'Tension' and 'Care' as Cornerstones of Criteria for Poetic-Visual Inquiry as Arts-Based Educational Research

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Abstract

This paper aims to address a number of inter-related issues concerning criteria for arts-based research. We start by responding to current discussions and debates over criteria, with a tacit goal of redefining the nature and goal of emerging visions of doing qualitative-oriented research. After reviewing some emerging frameworks for judging qualitative-oriented research and arts-based studies, we explore the prospect of integrating poetic elements into visual inquiry. This feeds into our suggestion of poetic-visual inquiry as a form of arts-based research, which we elaborate through three existing studies. In relation to this, we raise tension and care as two keys for thinking through researchers' consciousness when carrying out arts-based research.

Introduction
Our discussion of criteria is mainly positioned within the contours of qualitative-oriented research and we look more specifically at arts-based research. We want to clarify our usage of the two terms:
- Qualitative-Oriented Research
  We are aware that the dualistic labeling 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' is highly problematic, but it is difficult not to fall back to this set of entrenched vocabularies before deconstructing them or inventing new terms to illustrate our points. In this article, we use the term *qualitative-oriented research* to refer to studies where the ways that humans make meaning in the living world are prioritised over statistical significance in the process of designing, implementing and presenting research. We acknowledge that this broad category can include a wide range of approaches situated in different epistemological, methodological and conceptual frameworks.
- Arts-Based Research
  We use *arts-based research* to refer to academic research that applies inquiry methods of the arts as frames of methodology, ways of conceptualising research problems, and forms of representation. With our focus on educational research, we would also apply the term 'Arts-Based Educational Research' (ABER), originally proposed in 1993 by Elliot Eisner and his graduate students to members of the American Educational Research Association at the Arts-Based Research Institute, Stanford University (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008; Eisner, 2006).

Reconceptualising and Reframing Criteria
Our standpoint on criteria can be summarised as follows: 1) Criteria are always value-laden; 2) Criteria are essential for ensuring the quality of academic research; 3) Criteria operate on different levels; general criteria need to be coupled with more specific criteria when judging a study.
1) Criteria are always value-laden.
Qualitative researchers have challenged the implications of positivist thinking embedded in the set of vocabularies about criteria along the lines of 'validity', 'reliability', and 'generalizability' (Bochner, 2000; Ellingson, 2009; Lincoln & Denzin, 1994; Richardson, 1994; Wolcott, 1990). For instance, 'reliability' in the context of qualitative-oriented research usually refers to the dependability of data. 'Validity' is no longer limited to the sense of the logical and sound relationship between the measuring instrument and the concept it is attempting to measure. In narrative research, the term is applied to indicate 'the strength of the analysis of the data' (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 176). When *meaning-creation* replaces *measuring*, generalizability in terms of 'sample-to-population' (Firestone, 1993) is equally problematic. Maxwell (1992) emphasises the importance of 'internal generalizability' to qualitative researchers, which, in contrast to 'external generalizability', refers to the generalizability of a conclusion within the research setting. In a similar vein, Hammersley (1992) differentiates empirical generalisation (attending to aspects of empirical findings) from theoretical generalisation (attending to theory building).
Critical reflections on criteria mirrors the changing agenda of qualitative-oriented research which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2004), is now in the *seventh*

moment[1] 'concerned with moral discourse; with the re-joining of art, literature and science … [and] critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation, globalization, freedom and community' (p. 660). The features of *seventh moment* also imply that the creation and application of criteria are inevitably imbued with the values embraced by the human actors involved in the process. Criteria are thus fundamentally tied to 'our values and our subjectivities' (Bochner, 2000, p. 266) and 'choosing a set of evaluative criteria in and of itself is socially constructed and politically driven in nature' (Cho & Trent, 2014, p. 679).

2) Criteria are essential for ensuring the quality of academic research.

It is true that criteria can sometimes become an obstacle that prevents the imaginative and creative evolution of ideas (Bochner, 2000). While it is in vain to dissolve irresolvable differences behind different frameworks of criteria (Bochner, 2000), the real issue is to work out *why* and *how* these differences emerge, and how we can *live with* these differences. It is important to ensure the *quality* of qualitative research (Trainor & Graue, 2013), as an 'anything goes' attitude can be detrimental to any academic community.

Through criteria we make judgments of quality (Siegesmund, 2014). And through criteria, we can also explore and unveil our subjectivity in doing research. 'What we see depends upon our angle of repose' (Richardson, 1994, p. 522). Discussions on criteria can help us to make links between our 'angle' of repose' and the ways we approach research. In this sense, criteria are not simply an outward-looking mechanism for judging others' research, but can also act as an inward-looking instrument for reflective self-evaluations.

3) Criteria operate on different levels; general criteria need to be coupled with more specific criteria when judging a study.

In most cases, criticisms of criteria are targeted at *criteriology*, which is 'the quest for permanent or stable criteria of rationality founded in the desire for objectivism' (Schwandt, 1996, p. 58). To liberate ourselves from obsession with a fundamental truth, we believe that a checklist approach needs to be avoided and that discussions of criteria need to be situated in contexts. The challenge of framing criteria thus lies in the recognition of distinguishing general criteria commonly applicable to almost all types of qualitative-oriented research from unique criteria for judging specific research in its own context (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Cho & Trent, 2014; Schwandt, 2002). This calls for a parallel approach towards criteria: the combination of minimal/essential criteria and context-specific criteria.

We all have some basic expectations of social science research. For instance, Cho and Trent (2014) borrow Cobb and Hagemaster's (1987) list for evaluating qualitative-oriented research proposals, applying 'ten evaluative commandments' for evaluating dissertation studies and journal articles. The

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[1] Denzin and Lincoln (2004) surveyed qualitative research in the North American context from the beginning of the 20th century till now (beginning of the 21st century), and have identified seven moments: the *traditional* (1900-1950); the *modernist* or golden age (1950-1970); *blurred genres* (1970-1986); *the crisis of representation* (1986-1990); the *postmodern*, a period of *experimental and new ethnographies* (1990-1995); *postexperimental inquiry* (1995-2000); and the *future*, or the *seventh moment*, which is underway.

ten items[2] are almost all 'core elements' (except the last one: importance to the field), which can form the core of minimal criteria for academic research. Meanwhile, we need to look at how these elements relate to each other within the conceptual, theoretical and methodological framework of a specific study. It would be inappropriate, for example, to use the same set of criteria for a quasi-experimental study to judge a phenomenological study. As Finlay (2006) comments, 'If a piece of research is to be evaluated, it *needs to be evaluated on its own terms*' (p. 325, original emphasis).

Emerging Proposals of Criteria for Arts-Based Research
Following our general stance on criteria, we believe that arts-based research needs to demonstrate *quality*. Beyond providing justifications for 'an emerging methodology' (Slattery, 2003, p. 193), arts-based researchers have the paramount task to establish a framework of criteria that both fit the core criteria for qualitative-oriented research and reflect the distinctive nature and features of arts-based research.

We have selected a few major proposals to highlight the common concerns among scholarly discussions about criteria for qualitative-oriented research and arts-based research. When it comes to essential criteria for qualitative-oriented research, both Finlay (2006) and Tracy (2010) have recommended some key rubrics. Integrating his concerns over rigor, ethical integrity and artistry, Finlay (2006) suggests 5 'C's as criteria: Clarity; Credibility; Contribution; Communicative Resonance; and Caring. Tracy (2010) strives to provide a common language for discussing the quality of qualitative-oriented research and she proposes eight big *tents*[3]: worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence.

In terms of sociological ethnography, Richardson (2000) proposes a double lens approach that integrates scientific and artistic quality of ethnographic writing, and she identifies five dimensions for reviewing ethnographic research: *substantive contribution*, *aesthetic merit*, *reflexivity, impact on emotions and intellect,* and *expression of a reality.* This proposal has been slightly adapted into a four-dimension framework of criteria for postmodernist social science writing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) as: 1) substantive contribution; 2) aesthetic merit; 3) reflexivity; 4) impact. Ellis's (2000) strategy of judging narrative research is guided by a similar principle. Valuing both evocation and cognitive contemplation, Ellis (2000) privileges the former over the latter, which is in tune with her advocacy for evocative ethnography that 'uses stories to do the work of analysis and theorizing' (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 436). Ellis (2000) also considers the following aspects when reviewing journal articles: a new vision that readers can learn from the story; the style and structure of the writing; the goals, claims, and achievements of the author; and ethical considerations.

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[2] Expertise, problem and/or research question, purpose, literature review, context, sample, data collection, data processing and plans for analysis, human subject, importance to the field

[3] The metaphor of 'tent' is borrowed from Denzin's (2008) comment 'We cannot afford to fight with one another. . . . We need to find new strategic and tactical ways to work with one another. . . . We must expand the size of our tent, indeed we need a bigger tent!' (p. 321).

Echoing our third stance on criteria, we find that the main issue lying behind the above proposals concerns the conceptualisation of criteria that can do justice to the nature and features of qualitative-oriented research. In this regard, Hickman (2013) highlights the variations of the main guiding principles for judging three different paradigms of research, as displayed in Figure 1. Though the table format is limiting in that it fails to recognize the complex nature of making judgment, Hickman's (2013) attempt magnifies the distinctions between different frameworks of research and accordingly calls attention to the need to differentiate our lenses of criteria.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE	Quantitative research	Qualitative research	Poetic research
Worthwhileness	Utility	Value	**Insightfulness**
Veracity	Internal validity	Credibility	**Authenticity**
Applicability	External Validity	Transferability	Empathic strength
Consistency	Reliability	Dependability	Formal coherence
Persuasiveness	How Convincing	How Compelling	Expressiveness
Neutrality	Objectivity	Confirmability	Distinctiveness

Figure 1. An adjusted version of Hickman (2013)'s framework for judging three paradigms of research

Here, we want to highlight the dimensions of *insightfulness* and *authenticity*, which have a bearing on the core value of poetic research (or arts-based research). Etymologically, the modern use of insight derived from the word 'insiht' in Middle English, meaning 'mental vision', or 'sight with the eyes of the mind'. In Old English, however*, insiht* denotes 'narrative, argument, account'. The trajectory of its definition suggests a link between the mind's eye and the production of narrative and argument. It is thus not a coincidence that Eisner names his book *The enlightened eye: qualitative inquiry and the enhancement of educational practice* in which he (1998) affirms the value of the kind of experience that goes beyond *what it is* to *what it can possibly illuminate*. Eisner (1998) asserts that as qualitative researchers, we need wider our forms of expression, our use of language and strive to secure insights derived from multiple perspectives. Following this view, the question 'does the research communicate its ideas through well-constructed arguments?' needs to be replaced by 'does the research stimulate and engage its audience through its "fusion of an artist's inquiry methods, elements, and theoretical perspectives" (Knowles & Thomas, 2002, p. 123)?'. Insightfulness can lead to 'imaginative empathy' and 'sensitive engagement' (Whiteley, 1999, p. 117). But at the same time, we should not neglect Eisner (1998) caution that 'appreciation for personal insight as a source of meaning does not provide a license for freedom' (p. 35). Authenticity is one principle to ensure that artistic

creation and presentation do not run wild and that the pursuit of insightfulness does not lead to acts of distorting data[4].

To sum up, what emerges in the above considerations is the importance attached to both *intellectual contribution* and *humanistic value* for judging research, which have drifted further away from a checklist approach or a static view based on a fixed set of vocabularies. Despite the variations in the terms they use, all the above scholars have incorporated the following dimensions into their proposed frameworks of criteria: content, approach (where 'ethics' is an essential element), presentation, and contribution to the field. Their attitude towards *criteria* conforms to Richardson's (2000) stance 'I do not have definitive answers, but I have some ideas and preferences' (p. 254). We can also discern expectations and support for artistic elements in research, as demonstrated by the inclusion of 'aesthetic merit', 'resonance', 'evocation' and 'expressiveness'.

Framing Criteria for Arts-Based Research

A meta-framework for judging arts-based methods of representing research has been developed by Lafrenière and Cox (2012), who have raised three key factors for 'guiding arts-based research assessment' (GABRA): *normative* (data/findings are based on rigorous interpretation and analysis; basic ethical duties towards participants fulfilled); *substantive* (skillfully application of artistic techniques in correspondence to the artistic properties of its genre[s]); and *performative* (an appreciable effect on audience's understanding of or appreciation for the study findings). What Lafrenière and Cox (2012) have explored are arts-based methods of representing research findings, and they acknowledge that they have not considered studies that use arts-based methods as ways of inquiry.

Other scholars have discussed frameworks for assessing arts-based research that apply particular artistic forms. Faulkner (2007) considers the following aspects when reviewing studies that contain research poetry (as product): artistic concentration, embodied experience, discovery/surprise, conditionality, narrative truth, and transformation. Freedman and Siegesmund (2015) have explored criteria for arts-based inquiry that involves images, and they suggest 'insightfulness' and 'applicability' as alternatives to 'validity' and 'reliability'. They use *insightfulness* as 'the disciplined process of inquiry into perception' (p. 5) and *applicability* in the sense of 'a quality of usefulness' (p. 6). Apart from this overarching principle, Freeman and Siegesmund (2015) have identified five different purposes of using 'images' in research, each corresponding to one or two dimensions of criteria adopted by the Arts-Based Educational Research Special Interest Group (SIG) for assessment of excellence. We summarise their proposal in Figure 2.

> The combination of *insightfulness* and *applicability* recognizes the challenge for arts-based researchers to 'play two games at once' (Barone, 2001, p. 171): to effectively communicate arts-based studies, arts-based researchers need to take on the responsibility of a critic to review and interpret their own research critically and reflectively in an approachable style. Their usage of *insightfulness* is similar to

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[4] In our opinion, works like *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Schindler's List* are more authentic portrait of WWII Holocaust, whereas Holocaust denial literature is, to varies degrees, motivated and manipulated by various political purposes.

Hickman's (2013) proposal though there are some differences. According to Freedman and Siegesmund (2015), 'insightfulness' requires gaining both deep knowledge and a sensibility about that knowledge (p. 4), and it can be checked by people with knowledge of the field. This view of 'insightfulness' is mostly inward-looking, without considering how the work engages and connects with non-expertise audiences. In addition, what we find problematic in Freedman and Siegesmund's (2015) proposal is that they have mechanically matched each function of image with a distinctive dimension of criteria. Though 'image as inquiry', 'image as research', 'image as data' are all neatly composed terms, they fail to reflect the complexity involved in the application of visual materials in academic research. It is practically difficult to distinguish the different ways of using images (as the five usages often overlap with each other). And as we mentioned, we need to consider the framework of the study as well when discussing criteria for visual inquiry.

Purpose of Images		**Dimension of Criteria**
Image as Record	Analysing visually what can be seen	Significance
Image as Data	Analysis of local and global visual culture	Resonance
Image as Study	Analysis of participant made images as a form of investigation	Aesthetic Quality
Image as Theory	Researcher made interpretative/provocative object for personal analysis	Reflexivity
Image as Research	Analysis of public representation of research results	Aesthetic Quality; Ethical Considerations

Figure 2. Criteria for Arts-Based Research Employing Visual Materials

In what follows, we raise the idea of 'poetic-visual inquiry'. As we develop this concept, we introduce three studies, which we think, display the main traits of this type of research. Our approach towards criteria for arts-based research is informed by our general stance on criteria and our idea of 'poetic-visual inquiry'.

Doing and Evaluating Poetic-Visual Inquiry as Arts-Based Research
Arts-based research raises our awareness that 'what we look for, as well as what we see and say, is influenced by the tools we know how to use and believe to be appropriate' (Eisner, 1998, p. 4). Arts-based methodologies thus liberate researchers from traditional approaches of conducting and communicating research usually confined in the form of linear text. While narrative prose is still the dominant format in academic research, arts-based researchers have highlighted possibilities of integrating a diverse range of art forms, based on the recognition that 'our experience is fragmentary, multi-modal, and shaped by habits of attention as much as by what we encounter' (Oughton, 2012, p. 75).

One such example is the employment of poetry, which has been employed in social science research since the 1980s (Butler-Kisber, 2012). Prendergast (2009) provides a bibliography of the usage of poetry in qualitative research and she employs the term 'poetic inquiry' as 'an umbrella to cover the multiple terminologies [she has] been finding in [her] meta-analytical study'[5]. Prendergast (2009) classifies poetry inquiry into three categories according to the 'voice' of the poem: literature-voiced poems, researcher-voiced poems, and participant-voiced poems. We would argue that this distinction marked by 'voice' tends to overshadow the role(s) played by research poems, which is fundamentally shaped and presented by researchers based on research data or researchers' own reflections. We prefer to borrow Butler-Kisber's (2012) identification of *found poetry* and *generated poetry,* the former relies more on existing research data, whereas the latter is the product of researchers' creative efforts based on personal experiences *during* research or *as* research. Both forms of poetry can be integrated into different stages of research for different purposes. For instance, *found poetry* can be used as a format to synthesise ideas from literature (Prendergast, 2006) or as an analytical approach for interview transcripts (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Cahnmann, 2003); *generated poetry* has been created as self-therapy (Furman, 2004), as critique and reflection of existing literature (Leggo, 2014), or as a way to record and reflect collaborative efforts of inquiry (Lahman et al., 2009). Richardson (1992) contends that poetic representation enables the researcher to '(re)write the Self' (p. 136) into sociological research. The rationale behind this type of 'poetic research' can be traced to Geertz's (1980) suggestion of reconfiguring social thought that relies on the alignment to humanities rather than the natural science model. In a similar line, Nisbet (1976) argues for the fundamental connection between sociology and art, and Bochner (2000) uses poetic social science to refer to alternative ethnographic

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[5] Some examples of the multiple terms applied by different scholars include 'data poems', 'poetic narrative', 'ethnopoetry', 'poetic resonance', 'field poetry', 'poetic reflection', 'performance poem'. For a full list, please see Prendergast, 2009, pp. xx-xxi.

narratives, recalling Ivan Brady's (1991) notion of 'art-ful science' that integrates anthropology and literature.

In accordance with the principle of arts-based research underlying 'the expressive quality of an artistically crafted form' (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. xiii), we suggest that the quality of 'poetry' as a literary form can be extended to a metaphorical sense to indicate forms of knowing and representing that is capable of 'convey[ing] poignancy, musicality, rhythm, mystery and ambiguity' (Butler-Kisber, 2012, p. 142). Some of the key features of poetic inquiry include:

- Rich in metaphors;
- Rhythmic expressions;
- Ambiguity and mysteriousness;
- Exploratory rather than definitive tones;
- Traces of researchers' reflexivity and subjectivity;
- Space for multiple readings and ways of engagement

It is possible that we can weave poetic inquiry into arts-based research that is hypertextual, performative, and even multimodal. Here, we want to explore how visual inquiry can be pursued in poetic mode.

Poetic-Visual Inquiry as Arts-Based Research

From a postmodern perspective, writing is viewed as 'a method of inquiry' (Richardson & St. Pierre, 1994), which is itself 'a sociohistorical construction' (p. 960). In the same spirit, visual inquiry acknowledges that we can express our ideas and enrich our understanding of the world through visual materials. There is much difference between the inclusion of images simply as a supplementary illustration to the main text and the application of visual materials as a major part of narrative/argument/analysis. The latter forms the rationale of visual inquiry, and a further distinction can be made between a reportive style and an evocative style. Visual inquiry as arts-based research aligns closer to the evocative style, which 'has as its ambition the provision of a set of qualities that create an empathic sense of life in those who encounter it, whether the work is visual or linguistic, choreographic or musical' (Eisner, 2008, p. 6).

Is it possible to intertwine poetic qualities into this evocative style of visual inquiry? Is that possible that we use and create *images* (rather than simply *words*) in a 'poem-ish' way (Reynolds, 2004)? Our answer is affirmative. We use 'poetic-visual inquiry' to refer to the type of arts-based research where visual materials are the primary instrument through which researchers explore, shape, interpret, address and communicate their research problem and where the visual materials are created and presented *poetically*. To illustrate our point, we have selected three studies that, in our opinion, exhibit the major traits of poetic-visual inquiry. In Figure 3, we introduce the topic, major lens, and theoretical framework of the three projects.

Source	Topic	Major Lens	Theoretical Framework
Metta, 2013	Experience of women (and children) subject to domestic violence	Autoethnographic	Feminist; Poststructuralist; Embodied ways of thinking, knowing, writing, and being; Mindful practice (Buddhist philosophy)
Marin & Roldan, 2010	Exploring the role of photos in visual arts-based educational research	Photography-based educational research	Photo essay
Vaughan, 2005	Understanding family photographs	Practice-led Research (Interdisciplinary visual practice)	Feminist; Postmodern; Postcolonial

Figure 3. Three Examples of Poetic-Visual Research

Visual methods are a major form of inquiry in all three articles, though the sources and roles of visual materials vary. In Metta's (2013) portrait of women experiencing domestic violence, she has integrated drawings that she co-created with another artists; Marín and Roldán's (2010) photo essay blends photos from the collections of Lewis Hine, and those taken by teacher students and the researchers themselves; Vaughan (2005) brings together a number of images that are visual traces of her studio practices.

It can be said that the three studies fall into the category of arts-based research described by Cahnmann-Taylor (2008) as 'blurred genres that brings together hybrid forms'. What is noticeable, however, is that visual materials are all employed in these studies as an essential part of the *knowing* process. Metta (2013), for instance, comments that her 'weaving visual and written narratives … is a deliberate methodology to perform different layers of storytelling and storymaking' (p. 499). Marín and Roldán (2010) experiment with different ways of juxtaposing photos to make a case for photo-educational research. Their goal is to explore how photographs can be combined in visual arts educational research 'to generate formal, narrative and conceptual interactions that are decisive in terms o f their scientific and artistic interest' (p. 9). In Vaughan's (2005) heuristic inquiry into family's stories through studio practice, she develops 'collage' as a method for interdisciplinary study. Citing Harding's (1996) concept of borderlands epistemology, Vaughan (2005) believes that collage manifests efforts for 'an inclusive, liberatory agenda that can work in the overlappings of multiple

disciplines' (p. 26).

We want to extend the metaphor of 'collage', which can serve as the methodological core of poetic-visual inquiry. As we summarise in Figure 3, researchers of the three projects are all engaged in acts of creating multi-modal collage, mainly relying on the interplay between visual materials and written narratives (prose and/or poems). Texts have been 'written' into the visual, and images are 'visualised' into texts, achieving not only *trompe l'esprit* (ontological strangeness) noted by Picasso (Vaughan, 2005, p. 31), but also a multi-sensory embodied experience that can evoke the audience's various modes of emotion simultaneously.

In Marín and Roldán's (2010) photo essay, we can discern a particular rhythm in their creative juxtaposition of photos, especially in the way different sources of photo echo, complement, and contrast each other. For example, photos of similar poses and backdrop photographed in a different time-space are placed together, creating a strong visual impact and at the same time dissolves the researcher-participant distinction. The photos taken from Lewis Hine's collection displayed at the margin with a smaller size serve as the purpose of 'photo citation' (Marín & Roldán, 2010), by which the researchers interact with visual forms of literature. Rich metaphors are created and a sense of ambiguity is retained in their treatment of photos: blurring backgrounds, reversing lenses, and producing photos within photos.

To add another comment, we switch again to Vaughan's (2005) project. The images that she encloses form a visual track of her studio practice and her thinking process. Mantas (2012) believes that 'poetry insists that we pay attention to how "the word[s] are couched in the empty whiteness of the page" (O'Donohue, 1997, p. 95) as well as "contemplate the space that it leaves" (Mellick, 1996, p. 125)' (p. 228). Similarly, Vaughan's (2005) visual snapshots create a contemplative space, prompting readers to imagine those moments that have not been documented visually or textually

Poetic-visual inquiry as arts-based research is a liberating possibility rather than a tyrannous order. The three examples that we have cited demonstrate that it is fully compatible with a diverse range of theoretical lenses (feminist, postcolonialist, postmodern, and performative framework). Meanwhile, poetic-visual inquiry echoes the epistemological humble' (Barone, 2008) stance of arts-based research, recognising 'knowing' as 'a verb' and 'a work in process' rather than 'an object or product that is fixed and definitely knowable' (Eisner, 2008, p. 25).

'Tension' and 'Care' as Two Cornerstones of Criteria

As we mentioned earlier, Lafrenière and Cox's (2012) assessing framework mainly focuses on the representation of research findings that applies arts-based methods. To complement their approach, we want to discuss criteria for arts-based research with a process-oriented mindset. In other words, our discussion centres on researchers' *consciousness* while engaging in arts-based research.

Aesthetic quality is a key dimension while judging arts-based research, and Eisner and Barone (2011) have pointed out that

> Generally speaking, the more an arts based researcher possesses the desire, dedication, opportunity, persistence, and support for engaging in activities within a chosen art form and acquiring the technical skills

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and aesthetic feel for the medium employed, then the more
aesthetically accomplished their work is likely to be. (p. 56)

While a researcher's skills and devotion can assure the aesthetic quality manifested in the research product, it is hard to trace how their consciousness in this process. Acknowledging this difficulty, we try to make an attempt towards identifying the essentials of such consciousness. Arts-based research demands 'aesthetic vision' which is 'a high level of consciousness about what one sees' (Eisner & Barone, 2011, p. 37). When we introduce consciousness as part of criteria, we link back to our second principle of criteria. An awareness of how one's research is to be judged by others is informed by how one positions and reviews one's own research. We proceed now to illustrate two fundamental principles when considering this consciousness: *tension* and *care*.

A major feature of arts-based research, according to Eisner (2008), is that they are caught by a number of *tensions*. Eisner (2008) refers to Dewey's notion of 'disequilibrium' (1934) and he uses the term 'tension' in the sense of 'a psychological state that creates a feeling of mild discomfort, a feeling that can be temporarily relieved through inquiry' (p. 17). Among the five tensions identified by Eisner, the one most relevant to our discussion is 'the tension between formulating new questions and providing answers that can inform practices' (p. 23).

In the three studies that we have examined, all researchers are *conscious* of this tension. What they have presented are exploratory inquiries supported by their tentative attempts. As readers, we are invited to participate in a mental ritual in a setting laid out by the researchers. We are even encouraged to think for ourselves, and thinking about how things could be *otherwise*. This is manifested through the researchers' *manipulation* of visual materials, which is especially noticeable in Marín and Roldán's (2010) photo essay. Just by glancing at the photos, we can capture the interconnectedness between the photos, and we start to wonder about other possibilities. But we can also tell that Marín and Roldán are not only making a point about 'photo essay', and about the creative approaches towards using visual materials. We are caught in what has *not* been shown, in the intricacies of the multitudinous threads that connect the visual details. The poetic rhythms and metaphorical echoes of their visual inquiry sustain such tension, demonstrating 'an epistemology of ambiguity' (Barone, 2001) that 'celebrate meanings that are partial, tentative, incomplete, and sometimes even contradictory and originating from multiple vantage points' (pp. 152-153).

The mission of arts-based researchers is not to resolve tension, but to develop a high level of awareness of how *tension* is played out and its purposes and consequences. This is where tension connects back to insightfulness and applicability highlighted by Freedman and Siegesmund (2015). Carter (2004) believes that creative research has a different object as 'it explores the irreducible heterogeneity of cultural identity, the always unfinished process of making and remaking ourselves through our symbolic forms (p. 13). But beyond building into this heterogeneity into research by attending to tension, we find it important to probe into the ethical dimension as well.

A distinguishing feature of ABER is that 'it uses aesthetic qualities to shed

light on the educational situations we care about' (Eisner, 2008, p. 22). When reviewing arts-based research, we can consider the extent and form of care that the researcher holds for the topic and his/her own research experience (inward-looking), and for the experience of the participants and the psychological weight of the research on readers (outward-looking). This is in line with Noddings's (2003/2005) vision of the ethic of care, which incorporates *a relational view of care* and *care as virtue*. If tension is the rhythmic waves that stir us, then care is the soothing touch that calms us and reminds us to pay attention.

While argumentative narrative and pure slogans can be produced out of good intention, they might numb our senses. Poetic element can create and nurture a space for care. When we make judgments of arts-based research, we can explore how the ethic of care has been integrated into the study, and the extent to which the researcher is conscious of this aspect of ethics. In Metta's (2013) research, for example, *care* is woven into '*embodied mindfulness'* (p. 503, original emphasis). The strong emotional appeal of the autoethnographic texts honours and even magnifies women's experience of domestic experience, evoking an emotional response among readers. This aligns with 'wide-awakeness' (Greene, 1978) as one of the promises of arts-based research, when the 'beholder [is invited to] enter the aesthetic space' (p. 164) through the gates of imagination.

Social inquiry is 'a form of inquiry *on* human action as much as it is inquiry *with* human actors' (Schwandt, 1996, p. 63, original emphasis). Arts-based research goes beyond this expectation as positions our inquiry as fundamentally *humanistic*. With this in mind, we have faith that tension and care can serve as cornerstones for reviewing arts-based researchers' consciousness while framing and practising ABER.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, we have discussed the nature of criteria, and have raised 'tension' and 'care' as two cornerstones for considering criteria for poetic-visual inquiry as arts-based research. Our discussion of criteria is targeted at the research process, which we hope, can enrich the current dialogue on establishing framework for judging arts-based research that mainly concentrate on research product.

The examples that we have cited in this article are mainly photography and drawing as visual inquiry. We believe experiments and efforts of developing poetic visual inquiry and corresponding criteria can be extended to other forms of arts-based inquiry. For example, film-making calls for a distinctive poetic imagination in the process of image-making (MacDougall, 2006).

We are not, however, suggesting that we have 'discovered' a new approach towards criteria. Tracy (2010) comments that 'it is important to regularly dialogue about what makes for good qualitative research' (p. 837) and Richardson (2000) maintains that 'it is our continuing task to create new criteria and new criteria for choosing criteria' (p. 254). Likewise, we believe that frameworks of criteria are always evolving and always need to be adjusted, changed, and even overturned. Issues of criteria only emerge when we feel the necessity and urge to make judgment. Framing criteria helps us to clarify our stances towards our own research and alerts us to the bigger picture, which is ever more important when we engage in strands of arts-based research that calls for multi-modal creativity.

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