

Poem as Literature Review: Poetic Rumination on the History of Poetic Inquiry

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Abstract

This poem, akin to a literature review, is based on a presentation made at the 2019 Canadian Society of the Study of Education (CSSE). It focuses on Poetic Inquiry (an umbrella term used for research that uses poetry in the data gathering process and/or in data processing or dissemination). The aim of the poem is to play with the form of a literature review while exploring the history of Poetic Inquiry, bringing to light some of the internal debates that exist within the community who use poetry in their academic work, and consider if the work requires labelling to exist in the realm of scholarly methods and tools.

Keywords

poetic inquiry; research methods; literature review; research poetry

Introduction

Poetic Inquiry (Prendergast, 2009; James, 2017, Vincent, 2018) has become the term used to encapsulate academic research that uses poetry as a significant element of data gathering, processing or dissemination. Poetic Inquiry has no fixed definition and instead is often described differently by different researchers (Vincent, 2018). This has led to a recent re-labeling of this work simply as Poetic Inquiry, as in Faulkner (2019, p. 13) who moved away from the term “research poetry” to adopt the term poetic inquiry as it has become a more universally used term to describe this type of research method/tool. The following poem rumination (Leggo, 1999), written for the Canadian Society for the Study of Education 2019 conference, was composed as a short, spoken word poem to summarize some of my research findings. It was designed to be delivered with specific cadences, using enjambment and line breaks to create an aesthetic and performative layer to the sharing of the findings of my extensive literature review and subsequent article (Vincent, 2018) with others in the field of education. My aim was to illustrate the extensive, rhizomatic history of Poetic Inquiry that until recently had not be readily found in the literature; to

bring some of the internal debates to the audience's attention for consideration; and to have the audience, colleagues who work in various levels of education, consider the power of poetry (which changes from person to person) when it comes to their own teaching, research and curriculum development practices. The capaciousness of poetry affords the researcher an opportunity to play with language and uncover meaning that they potentially would never have found through the medium of prose. Through using poetic form (e.g. line breaks and stanzas) and poetic devices (e.g., metaphors and enjambment), researchers can uncover layers of meaning that lay dormant or hidden at first glance.

My aim in sharing this piece here is to spur others to explore this dynamic area, while demonstrating another way of crafting and conveying a literature review, which may inspire others to do the same. The following poem begins with a droll list of terms that have been used over recent decades (Vincent, 2018) to describe research that uses poetry and moves into some specific examples of various fields and researchers who use poetry in their work. The poem begins unclear and slowly provides more clarity as answers unfold (similar to the experience of researching and writing a literature review).

Poetic Inquiry (PI)

oh wait, I forgot about terminology—

Poetic rumination
 Poetic transcription
 Poetic analysis
 Ethno-poetic
 Poetic ethnography
 Autoethnographic poetry
 Arts-informed research
 Field poetry
 Fieldnote poetry
 Poetic fieldnotes
 Found research poem
 Poetry informed research
 Poetic performance research
 Poetic technique-based assessments

Oh wait, the poem-

The history of whatever you call it
 cannot be followed like a line
 (left in the movie Birdbox)
 or bread crumbs
 (to lead us home
 despite the sweet smell of gingerbread
 in the distance).
 It instead pops up
 earthy like mushrooms

rising out of the earth
growing through downed logs

Carpeting the moist
 shaded ground
some edible, some beautiful
 all propagating
 all adapting-
 or it may surprise you
creeping along the soil
with disruptive pops green
 and supple ripe red
 ready to pick
(the one that suits your fancy)
like u-pick farms near the highway
in the valley.

What inspired this fruiting
of fungi or fanciful fruit?

Was it Richardson's poetic transcription
 of Louisa May's life story
or would we go back to the anthropology of Tedlock or Flores
 writing poetry to show the other
 and to know themselves in relation?

Could it have been Butler-Kisber
 in education
 finding the poetry
 in her participants' voices?
 Or our much loved Leggo
 whose life lived poetically
gave poetic rumination, autoethnographic style poetry
 that also supports teacher education?
Surely, we can credit Black and Enos
 using poetry with phenomenology whose
poetic pilgrimage lead to greater understanding
of the field of social work and who those social workers are.

Then we have Furman and Cavers and Langer and Leitz
 all supporting the development of poetic stories
that bring language to the Self and to language learners.
Today, we can credit Prendergast
 for the umbrella term
 used by many
and for bringing, with Carl, the PI Symposium to life

And thank Sameshima and James and Wiebe and Guiney Yallop
 and Hasebe-Ludt and Chambers and Sinner
 and Leavy and Conrad and Rajabali and even Fels and Belliveau for co-exploring
 promoting while performatively exploring
 What a poem is good for.
 Social work, health care, anthropology, the arts
 even the hard sciences (not too hard to crack new ways to synthesize with poetry)--
 Poetry is appearing
 Poetry is being used to generate new and different meanings
 it is being used to create knowledge.
 Finding phenomena in phenomenology
 Clarifying cases in case study
 Grounding understanding in grounded theory
 This is not to say that our diverse ecosystem of scholars
 be them mycellic or berry-like is without criticality.

Outside of PI, debates swirl
 from the likes of Jagodzinski and Wallin
 who ask if arts-based research does enough
 or if those in the field can sketch their navels from memory

We should note that they did not mention poetry
 but in a passing single word--
 this is also the case with notable methodology texts
 like Creswell, who promotes narrative but does not mention
 the storying of PI.

Why not? How could they have missed the work of so many?

One day I may ask them.
 Get them to check the RX of their glasses
 Check their field of vision
 which missed high quality knowledge and deep meaning.

There also exists a debate from within
 stanzas, not silos
 different forms, not destroying forms
 Who can use it? Do they need a background in poetry?
 Do they need a criteria? Faulkner can help you with that.
 Hearing an echo of quality poetry
 and quality research, that may be Piirto.

Head followed by heart, check out the work of Leavy and Cahmann-Taylor
 who can show you examples of work being done in the field
 Heart followed by head, see the various books inspired by the PI symposium
 from Sameshima, Prendergast, James, Fidyk, Galvin, and Leggo

What all agree is that poetry does something different
 that engaging with it yields an aesthetic knowing or ruminating
 that conventional texts do not readily afford.
 It expands knowledge through fewer words
 using images and poetic devices to create
 layered
 meaning
 on the page
 It uses form to form meaning
 with line breaks
 purposeful
 spacing to single out words
 while tapping into aesthetics, cadence and sound to
 pique interest

Poetry allows for intertextuality
 Allows a short cut to meaning (distance, not work) through fewer words with diverse meaning
 Allows for multiple levels of meaning
 Allows for multiple interpretations
 Allows for voice to be 'heard'
 Allows for language to lay languidly
 or lift our lexicon to rapid new heights.

So where did Poetic inquiry come from?
 Everywhere and no where.
 The liminal spaces between fields
 of strawberries (with mushrooms here and there)
 of disciplines
 of walks of life.
 It has no linear history.

Does it need one?

There is always more to chew on.

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