



IS THERE A DEFINITION? RUMINATING ON POETIC INQUIRY, STRAWBERRIES, AND THE CONTINUED GROWTH OF THE FIELD

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Abstract: Over the last ten years, Poetic Inquiry (PI) has proven itself as an emergent arts-based research methodology. It has gained greater acceptance in the larger community of qualitative research due in large part to the hundreds of published studies that employ the writing or analysis of poetry as a major focus of the research process (Finley, 2003; Prendergast, Leggo & Sameshima, 2009; Prendergast & Galvin, 2012). However, despite this greater acceptance and increase in studies found in the literature, there has not been a critical contemporary exploration of the history, theory and method of PI that could lend itself to defining what the method is, for those unfamiliar with it. This article provides a summary of PI as it exists in the literature today. This includes surveying the rhizomatic history of the method, exploring debates around who should or should not use the method and conversation around the current uses of PI in qualitative research.

Keywords: poetic inquiry; poetry; research methods; arts-based research; rumination

I see you
 in wild spaces
 of liminal tangles
 resilient like strawberry bushes
 yielding fruit, supple and sweet

unyielding like fungi sprinkled in the forest
 an earthy germinating blend
 where do you begin? end?
 where do I begin? end?

by Adam Vincent & Carl Leggo

Introduction

A review of the literature that uses poetry in research or reporting processes, comprising academic journal articles, book chapters, anthologies, and poems published in peer reviewed publications, reveals that Poetic Inquiry (PI) does not have a fixed definition. This is because the work undertaken through the methodology is not limited solely to artistic, aesthetic, educational or research-focused spaces. This widespread or transdisciplinary space has been referred to in the literature as a liminal space (Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis & Grauer, 2006; Neilsen, 2008; Leggo et al., 2011) that exists between multiple disciplines and disciplinary practices. With mentions in the literature of PI going back nearly 70 years (Carruth, 1948; James, 2017), not including the spectrum of synonymous terms, is it first important to understand why the method arose in qualitative research. This needs to be established before we can attempt to develop an understanding of PI and create a working definition of the method(s) as represented in the literature today.

The Proliferation of Poetic Inquiry

In her post-doctoral study, Prendergast (2009) found over 230 published, peer-reviewed, journal articles or book chapters that identified poetry as a major element of the research processes or research presentation. She distilled the ways in which poetry was used, and what labels were given to the poetic research practices, into 40 key terms that encompassed PI in the literature at that time. This number has increased significantly with Prendergast now having compiled “around 3000 pages of poems from social science peer-reviewed journals” (Prendergast, personal communication, January 27, 2017), but her initial published findings remain significant today. In her article,

published in 2009, she discovered that while a number of terms were used synonymously with PI, most studies could be placed into three categories by using the concept of voice. These categorizations served as a way to better understand the landscape of the methodology and how poetry was being used in qualitative research. These categories were: *vox autobiographia/autoethnographia* – researcher voiced poems (e.g. field notes), *vox participare* – participant voiced poems (e.g. interview data) or *vox theoria* – literature voiced poems (e.g. written from or in response to the literature) (p. 545). Prendergast (2015) has since adapted and expanded these categorizations, from three to five, to include:

Vox Theoria/Vox Poetica – Poems about self, writing and poetry as method
Vox Justitia – Poems on equity, equality, social justice, class, freedom
Vox Identitatis – Poetry exploring, self/participants' gender, race, sexuality
Vox Custodia – Poetry of caring, nursing, caregivers'/patients' experience
Vox Procreator – Poems of parenting, family and/ or religion. (p. 6)

These new categorizations not only reflect her continued engagement with PI, but demonstrate the variety of fields that use its methods. Prendergast's original categorizations are similar to that of Hanauer (2010) whose smaller scale study found 66 sources that use poetry in their research. He suggested 3 categories that could aid in better understanding why and how poetry is/was used in qualitative research studies by looking at the focus of each study. He found that poetry was used: "1) to represent and reinterpret existing data; 2) to collect data; and 3) to collect field notes" (p. 75). Both researchers' categorizations reflect the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the methodology and provide ways to consider what sets PI apart from other qualitative methods. This information aids in our exploration and discovery of the characteristics of the method as we can see that even scholars who use PI struggle with its definition.

The increase in published research studies that use PI, what Leavy (2015) calls a "turn towards scientific artistic expression" (p. 66), shows that the methodology goes beyond a way of representing voices more vibrantly (which can also be demonstrated through well-written studies that use narrative inquiry or case study methodologies). Poetic Inquiry, in the literature, is selected as it promotes criticality, can make explicit the position or reflexivity of the researcher, and allows for different perspectives to be considered through the artistic medium of poetry. Prendergast (2009) stressed the importance of a balance between both aspects of the methodology – aesthetically pleasing/evocative poetry and critical inquiry, writing:

My intention to articulate a methodology for poetic inquiry is to position it as an artistic practice carried out within a research framework that cannot and must not diminish the critical/aesthetic qualities of these kinds of poems as poetry. (p. 549)

In her exploration of the dynamic ways that poetry is used in the literature, she did not favour the aesthetically pleasing works over the critical works. She suggested that PI is, “along with all arts-based inquiry approaches, deeply concerned with aesthetic issues around quality, qualifications, preparedness, elitism and expertise” (p. 563). PI is not selected by researchers as a way to avoid the stringent nature of scientific studies or to diminish the need for thorough, well-supported studies, but is chosen as a method to realize new or different ways of knowing with the potential for a variety of views and voices.

The mode of poetry, the act of writing poems or analyzing through poems, is represented in the literature as a way to expand perspectives on human experience. As a proponent of this idea, Brady (1991, 2004) stressed that the capaciousness of poetry is able to express and accounts for “life’s exigencies” and that it “promotes robust discourse from ivy-covered halls to the hinterlands of humans *being*” (pp. xv-xvi) through its dynamic uses of language. Similarly, Leavy (2015) wrote, “...poetry is a form that itself brings attention to silence (or as a poet might say, to space) and also relies on emotional evocation as part of meaning making while simultaneously exposing the fluidity and multiplicity of meaning” (p. 66). Percer (2002) went beyond appealing to the emotion brought forward through the use of poetry, arguing that the intersections of poetry and research extend beyond the usual range of educational scholarship by adding greater depth to the study. He, like Prendergast and others, maintained that poetry brings out new ways of understanding, but that it does not diminish the need for balance between the expressive and empirical elements that encompass the methodology. Informed by her own experiential and experimental practices, Cahnmann (2003) also suggested that the use of poetry can bring about new understandings, contending that “through poetic craft and practice, we can surprise both ourselves and our audiences with new possibilities” (p. 37). The practitioners of PI, from various fields of practice, choose to use poetry in their studies for particular purposes and in particular ways, but the underlying reason is that they wish to interact through language in ways that are not commonly accepted in more traditional qualitative research methods and seek different ways of knowing.

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The Rhizomatic History of Poetic Inquiry

The literature indicates that Poetic Inquiry (PI) arose in response to what Denzin & Lincoln (2011) described as a “crisis of representation” (p. 3). Prendergast & Galvin (2012) described this crisis as a response to research that “appropriated, overpowered, fragmented, rendered-over summative or even silenced” participants’ voices (p. 5). Through poetry, alternative approach seeks to add the voices of participants to the research and provide different ways to try and understand others’ perspectives and experiences. This attempt to understand differently has yielded hundreds of published studies across the disciplines and a myriad of unpublished theses and dissertations that remain archived in universities around the world.

We now turn to address the question of how this method developed historically. The history of PI is difficult to trace as it is not linear. Any attempt to convert the non-linear history of PI in to a linear history would diminish the richness and complexity of the methodology. As such, I posit the idea that the history of PI is *rhizomatic* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Irwin et al., 2006) with various nodes that have no discernable center. This idea was echoed in recent correspondence with Dr. Carl Leggo who likened the rhizomatic nature of PI to a strawberry plant (Leggo, personal correspondence, June 19, 2017), whereas Dr. Kedrick James likened it to a mushroom, more specifically like mycelium with no hierarchy (James, personal correspondence, June 19, 2017; June 29, 2017). The idea that strawberries grow in a variety of areas and mushrooms grow out of a variety of media also helps in understand that the poetry created through PI may be of the same textual genre, but the context – that is what feeds the poetry, differs and is as important as the products themselves.

Turning again to the literature, we would be remiss if we did not talk about sociologist Laurel Richardson who is often cited as a major influence in the field of PI (Pelias, 2004; Prendergast, 2009; Haunauer, 2010). In her article *Poetics, dramatics and transgressive validity: The case of the skipped line* (1993), Richardson (1993a) explained how her creation of the five-page poem about Louisa May’s lived experiences was written with the intent to explore how using a non-scientific form can “make visible the underlying labor of sociological production as well as its potential as a human endeavor” (p. 695). Inspired by DeShazer’s (1986) feminist writing on language and power, Richardson explained that she felt inclined to explore her work through poetry as it can create checks and balances; that it has the ability to mitigate power struggles that occur in social science research. She wanted the freedom to explore her findings in ways that could bring the lived experiences of her participants to life. She wrote:

Poetics strips those methodological bogey-men of their power to control and constrain. A poem as “findings” resituates ideas of validity and reliability from “knowing” to “telling.” Everybody’s writing is suspect – not just those who write poems. In sociological research the findings have been safely staged within the language of the fathers, the domain of science writing. [The poem] “Louisa May” challenges the language, tropes, emotional suppressions, and presumptive validity claims of masculinist social science. (1993a, p. 704)

Richardson sought to explore a way of better portraying her participant’s story through poetic form, as she saw it as a way of giving voice and power to her participant by creating “...a transcript masquerading as a poem/a poem masquerading as a transcript” (1994, p. 126). While her play on form was seen as radical by some at the time, she contended that she was not seeking an elimination of social-scientific writing, but was looking to expand her field and its “representational forms” (1997, p. 298). This led to her further conceptualization of forms of poetry used in research: narrative and lyric research poetry. Leavy (2015) disseminated Richardson’s identification and categorization of research poems in her discussion of PI by explaining that for Richardson, narrative poetry is “closer to storytelling, where data gathered from interviews are transformed into a poem that tells the respondent’s story, using his or her language” while “lyric poetry emphasizes moments of emotion and is less concerned with relaying a ‘story’ per se” (p. 66). This is an important distinction when trying to understand the purpose of using poetry in research and the foundational texts that form approaches to PI.

Despite her major contribution to the method, what Richardson’s (1992) writing about *Louisa May* and subsequent publications about the poem lacked was a clear description of her process of writing research poetry. In response to this lack of method or guide, Glesne (1997), motivated by Richardson’s transformation of interview transcripts into poetry (poetic transcription), developed a process that can be used to create poetry from transcript data. She called this process “poetic rendering” (p. 206). Poetic rendering entails taking the participants’ words, putting them into stanzas, and then deliberately removing words so that participants’ intent and voice remain, but the text is more refined and evocative. Glesne, as an early adopter of PI, was careful to discuss the hybridization of her texts, not defining them as poetry. She noted that her poem-like transcription texts “move[d] in the direction of poetry but [were] not necessarily poetry” (p. 213) in order to have her work exist in the liminal space between art and research. Glesne and Richardson’s ideas were later picked up by the likes of Walsh (2006) who used her research transcripts to create found poems that “were both academic and artistic” in nature (p. 990).

Other notable mentions in the literature are Poindexter (1998) who used poetry as a method of data analysis and MacNeil (2000) who is cited as being one of the first researchers in the literature to use qualitative data analysis software to support the creation of poetic data transcription (p. 361). It should be noted that before the contributions and explorations of these researchers came the experimental work of Tedlock (1983) who experimented with the creation of “dramatic poetry” (p. 55) from transcription data. Gee (1989) also posited a process for breaking transcripts down into stanzas to generate understandings, while Eisner (1997) sought ways of integrating the creative and analytical. Eisner’s argument that poetry could transcend language and possessed an “evocative presentation of data” (p. 5) contributed to the conversations taking place around the use of poetry in qualitative research studies across multiple fields.

These researchers did their work in different fields, yet, using the analogy put forth by Leggo (personal communication, June 9, 2017), they all grew “strawberries.” Each scholar sought new ways of knowing and felt that poetry was the mode of writing that could help them learn more about their research processes and research participants. Acknowledging the simultaneous parallels that took, and take, place in various fields continues to develop our understanding of PI and moves us closer to a working definition. Looking closer now at how PI has developed and is used in the areas of health care, anthropology, sociology and education should assist in our conceptualizing of this ever-growing rhizomatic method.

Yielding Fruit: Poetic Inquiry in Fields of Practice

PI appears in some form or another across a multitude of fields. Appearing infrequently in the literature, though worth mentioning as researchers continue to explore ways in which poetry can be used to support their research, are the areas of advertising, organizational research, management and policy, and music therapy (McCulliss, 2013). There are however four major areas, or fields, that appear recurrently in the literature: health care, anthropology, sociology, and education. Discussing PI’s use in the field of health care research requires mentioning the significant contributions of Rich Furman. Furman is frequently cited in the literature (Prendergast, 2009; Hanauer, 2010; McCulliss, 2013; Faulkner, 2016a) as a single author or as part of a small group of authors, who used poetry as a tool for healing for medical practitioners and their patients (Furman & Cavers, 2005). He is also cited as using poetry to explore loss in his personal life, around the death of his father (Furman, 2004), and in studies that explore the uses of poetry as a form of research data (Furman, Lietz & Langer, 2006). The work that was done was both autoethnographic and ethnographic in nature (see Rothenberg, 1994; Smith, 2002 for more on ethnopoetics) where poetry served as

a major methodological process. These studies reflect the versatility of poetry as a tool in qualitative research. It should also be noted that the work being done through PI has echoes to the work being done through writing therapy which often explores identity and the concept of self (Anderson & MacCurdy, 2000; Furman, 2004; Lengelle, 2008; Orr, 2002; Zimmerman, 2002). Similarities lie in the reflective and reflexive nature of the writing, which is akin to autoethnographic and ethno-poetic ways of knowing. Moreover, many of the theories, studies and explorations through poetry have parallels to the work done by arts-based researchers in education (Leggo et al., 2011) as well as those exploring issues in the area of social work, where they strive to understand the lived experience of others (Black & Enos, 1981); physiotherapy and the relationship between physiotherapist and client (Tasker, Loftus & Higgs, 2014), and specific emotional facets of nursing such as empathy (e.g. King, 1995). These researchers sought and continue to seek ways to better understand human experience from a variety of viewpoints. Öhlén (2003), for example, took narratives of suffering and condensed them into poetic form in an attempt to better understand what suffering meant. He argued that a hybridization of approaches – using narratives and poetry, can aid in understanding writing and that “scientific language needs to be enriched by everyday metaphoric and poetic expressions” (p. 565) if a phenomena (a lived experience) is to be understood. Once again, we see our metaphorical strawberries growing without linear ties between fields of study.

Looking now to the field of anthropology, the initial use of PI in research studies is often attributed (e.g. Prendergast, 2009; McCulliss, 2013) to Flores’ (1982) and her experimentation with “field poetry” (p. 22) as well as credited to Tedlock’s (1983) creation of narrative poetry from his transcript data. A deeper look at the field of anthropology also uncovers the work of biological anthropologist Loren Eiseley (1972) who is cited by poet and anthropologist Miles Richardson (1998), as a trailblazer in his field. According to Miles Richardson, Eiseley was not only able to use poetry as a way to portray significant discoveries in anthropology, but used it to explore and give dimension to every day human behavior.

As mentioned previously, the PI movement in sociology is attributed to Laurel Richardson and her experimental poetic renderings of her participants’ stories. Richardson’s work is often cited as a primary inspiration for PI as we know it today (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Hanauer, 2010). Be it field note poetry, poetic transcription, or poetic renderings, the uses of poetry in anthropology and sociology, as in health care, are important rhizomes that contribute to our understanding of PI with each study growing and extending into other fields of practice and research.

Continuing the metaphor of the rhizomatic history of PI, I now turn attention to the field of education. The work of Lynn Butler-Kisber, Carl Leggo, and Monica Prendergast

are each significant in shaping and identifying the history of PI in education. Butler-Kisber's notable work in PI can be traced to the late 1990's where her experimentation with poetic transcription illuminated ways in which poetry and qualitative research could unite in education. Butler-Kisber (2002) cites Eisner (1991) and his discussions around the power of combining art and research as a major inspiration for her research. She wrote that she felt as if Eisner's work gave her "permission" to explore her research through poetic representation (p. 231). Of her process, she wrote:

I began to experiment with poetic representation. I chose this route because what was emerging in my research demanded an evocative portrayal. I was familiar with the work of Richardson (1994) in which she used found poetry to represent sociological interviews. In this approach, the researcher uses only the words of the participant(s) to create a poetic rendition of a story or phenomenon. Because I was most comfortable working with words rather than other alternative forms, I decided found poetry might offer a viable way of portraying what I was finding. (2002, p. 232)

While her work in poetic transcription and poetic data analysis linked to the poetic exploration of Richardson (1993b; 1994), Tedlock (1983) and Glesne (1997), her work marked a pivotal shift in the acceptance of poetry within educational research that opened the doors for other artist-researchers. Similarly, Leggo's work has contributed significantly to the literature around PI and is cited in a variety of studies that employ poetry (Prendergast, 2009; Lahman et al., 2011). With obvious ties to autoethnography (Ellis, 1999), Leggo's research explored, and continues to explore, his positionality and reflexivity in his research through poetry in a practice that he calls "living poetically" (2015, p. 145). His *a/r/tographic* work (as artist, researcher and teacher) in the literature also explored his development and growth as a person, educator (see Leggo, 1997, 2003, 2007) and poet (see Leggo, 2005, 2012) while simultaneously exploring how education, writing and poetry impacts the lives of others. Leggo's concepts of poetic rumination (1999) and his discussions around the merits of writing poetry as a way of knowing (2008) and way of viewing the world differently helped to expand the definitions of academic writing and what it means to be a researcher.

Other notable pieces in the literature around the use of poetry in education and educational studies comes from Furman (2014) who described how the use of poetry in his freshman course at the University of Washington Tacoma "allowed students to learn about the nonliterary uses of poetry using experiential, hands-on methods that help students develop new communication and analytical skills" (p. 206). Roberts, Brasel and Crawford (2014) also discussed the benefits of using formula poems when working with in-service and pre-service teachers to help them reflect on their professional experiences as well as to identify struggles that students may have with test and

assignment anxiety. Patrick's (2016) study also revealed a need for a space in qualitative educational research for poetry, as the findings indicated that found poetry written by teachers allowed them to refine information and seek greater scholarship around what can be done with poetic data. Similarly, Dobson (2012) argued for additional interactions through poetry in education suggesting that, "as an artefact, the poem offers valuable insights regarding the process of awakening in consciousness and of possibilities for the reinvigoration of education, from the Latin, *educō*, *educare*, to draw forth from within" (p. 132).

The impact of PI in education is, however, not limited to research on practices, experiences or teaching methodologies, it also extends to exploring issues around curriculum development. Inspired by the presentations at the Provoking Curriculum Studies Conference in 2013, Ng-A-Fook, Ibrahim and Reis (2016) edited a collection of studies that considered the intersections between curriculum, the arts, and teaching strategies. Their exploration used notions of "strong poetry" and "strong poets," building off Bloom (1973) and Rorty's (1989) discussions respectively, to frame their collection which emphasized the work of those who "find themselves involuntarily straddling that which is realistic and that which is yet to come, which they help bring into being" (p. xvii). The collection presented the concept that scholars are poets and that using the poetic in education could support curriculum development by complicating accepted practices and theories and by promoting change incited by meaningful and critical reflection.

Reviewing the history of PI in education requires not only a consideration of published works, but also a look at the works that may not be published in international journals that still contribute to the rhizomes of PI. Experimentation and exploration is occurring in universities around the world, be it through purely text-based explorations or through text and visual arts such as De La Lama's (2014) unpublished dissertation that took the form of a poetic graphic novel at the University of Florida. A cursory search for the specific term "Poetic Inquiry," limited to dissertations or theses, through the University of British Columbia's library online data-base generates 86 results since 1974. An item of interest that stood out for me was that of the 86 dissertations that cite "Poetic Inquiry," 10 were authored in the last two years, which gives a strong indication of the greater acceptance of such approaches in graduate studies and qualitative research. Taking a closer look at some of these 86 studies, I turn to the research of Sinner and colleagues (2006) who provided a glimpse into how ABER has been used in graduate dissertations at one of Canada's top universities. The researchers explored over 30 arts-based dissertations in the Faculty of Education at The University of British Columbia (UBC) from 1994-2004 with the intent of identifying, describing and documenting the arts-based practices of graduate students. Among these dissertations were projects that used narrative inquiry and hermeneutics, post-colonial and

autoethnographic personal explorations through poetry, writing and visual arts, performative inquiry, which used poetry and prose, poetry and photography, and a/r/tography. They argued that these studies were, and are, significant as they sought to push the boundaries of art and research:

Arts-based educational researchers are always seeking to understand the parameters of “good art” and “good research,” and they are never satisfied with any checklist, template, or formula. Instead, each new arts-based educational research project is informed by past projects, but is always also seeking to extend the possibilities of what constitutes both research and art. This process is creative and emergent, a dynamic process of inquiry. (p. 1229)

Sinner and colleagues (2006) once again allude to the boundaries that PI resides within, moving me to the next section that explores the challenge of identifying where the methodology resides in the larger context of qualitative research.

Still a Strawberry? Synonymous Terms and Uses

Looking not only at the field-specific uses of PI, but the terminology used to describe the work being done adds greater dimension to the understanding of what it is. What is poetic inquiry? Who are poetic inquirers? These questions are not easily answered. When asked about the origins of the term Poetic Inquiry, Prendergast responded:

I was using the term “research poetry” in my own graduate work, but it was never a term that “worked” that well for me, clunky sounding. I felt the same way about Richardson’s “poetic representation” and “poetic transcription.” As I gathered together the annotated bibliography that was the focus of my post-doc with Carl [Leggo], the term poetic inquiry popped up... So I cannot claim to have coined the term poetic inquiry but I certainly did choose to use it as an umbrella term for the array of poetry-based practices I was finding in the literature. (M. Prendergast, personal communication, January 27, 2017)

When asked to define Poetic Inquiry, Butler-Kisber (2017) remarked:

I would define poetic inquiry as the process of using words from transcripts or field notes from our studies and transforming them into a form of poetry. This could be done as found poetry, where we use the actual words of the participant. It also can be done as generated poetry, where we use our own words to reflect upon some aspect of our research. (00:10)

Considering the umbrella term and unpacking Butler-Kisber's concise definition, where she alluded to poetic transcription, poetic field notes, poetic data analysis and poetic reflection, will assist in further dissemination of the term PI and help to build our understanding of the methodology. For example, Prendergast offered her take on the concept of found poetry and "literature voiced research poetry" (2004) or *vox theoria* (2009), while Poindexter's more anthropological poetic data analysis used poetry to re-tell the stories of her participants coming to terms with a diagnosis of HIV (2002). Cahnmann (2003) had her own approach to ethnographic research poems that differed from Flores (1982) and Richardson (1992) to bring her research to life while remaining critical of her research choices. Rapport and Hartill (2012) addressed crossing disciplines with ethnographic poetic representation which they saw as a method of "representing social data and its management of language" (p. 21) in a way that demonstrated "an experiential truth that cannot be accessed in other ways" (p. 21).

Poetry is also used in studies that have social justice implications. Hartnett (2003), for example, used poetry in the creation of a critical ethnography with elements of autobiography and political underpinnings when he looked at the treatment of prisoners in the federal prison system in the United States of America. Similarly, a form of critical PI has been used by Leavy (2010) who, for example, created a suite of poems reflecting on the "artistic-scientific divide" (p. 240). In this suite, she used poetry as a form of resistance to undermine power, to share her ideas and to allow for readers to generate their own interpretations as opposed to providing a singular and absolute truth in her text. Continuing the exploration of poetry and power, the work of Lahman and Richard (2014) discussed the concept of "appropriated poetry" (p. 344) derived from textual archives to create found poems in various poetic forms, including that of a *cento* or collage poem. For these researchers, poetry and power are interconnected and they see poetry as a way to give their participants voices in the literature and in society.

The concept of ethnographic poetics (Brady, 2004), where research occurs in the spaces between anthropology and art, supports studies like that of Carroll, Dew & Howden-Chapman (2011) who used poetry to explore the concept of homelessness. They conducted an ethnographic study with 40 research participants who lived in "informal dwellings such as sheds, vans, buses, garages and caravans" in New Zealand (p. 263). The researchers found that poetry allowed the voices of the participants to be heard and broadcast across a variety of fields with the hope that their living situations would become known to policy makers, health care providers, and the public at large.

PI also allows for an exploration through poetic social science (Bochner, 2000) and anthropological poetics; Brady (1991) called the integration of anthropology and literature "art-ful science" a liminal space where the beauty and tragedy of the world are textually empowered by the carefully chosen constructions and subjective

understandings of the author (p. 270). Prendergast, Gouzouasis, Leggo & Irwin (2009) sought greater understanding of their participants' experiences in making music through the process of creating haiku, a form of Japanese poetry, from research participants' interview responses.

Continuing the discussion around terms, we consider the work of Neilsen (2008) who posited the idea of Lyric Inquiry, which "marries lyric [poetry] with research" (p. 94). While Lyric Inquiry does not take up a significant space in the literature, it provides a different way to look at a particular facet (or approach) of PI. Neilsen's use of the term *lyric* was chosen to avoid narrow interpretations that often accompany work done using poetry. She says, "the term lyric is a term with the roomy capacity to include the expressive, the poetic, and the phenomenological in our scholarship without returning to the false distinctions or choices our enterprises often invite" (p. 94). This form of research method, she argued, was aimed at connecting with the reader on an emotional level through criteria akin to that of PI. Her criteria entailed: "Liminality, ineffability, metaphorical thinking, embodied understanding, personal evocations, domestic and local understanding, and an embrace of the eros of language-the desire to honour and experience phenomena through words...and to communicate this experience to others" (p. 95).

Studies in PI may not use the same terminology, but often their intentions are the same; they seek to explore the relationships between language and meaning.

A review of the literature also reveals that PI is not limited to the proverbial pen and paper ways of writing. James (2009), for example, discussed the notion of digital poetic inquiry that used cut-up texts to create found poems in order to glean more from the data. Of this process, he wrote:

...resonance becomes key to unlocking the intent of the text, but it is only brought into awareness through the deliberation and textual dwelling undertaken as a method of interest. Thus while other poetic inquirers using these methods may choose to work with texts gathered from information environments more savory and solidified than junk email, there is no essential difference in the process of inquiry. (p. 71)

Advancing the discussion around non-physical text-based forms of PI, Fels (2012), described performative inquiry not as a method "but rather a way of being in embodied inquiry with others through the arts" (p. 55). Performing poetry, like that of performing one's own stories (Saldaña, 2011), allows a different perspective on the research not only through the performance, but through the act of speaking the poetry/data, which becomes an embodied representation and invites others to share in the work and to

spur further inquiry. Using poetry as part of performative inquiry has been done to explore curriculum (Fels & Belliveau, 2008) and reflective praxis (Prendergast, 2010). It has also been used to further explore the concept of performative inquiry as a methodology and its place in qualitative research (Prendergast & Belliveau, 2013; Allsopp, 2015; Kreider, 2015).

Performative inquiry can also extend into the realm of digital PI as demonstrated by Natasha Wiebe's (2008) exploration of self and religion, in which the online journal article includes hyperlinks to audio files of her reading her poetry. Wiebe believes that her "poetic inquiry is performative research in that it is performed to an audience, and because it is reshaped as a result of interaction with that audience" (p. 15). Adding the multimodal level of auditory voice to her journal articles, Wiebe suggests, allows for an opportunity to rework her research and poems through the feedback provided by the audience and through her critical reflection of her poetic performances. In these examples, poetry, in both textual and non-textual forms, allows for unique interactions to take place between research and researcher. This idea is echoed by Prendergast who speaks of the power of poetry in her practices with performed research and in the writing of her 2006 dissertation, saying that "writing poetically was a necessity brought about by the challenge of representing the ephemeral and transitory nature of a theatre performance" (M. Prendergast, personal communication, January 27, 2017).

Returning once again to the notion of PI existing and growing in liminal spaces, I turn to explore the ideas of using poetry as part of a hybridized, collaged or bricolaged (Kincheloe, 2001) text. Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo (2009) and Hasebe-Ludt and Leggo (2016) explored the idea of *métissage* which they explain "comes from the Latin word *mixtus* meaning 'mixed,' primarily referring to cloth of two fibers" (2009, p. 142) to describe their weaving of story and/or poetry with visual art in their exploratory work with ties to Aboriginal ways of knowing.

The literature around hybrid texts also includes the work of Christianakis (2011), who explored the process of creating hybrid texts with fifth graders using rap (music and lyrics) with its elements of rhythm and poetry. First, she explored how students interacted with popular writing models and later with hybrid text creation using poetry, which led her to recommend the need for more embedded popular writing or pop culture focused works in classrooms to better reach students. Another version of the hybrid text, where poetry and story are interwoven (enacting Prendergast's, 2009, idea of *vox theoria*), is found in both published pieces (see Quinn-Hall, 2015, who mixed text types to find greater meaning), as well as unpublished dissertations and theses (such as Vincent, 2015, who created a textual *métissage* that explored the ties between poetry and literacy education). This weaving of text types, as indicated in the literature, is done with the intent to generate deeper and more meaningful understandings of concepts

and to further explore the literature. Leggo (2008) praised these liminal spaces, between art and traditional ways of knowing:

As a language and literacy educator, I am committed to exploring the intersections between creative practice and critical pedagogy, and creative pedagogy and critical practice. I want to linger in the spaces of binary oppositions in order to build bridges like metaphors from one vertex to another, even in the midst of one vortex through another. (p. 146-147)

The intersections, with various terms to describe researchers' interactions with poetry, re-affirm the idea of rhizomatic clusters and the metaphor of ever-growing strawberry plants that embody PI. There is no singular set of terms or one exclusive way of enacting a study using PI, which gives researchers greater liberty to explore their research and answer their research questions. This lack of concrete definition, which allows for emergent explorations of language and analysis through poetry, however, can also be seen as problematic.

Acknowledging Concerns with Poetic Inquiry

An understanding of PI would not be complete without considering some opposing views, problems, or criticisms of the method. Richardson (2000) has argued that art and inquiry do not need to be separate, writing that, "any dinosaurian beliefs that 'creative' and 'analytical' are contradictory and incompatible modes are standing in the path of a meteor; they are doomed for extinction" (p. 962). While there are few "dinosaurian" arguments in the literature, there are, however, those who practice PI who are concerned with the quality of studies and caution against grouping novice poets with those who have studied the art and craft of poetry. They believe that the study and act of writing poetry, or poesis (from the Greek for *making*), needs to be attended to prior to undertaking studies that adopt the use of PI. Piirto (2002) wrote,

For some thinkers in the field of qualitative research, the person using poetry in the depiction of qualitative findings need have no background in poetry, no record of having written poetry, no formal study of poetry. To write poetry one need not have studied it, seems to be the thought. (p. 435)

She cautioned against the idea of novice poet-researchers and argued that researchers and readers of research should not "confuse the poetasters, [a term used to describe one who writes inferior poetry], for the poets" (p. 444). She expressed a fear that this lack of classification could dilute the reputation of the methodology and undermine the work that was being done through PI.

This call for a form of quality control was also voiced by Barone (2001), who suggested that arts-based research must be done well or the reputation will falter (p. 27) and Faulkner (2007) who wrote, “I am tired of reading and listening to lousy poetry that masquerades as research and vice versa” (p. 222). Faulkner suggested that there is a greater need for criticality when undertaking a study using PI and contended that researchers should consider why they are using poetry, what they seek to accomplish through the medium of poetry, and how they intend to use poetry in their studies. She suggested that addressing the motivation behind the use of poetry and how the research will be undertaken could help to ensure that the research being done was able to demonstrate the balance between art and research; an idea that resides as a core tenet of the method. Perhaps not everyone is equipped to grow and maintain strawberry plants.

In contrast, Lahman and colleagues (2010) suggested that if researchers are restrained in their modes of accepted communication that it limits their ability to produce effective studies. They wrote, “we must continue to ask ourselves why the field has privileged prose, and a very certain type of scripted prose, over other forms of representation and what knowledge this privilege has lost or obscured in relation to new research understanding” (p. 46). To further counteract what they saw as limits put on who can and cannot use poetry, they created what they called “good enough research poetry” (Lahman et al., 2011, p. 894) during their exploration of ways in which poetry and research can coexist. This was an obvious push against the cautionary remarks of the likes of Piirto (2002) and Faulkner (2007). They supported their open exploration through poetry by citing Leggo (2008), who wrote,

I am concerned that some researchers put poetry on a pedestal as an object for awe-inspiring reverence. I like to stress that poetry is earthy, rooted in everyday experience, connected integrally to the flow of blood in our bodies, expressed constantly in the rhythms of our speech and embodied movement. (p. 170)

Prior to this discussion of poetry, Leggo (2008, p. 167-9) discussed his belief that everyone who undertakes studies using poetry should study the art of writing poetry (which mirrored that of Piirto and Faulkner, who Lahman and colleagues were pushing against). Knowing the greater context of Leggo’s comment, however, does not diminish Lahman and colleagues’ argument that poetry should be accessible to everyone. Their fear is that if the mode or genre becomes elitist that the world is potentially missing out on important discoveries, ways of knowing and ways of expression. This is because, as Ely (1997) wrote, “poetry allows for maximum input – in and between the lines” (p. 136). The question of accessibility of the method is one that remains unanswered and

somewhat contested, yet the proverbial strawberries of poetry continue to grow and proliferate.

What then of the definition of PI? It is clear that PI lacks linearity: that poetry is being used in a variety of fields, discussed using synonymous terms, and in response to individual contexts. That poetry is a unique and vital way to express and learn is a universal element of the studies I reviewed. The plants are growing and bearing fruit.

Continued Growth: Poetic Inquiry Today

As I have explored, PI is happening in various fields, at the intersections between fields and in emergent ways that use art and research for the purposes of understanding. Looking at some of the communities and recent published studies helps to garner an understanding of how the methodology has grown and what rhizomes exist today.

In addition to the International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry (ISPI, 2018), which has been taking place every two years since 2007, where those who practice the methodology and those who are interested in it meet to discuss their work and expand on ideas, there is an ever-growing community of arts-based researchers who are members of notable professional societies. PI, as a form of Arts-Based Educational Research, is of particular interest to special interest groups in two of North America's largest educational research associations. The American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2018) has a special interest group centered on arts-based educational research (ABER SIG, n.d.), which includes PI and sharing of poetic research at their annual conferences. Likewise, Canada's Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE, n.d.) has the Arts Researchers and Teachers Society special interest group (ARTS, n.d.). These special interest groups facilitate workshops, presentations and discussions at their conferences and promote the work of artist-researchers through their academic journals and publications.

Looking briefly at the Canadian context for contemporary journals that publish studies that use PI, the *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* (JCACS, 2017), has been publishing the work of Canadian and international scholars since 2003. The journal published a special edition, guest-edited by Erika Hasebe-Ludt and Carl Leggo (2016), with the theme of "A Métissage of Polyphonic Textualities" that included poetry and influences of PI in discussions provoking thought around curriculum development and curriculum changes. There is also significant evidence of studies that employ PI being published through one of Canada's newest academic journals, this

journal, *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal* (ARI, 2018). These are but a small sampling of the journals publishing artistic academic work in Canada.

The last two years have seen a strong showing of studies that employ PI in the literature. These publications continue to push the rhizomatic growth of the methodology taking place in a multitude of fields. The practice of poetic play (Wiebe et al., 2016) aims to better understand positionality, and there is a continued call for criteria around the methodology (Faulkner, 2016b). Exploration of human experience, such as the experiences of living with physical disability (Downey, 2016), or what Görlich (2016) calls a “polyvocality of experience” (p. 525) through poetry to explore how students feels about their educational experiences in both domestic and international contexts (Wiggins & Monobe, 2017), continues to arise in the literature. The use of poetry to better understand the *Self* (Grimmett, 2016; Norton, 2017) and the experiences and voices of the *Other* (Apol, 2017) is also ever-present. The use of poetry in social justice focused studies gives voice to marginalized communities and people such as Aboriginal communities (Saunders, Usher, Tsey & Bainbridge, 2016) and members of the LGBTQ community (Lambert, 2016) whose stories may not otherwise be heard. Finally, *Poetic Inquiry II* (Prendergast & Galvin, 2015) and the publication of a third anthology around poetry and place (Sameshima, James, Leggo & Fidyk, 2017) continue to amalgamate pieces from new and more seasoned researchers who employ PI in their work. This propagates the continuation of PI by providing exemplars of studies that use the methodology, which may inspire others to explore their research through poetry. These studies are a sampling of the recent publications in the literature which use poetry or PI, but do not reflect the exploratory work that continues in academia, both written and performed (Hume & James, 2017), that seek to push ways of knowing and interpreting lived experience through poetry. These studies continue to develop the rhizomes of PI by engaging students, faculty and the community in poetic exploration of research. They act as exemplars of where this work can go and grow (keeping our metaphor alive).

Conclusion

In this article, I sought to provide an introduction to the intricacies that make up PI. The metaphor of the rhizome helped to support this exploration with the idea of strawberry plants growing and crawling in different directions, yet all yielding the same general type of fruit (poetry). This idea could, as mentioned, also be likened to fungi that reproduce in a variety of areas, but are still of the same species. What my inquiry has revealed is that attempting to create a working definition of a dynamic method such as PI, while not an exercise in futility, is a near impossible task. This article has, however, given newcomers to the fields of education, arts-based research and/or poetry, an idea of how the method came to be. Through engaging with the voices in the literature who

caution those with limited experience in poetry to walk gently through the proverbial strawberry field (Faulkner, 2007; Piirto, 2002) as well as those who champion open engagement (Lahman et al., 2010), I too, bring forward a reminder for critical and purposeful engagement through poetry where both elements of art and inquiry are ever-present and understood. Without an understanding of these elements, researchers risk undertaking a studies and producing documents that will never reach their intended audiences, which would be an act of futility; even strawberries need favourable conditions to grow.

A major goal of this article was to provide a critical, contemporary look at PI from its accepted history (Prendergast, 2009; Hanauer, 2010; McCulliss, 2013, Faulkner, 2016a) to the lesser cited, yet impactful, research that has been conducted and continues to be done. This was done in hopes that you, the reader, both those of you familiar with and those unfamiliar with PI, may not only seek your own definitions of the methods and feel an urge to engage with poetry yourselves, but that you might continue to look for other strawberry plants along your journeys: Where are they growing? Can others pick strawberries with you? The method continues to grow across and between disciplines; many strawberries, hard to define, a lot to chew on.

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