained attention to the positions in which I place myself and am placed by others, listening to and acknowledging of inner voices, doubts and concerns as well as pleasures and pride, and a sensing of what my body is feeling. It implies a constant questioning of what I am doing and why. . . . These become sources of insights and a springboard for further investigation.

Following directly on to “pleasures and pride”, Nkosinathi, a staff–student participant, shares how stimulating it was for him to see his tweet “in print” as part of a found poem. He notes:

> Being able to identify that the tweets that I contributed with to form [the] poem . . . made me so proud of myself and the study that I am currently conducting . . . through this exercise, I learned that there is no single method for questioning and answering our daily practices for solutions as I never thought that my study could be this valuable and interdisciplinary. I also realised that my study has creativity and innovation in it.

The inherent creativity in a process of poetic inquiry can enable fun in learning and research, as well as imaginative processes that can enhance the experience of learning, teaching, and research.

Reflexivity has become an important aspect of research in many disciplines where there is genuine concern for innovative ways of doing things for improved results and better practice (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000; Bishop & Shepherd, 2011; Hertz, 1997; Naidu, 2014). Bergold and Thomas (2012) described reflexivity as something that “requires the researcher to be aware of themselves as the instrument of research” (p. 205). This needs a safe space with open communication and different types of support by the co-researchers. Being novices to this form of research, we did face a number of challenges, such as sharing our reflexive activities for the writing of this article when we were physically so far apart. Despite this, we spoke often, communicated by emails, and whenever possible, met face-to-face. Theresa, a TES supervisor, observes:
The process of writing the paper took me to another level of academic collaboration. I found myself having to negotiate the rough corners of different understandings and perceptions of ideas and concepts towards common ground where everyone was comfortable. It was difficult and sometimes, I felt downright uneasy, challenged, but it was also very exciting. The spirit of cooperation and determination to make it work went a long way to make it all possible and worthwhile.

For Sibongile, another staff–student, the process of working together as we created the poetry was a profound experience. As she later said, it helped her gain confidence as our group interactions grew towards the writing of this article.

This article contributes in some measure to the growing body of literature in which reflexive encounters inform the process of creating poetic experiences. Although Schwalbe (1995), argued for well-written prose in qualitative research (as opposed to poetry) he nevertheless declared that:

> poetry can be an aid to making better sense of others, for others, and, possibly with others. We might learn something about representing others by struggling with the problem of how to represent ourselves. (p. 410)

Indeed, as we went through the process of collectively creating the poetry, each of us got the feeling of not being alone in the self-study project and the challenges of supervision or writing our postgraduate research texts. Sharing the thoughts in the tweets and the poems in the end had the effect of fun learning and self-discovery, as the participant tweets below indicate:

> I am inspired and innovative when working in dialogue with others. Together, we create what I alone could not.

> I was surprised to learn that my personal expression and format of my research/work is welcomed by self-study methodologies.

Reflexivity, enacted through the tweet poem activity, made visible our struggles between our own shifting ideas and the conflicting ideas of others—as demonstrated by the response of one participant in the group:

> I can be intolerant when confronted with others’ views of my shortcomings. I can be sarcastic in responding to such people.

At the same time, it proved to be educative and inspiring to many as another participant stated:

> Thank you for organising this workshop, it made me just realise I need to do what I firmly believe is “appropriate” research.
As illustrated through the method, open and honest dialogue allowed us to realise the value of collaborative approaches to enacting educational research. One of the tweets reflects this idea when the participant states, “I work best with others, and my best ideas arrive through dialogue.” It also shows that acknowledging differences in points of view and engaging with uncertainty may not necessarily be a cause for concern, but rather become an opportunity for discovery and growth (Pithouse et al., 2009).

Poetic inquiry allowed us to explore some of the advantages of this research genre. One such advantage is the release of thought processes that lead people into self-awareness and discovery. This further led to enabling individuals to think freely in order to become creative and innovative. Sharing thoughts, opinions, and tweets offered a means for all members of a group, no matter their status, to equally play a role in the co-construction of the found poem and thus a shift occurred from teacher “expert” to participatory member.

Theresa, in her reflections, points out the challenge of sitting in a mixed group of supervisors and staff–students and having to think, sometimes aloud, and share thoughts, choices, and give explanations. She notes:

> I had never before had to generate thoughts, share them right there and watch them instantly become building blocks together with other people’s, as the found poetry developed and grew before our eyes. The whole process was highly inductive and very exciting. A new perspective for me on learning something by active participation rather than someone standing there and proclaiming it as a piece of new knowledge for me in a classroom or at a workshop, which I had to absorb mentally from them as knowers. This was a lesson too for me in innovative teaching for my often restless students.

**What do the results mean in practice?**

The results have variety of meanings. For one thing, collaboration and the sharing of ideas and experiences with other practitioners was made possible. Second, our own and others’ ideas were critiqued in an environment of trust. Third, thoughts about innovative ways of transforming our educational research practices were initiated and, lastly, an atmosphere of inclusivity was created in which participants were encouraged to contribute to the poetic inquiry process.

Nkosinathi poignantly makes the following observation regarding this experience:

> This educational exercise is an invitation to learn, a means to tackle tough questions that face us individually and collectively as teachers and academics, and a method for questioning our daily taken-for-granted assumptions as a way to find hope for the future.

The found poems enabled the release of thought processes that led us into self-awareness and discovery. The process of creating the found poem demonstrated, as pointed out by Scott (2012), that learning while playing can be fun. Sibongile testifies to being positively changed by our collaborative poetic inquiry experience:
I am growing in my learning professionally and personally. I have transformed as a lecturer and hope my teaching practice has also transformed in such a way that it contributes to the learning of students so that they are better prepared for the work environment and as responsible citizens.

Throughout the process of creating the found poems we, as participants, were forced to situate ourselves in our studies. The voices of participants in our group and our perspectives were respected and reported. Even negative comments were shared—such as that of one participant: “Grumpy, seemingly uncomfortable situations lead to anger.”

In the process of creating the found poems we discovered a similar experience noted by Butler-Kisber (2002, p. 237) in that the work with found poetry “pushed us personally and pedagogically.” This is demonstrated in the words of one participant:

I am able to reflect on the work that I’m doing.

Despite acknowledging our need for developing technical and artistic skills, we benefitted from participating in this exercise, which will undoubtedly allow us to consider the use of found poetry to challenge educational and social inequities in our respective practices.

Creating found poetry collaboratively, enabled us to explore and produce what Butler-Kisber (2002, p. 229) referred to as an “artful portrayal.” We were able to experience this approach as providing multiple ways of looking at research material that led to new insights and understandings. We found, like Walsh (2014, p. 59), that the process of creating the found poem from the data helped us move out of analysis into “a way of being and knowing that is more lyrical and embodied.” A statement shared by one participant reflected this; in his words, “I am now a researcher.”

The process of creating the found poems enabled us to play poetically as we cut and pasted segments of words and phrases in an attempt to distil themes and crystallise our thinking. Strong (2010) encouraged the use of playful ways of doing generative work while van Laren, Mudaly, Pithouse-Morgan, and Singh (2013) emphasised the generative value of engaging in imaginative or open-ended activities. As we learned new ways of thinking and doing, we modelled what Strong (2010) referred to as moving beyond our habitual thinking. One participant in our group demonstrated this in her honest statement: “A calm composure disguises a tension between doing ‘the usual’ and doing ‘the different’.” The act of presenting the poetry through performance not only added to the fun experience, but also assisted in deepening our awareness and understanding. The playfulness of the presentation belied the seriousness of our learning. We were transformed not only in how we do things, but also in our lives as well through the process.

A working collaboration amongst us as workshop participants, built on trust and reciprocity, assisted in producing unique and fascinating texts. Collaboration often means symmetry in the relationship between the participants, who are also the researchers. This collaboration “helps balance the power differential and encourages researcher reflexivity” (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 235). There is value in collaborative reflection and activity, as argued by Pithouse Morgan, and Pillay (2013, p. 7) who observed:

Through expressing, listening and being responsive to and yet critical of our own and each other’s ideas, we can become learning resources for each other.
What is the key benefit for the readers?

Poetry can make situations more vivid to the reader. Hill (2005, p. 96) argued that it “provides us with a window into the feelings of characters” and it encapsulates our life experiences by describing the feelings experienced by the writers of the piece. It can capture the complexity of human experience in an educational, cultural, and social context, and ultimately it allows the reader to see, hear, and feel. Poetry allows self-reflection. As expressed by Greene (1991), if our work provides an opportunity for the reader or viewer, as well as the creators, to reflect upon his or her own life and on what it means to be in the world, it can be transformative.

Butler-Kisber claimed that if the found poem exhibits certain qualities, it can engage the reader in a powerful way. She maintained that it can:

> pull the reader (viewer) into a world that is recognizable enough to be credible, but ambiguous enough to allow new insights and meanings to emerge. Through accessible language and a product that promotes empathy and vicarious participation, the potential for positive change in education becomes possible. (2002, p. 231)

We also hope that making visible the process of creating the found poems and the end products will resonate with the audience and readers of this article, so that all readers might imagine what experiences other novice and practiced researchers have.

What remains (potentially) unresolved?

A shortcoming of found poetry as a research strategy as demonstrated in this article may relate to issues of more conventional notions of validity and generalisability. However, as addressed by other qualitative researchers, narrative (and found poetry, we contend) ought to be judged by its persuasiveness, and whether the interpretation is reasonable and convincing (Riessman, 1993). We believe our work meets these requirements.

Another possible constraint on a collaborative found poetry exercise is the activity of embarking on the process with a group of people who may not know each other well. In our case uneasiness disappeared long before the end of the project. An added complication is that not all groups work together effectively. Ours, however, worked very well together.

Problems may occur too, with the restriction of a limited number of words with which to work in writing a tweet. Challenges may also emerge during the poetry-writing stage, with participants having to formulate a found poem based only on the words of a tweet. However this may be a positive characteristic because one of the features of arts-based research postulated by Barone and Eisner (1997, p. 73) is “the use of contextualized and vernacular language.” This may mean more people being in a position to relate to the language.

A potential drawback with this method is fear on the part of participants in the group because writing about one’s lived experience is risky, entailing the disclosing of ourselves to others. It may prove vulnerable for an individual to present his or her private thoughts and emotions in a public setting. However, the anonymity of the tweets did allow for the privacy of individual participants to be maintained.
A further constraint may present itself in relation to authorship. Collaborative found poetry requires risk because participants may have to accede control to the whole group because the collective group makes the selection as to what is used in the poem. Participants in the group may find it difficult to relinquish control over how the self and the personal research experience is “re-written” or interpreted. One of the limitations of coauthorship is the question of whose voice ultimately comes through strongest. Choices in representing voice may result in misunderstanding, misreading, and misrepresentation. Questions relating to representation of each individual participant’s ideas remain. We could question whether the words and phrases that were selected to form the final found poem were representative of all our ideas and whether the poems were able to capture participants’ individual experiences of what we had learned about ourselves during self-study research. However, according to Richardson (1993, p. 695), found poetry “makes a space for partiality, self-reflexivity, tension and difference.” It requires a willingness on the part of the creators of a found poem to open self to critique. We conclude here with a comment from Wendy, which captures our collective sense about this experience:

In reflecting critically, I see that despite the messiness of the process and unpredictability of the outcome, I gained insights I wouldn’t otherwise have obtained had the requirements been simply for a linear written response.

Conclusions
Poetic inquiry is a research approach towards knowledge creation that relies not only on the transmission of information, but also on the deeper issues of the poetic. In this article, we demonstrate that it can also be successfully deployed as an exciting mode of inquiry, contributing to educational research and education as a whole within universities and other communities. The representation of the found poem process as a form of participatory research, we believe, demonstrates the multiple-perspectives and multivocality of our group of self-study researchers.

Found poetry can, and did for us, encapsulate stories of our experiences in research. Harriet Mason (1996) said of storytelling and wholesome learning that stories are not limited to the language arts subjects. Stories teach values and perpetuate culture and heritage. When we, as a group of novices in poetic inquiry research, were introduced to this experimental form we experienced what Glesne (1997) described as a freedom to write in ways we had not before tried in academia and took risks with our writing, allowing our own voices to be heard. This is illustrated in the words of one participant who said, “I don’t have to sound like other academics.”

The found poems, we believe, should not only be offered as a completed work but, as suggested by Walford (1991, p. 5), they should allow us as researchers an opportunity to:

share some of the challenges and embarrassments, the pains and triumphs, the ambiguities and satisfactions in trying to discover what is unknown.

As some of the workshop evaluation responses from our participants clearly demonstrate:

Writing is so difficult.

And

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I am really confused about the notion of reflexivity—need to think more carefully about it.

We believe that poetic inquiry can be viewed in a similar light because it relies on subjective, relational, and holistic perception and expression. According to Elliot (2012, p. 6),

*It creates and/or reveals connections within and between us and the world we live in.*

The world as we know it is indeed crying out for us to reconnect with it to heal our many ills and to bring about healing for all—to make the next generation safer and more connected to the values we believe in for the survival of human kind.

According to Barthes (1976), a readerly text is one that presents itself as conveying conclusive meanings but a writerly text, as we believe is portrayed in the final found poem, is one that calls attention to its constructedness, tentativeness, and is one that requires the reader to make meaning. The reader or audience, as posited by Glesne (1997, p. 218), joins the creators of a found poem “in constructing the interpretation, realizing that it is not some absolute meaning of the prose that is important but the multiple meanings and the possible meanings that we create together.” As the writers of an experimental form such as a found poem, we are in agreement with Glesne (1997, p. 218) that our group, through this article,

*seeks the transformative powers of language and reflection to open, in some way, all participants: researcher, researched, and readers.*

We hope that this, at least to some extent, has been achieved.

**References**


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