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A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER WITH RESEARCH: POETIC TRANSCRIPTION

Lorenzo Cherubini

Professor, Faculty of Education, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

lorenzo.cherubini@brocku.ca

Abstract

Poetic inquiry is a qualitative method that accounts for both the participants' first-person perspectives and the researcher's personal interpretation in a unique and invitational presentation of data. This paper will discuss, first, the use of poetic transcription to transform the Research Conversation interview scripts of Indigenous community members involved in a partnership with university educators. The research project examined the concepts of learning and education from those in the Indigenous community that were directly involved in the culturally appropriate programs offered at a Friendship Centre in Ontario (Canada). The key themes identified in the data will be shared. They include: 1. Education as a "lived reality" 2. Sense of Well-Being, and 3. Resolving Tensions. Second, the paper will present the respective poems that emerged from the poetic transcription that represent the researcher's critical encounter with participants' delicately complex stories. The manuscript addresses how readers' emotions are implicated in poetic inquiry

since the qualitative approach serves to appeal to the broader complexity of participants' experiences. The poems, therefore, underscore the intensely personal encounter and individual impressions the researcher experienced and, in turn, offer readers an opportunity to share in the moments of the critical encounter.

Keywords

Poetic Inquiry, Critical Encounter, Poetic Transcription

1. Introduction

Poetic inquiry is a qualitative method that accounts for both the participants' first-person perspectives and the researcher's interpretation in a unique and invitational presentation of data. Specifically, poetic transcription transforms the interview transcripts from the research participants into poetry (Parsons et al., 2011; Rapport, 2008). It is a qualitative research approach that allows the researcher to complement the voices of the research participants (Bishop & Willis, 2014). This novel approach to research is particularly well-suited for the research project that explored Indigenous community members' lived experiences in an urban-based context in Ontario, Canada. The participants were invited to the research project based on their involvement in a local Friendship Centre that provides culturally appropriate programs to the Indigenous community, including health, social, and educational services. The Friendship Centre provides the space for Indigenous community members to socialize with others in traditional ways that endorse inclusivity and belonging (Fraser et al., 2019).

1.2 Context of the Study

All partners in the project, including Indigenous community leaders, an Elder, and university educators, participated in a series of Research Conversations based largely on an Indigenous research framework (Kanu, 2011; Smith, 2021). Participants were invited to share their experiences related to the Friendship Centre programs and resources that fostered their unique sense of identity and contributed to a more critical understanding of the institutional and systemic barriers in mainstream society (Dion et al., 2010). The project acknowledges the strength of Indigenous community members to examine the socio-cultural and socio-historical power relations that are significantly implicated by colonial practices and policies. Throughout the Research Conversations, the Indigenous community participants were critical agents and identified mainstream ideologies that favored dominant interests at the expense of marginalized groups (Langer-Osuna & Nasir, 2016; Luke, 2014).

It should be noted that as a researcher, I have engaged in bi-epistemic research for over two decades. I value the relationships I have with Indigenous communities, educators, scholars, and students. Some of these past projects speak directly to Indigenous peoples' experiences in educational settings, including the perceptions of Indigenous students and school community members in provincially funded public schools in Ontario (Cherubini, 2014a; 2014b). I have also collaborated on research projects that focus on the implications of provincial education policy on

Indigenous student engagement (Cherubini, 2022) and on prospective teachers' expectations of addressing Indigenous students' needs in mainstream classrooms and schools (see, for example, Cherubini, 2021).

2. Methodological Approach

In terms of the research project under discussion, the transcripts from the Research Conversations served as the data and were analyzed using grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The coding of the data and the constant comparison of emerging ideas and concepts were saturated into three themes identified as: 1. Education as a "lived reality" 2. Sense of Well-Being, and 3. Resolving Tensions.

However, the intent of this paper is not to discuss the themes grounded in the data according to the more standard reporting approaches of qualitative analysis. Instead, it is to share the poems that emanated from the respective themes using poetic transcription. The poems, thus, are meant to share the researcher's intensely personal encounter with the moments shared by the participants themselves in a manner that then invites the reader into the encounter of another's experience (Furman, 2004; Richardson, 1992; 1993). The Research Conversation transcripts are chosen purposively in terms of their potential to describe the unique experiences shared by the participants themselves (Carter et al., 2018). According to Glesne (1997), words, sentences, and expressions are distinguished from the transcripts to synthesize the meaning.

Of particular significance to this discussion, however, is the fact that the presentation of the poems that are an outcome of a poetic transcription approach are not limited by strict analysis and rigid structures. For example, the traditional headings that typically structure the format of a research paper, including introduction, context, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion, are not necessarily entirely applicable; instead, the poems are meant to be independent and therefore invite readers to make sense of their meaning by themselves (Chan, 2003; Koelsch & Knudson, 2009). By juxtaposing the actual words of the participants in a poetic expression the reader is enabled to perceive others' experience differently (Richardson, 1993).

Like Glesne (1997), my intent is to account for the more traditional qualitative data method (in this case, grounded theory) and then transition to a poetic transcription analysis:

I found myself, through poetic transcription, searching for the essence conveyed, the hues, the textures, and then drawing from all portions of the interviews to juxtapose details into a somewhat

abstract representation. Somewhat like a photographer, who lets us know a person in a different way. (p. 206). The poetic expression is, therefore, complemented by just enough context of the broader research and design to familiarize readers but not to impose an interpretation (Darmer, 2006).

3. Outcomes: Creative Expressions

Consider, therefore, the context of the respective themes as they are shared in poetic transcription.

3.1 Education as a “lived reality”

Throughout the Research Conversations, the Indigenous community participants described how fundamental aspects of identity were understood in the broader experiences of their lives, including education. The following poem is an outcome of my personal encounter with the data, in the broader view of participants’ reflections on education as a “lived reality”:

*Knowledge shared.
Through storytelling.
The stories of the elders.
Listening.
Just kind of taking it in
A story.
Their story.
Not written in textbooks.
School was just a question ...
and then a straight answer.
The Friendship Center brings different teachings.
A journey.
Learning from the elders.
From others.
At the centre.
With different people.
Figuring things out.
In different ways.
Connecting the culture.*

Connected to the people.
To even the way they taught.
It's just better.
Working with the elders.
Probably learned more than I ever learned ...
in university.
Out in the field.
Doing things.
Sitting with her.
Through colonization.
Residential schools.
We've lost.
A lot.
Still a long way to go.
To get our culture back.
Especially in the urban.
In school ...
There was no support
Learning about culture ...
And stories.
Interesting.
Learning about someone's life
who's been through a lot.
You can actually take it in.
Learn those lessons.
Different people.
Listen to different people.
Become a better person.
Through storytelling.
Yeah.

3.2 Sense of Well-Being

The Indigenous community participants associated the Friendship Centre with fostering their sense of well-being. The Friendship Centre represented a distinct place from mainstream society. Consider the poem below that represents my encounter with the theme of a “sense of well-being”:

*Teach people about care.
Mother Earth more than anything.
We've been colonized.
Re-culture our people.
Learn language.
A step forward.
Getting back with our culture.
Everyone sits in circle.
Keep everyone from the background.
And foreground.
Include everyone in the teaching.
Everyone not facing a certain way.
Everyone more equal ...
and a part of the conversation.
Everyone there together.
Speak only when they want to.
Everyone's point of view.
In the circle.
More casual.
Common within the Friendship Center.
Around that kitchen.
Cooking.
There's life.
Life that gets talked about.
And it was just nice ...
I sat with them.
For a few minutes.
Listening and kind of ...*

just observing.
In the moment.
Was awesome.
And that's how it is ...
At the Friendship Center.
Within all our programs.
And that's most impactful.
Actually engaged.
And learning.
The things you take with you.
Carry throughout life.
Taking that knowledge in.
Really something to think about.
Made me want to engage.
Learn more.
The Friendship Center.
Always been a big part of my life.
Very awesome community.
Experienced so much.
They've given me so much.
Of everything.
In my life.
Helped with career.
Helped socially.
Helped spiritually ...
and culturally.
That's very big.
That's everything about me ...
That's who I am.
Without the Friendship Center
I wouldn't be
the person
I am today.

3.3 Resolving Tensions

The research participants were critical agents that distinguished and discussed the respective tensions that exist between western and Indigenous-based education and community paradigms. Their stories are embedded in the poem that follows in the context of the theme of “resolving tensions”:

Sit with them.
The elders.
Those dinners ...
so important.
Learn best through stories.
More welcoming.
A way to learn.
Rather than school.
School is a lot of people.
Learning best by doing.
Getting my hands on things.
Just doing it.
You're not teaching the way I need to be taught.
In class.
Nothing to do with understanding ...
Math ...
Or anything else.
My learning style is different.
From the mainstream.
From schooling.
There ... they split you up.
Was really hard.
For me.
I knew I could do the work.
Teachers not understanding.
Different learning styles.

A problem for other students.

Wasn't just me.

I grew up around the Center.

Always been a family.

We know each other.

You know, chillin.

The Center.

Brings us all together.

Pretty cool.

4. Significance

A hallmark of the poetic inquiry approach rests in its potential to provide the researcher with the necessary freedom to exercise both analysis and creative expression. In the process, the researcher can, as Glesne (1997) suggests, invite the highly personal encounter with the stories themselves by reflecting purposefully on the essence of the individual and collective experience. This is not, quite clearly, a traditionally empirical methodological approach to research. It is, however, a means to create expressions that provide personal abstract representations of participants' experiences that may themselves be accessible to the unique circumstances that each reader brings to the poem.

The poems shared in the manuscript emanate directly from my encounter with the data. They are not reflective of the thoughts of any other member of the research team, nor are they representations of the perspectives of any individual that participated in the research project. In this way, the poems reflect my genuine learning in the context of my encounter with participants' stories. Significant to the process, the poems invite readers to the encounter. They offer a platform for further discussion. In other words, the poems are meant to serve as a necessary bridge to consider carefully how the respective abstractions inherent across the poems implicate upon one's own encounter with them. Poetic inquiry, different from more traditional methodologies, welcomes the reader's encounter with the shared moments described in the poems and allows them to remain at a distance from the stories of the participants.

The researcher's experience, as described in the scope of each poem, invites consideration of the issues grounded in the data in a potentially more distinctly pronounced manner. Readers are also invited to adopt the poetic expressions in a manner that speaks more

directly to the testimonies of their own lived experiences. It brings the essence of the stories to the locality of each individual reader. The impressions, captured poetically, encourage readers to think reflectively and readily place their observations in the context of their own lives. Last, poetic inquiry encourages researchers to share poems that can, in many respects, provide moments of acknowledgement that subsequently allow readers to engage in the experience through the lenses most relevant to their lives.

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