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# Found Poems, Member Checking and Crises of Representation

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## Found Poems, Member Checking and Crises of Representation

### **Abstract**

In order to establish veracity, qualitative researchers frequently rely on member checks to insure credibility by giving participants opportunities to correct errors, challenge interpretations and assess results; however, member checks are not without drawbacks. This paper describes an innovative approach to conducting member checks. Six members of a learning organization participated in two group interviews to examine the use of poetry as a method to promote individual and organizational learning. Several weeks later, participants received a copy of their transcripts and were asked to create a “found poem” to reflect their thoughts and feelings about using poetry as a learning tool. There was resonance between the interview themes produced by traditional open coding methods and those using participant - created found poems. However, the found poems added an emotional depth and connection that was missing from the traditional approach of coding qualitative data. This suggests that participant - created found poems can provide an agentic alternative to the usual method of member checking and also expand the notions of aesthetic approaches within qualitative research.

### **Keywords**

Arts - Based Research, Found Poems, Member Checks, Trustworthiness, Crisis of Representation

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## Found Poems, Member Checking and Crises of Representation

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In my training as a qualitative researcher, I was schooled in the “traditional” assumptions, approaches, and methods of conducting interpretive qualitative inquiry. I was trained to perform the methodological procedures designed to insure trustworthiness, *the* goal of significant and “believable” research. Trustworthiness, despite the eight plus historical moments within the evolutionary path of the field of qualitative methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), is still the most often cited standard of truthfulness and authenticity for qualitative research across numerous and varied disciplines.

### **Trustworthiness: The Original Gold Standard**

In order to establish that qualitative findings were worthy of attention, Lincoln and Guba (1985) first put forth the notion of trustworthiness to replace the quantitative criteria of validity, reliability, and objectivity. Conceived as parallel to empiricist concepts, trustworthiness determined the degree to which researchers’ claims about knowledge corresponded to the reality (or the research participants’ construction of reality) being studied (Manning, 1997). Its aim was to achieve a relatively high degree of accuracy and consensus by means of revisiting facts, feelings, experiences, and values or beliefs collected and interpreted (Cho & Trent, 2006). Concerned with safeguarding consistency and the validity of findings, trustworthiness includes:

- *credibility* (in place of internal validity), that is, the extent that the constructions adequately represent the participant’s reality;
- *transferability* (in place of external validity), that is, an adequately and thickly described account so that those who wish to transfer the implications to another context can do so with an adequate data base;

- *dependability* (in place of reliability), that is, the data is internally coherent; and
- *confirmability* (in place of objectivity), that is, the extent to which the theoretical implications are grounded in the data.

These criteria were seen as particularly vital if the purpose of the inquiry was to describe or understand the experiences of the researched, and not to predict or control those experiences. In order to promote the trustworthiness of the data, several safeguards were customarily built into projects in order to provide a series of checks and balances (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Member checks, or respondent validation, involve testing the data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions with participants from whom the data were originally gathered as an important and preeminent way to insure truthfulness and authenticity. Member checks give participants opportunities to correct errors and challenge what they perceive as erroneous interpretations. They provide participants with an occasion to volunteer additional or clarifying information, which may be stimulated by reviewing their contributions. These additions may deepen and extend the researcher's understanding and analysis. Member checks also afford participants the opportunity to assess the adequacy of the data and the preliminary results, as well as to confirm or disconfirm particular aspects of the data. This safeguard still forms the foundation for many qualitative claims of veracity.

### **The Need for Different Standards**

Since my early experiences in learning and becoming a qualitative researcher, the field has undergone a profound philosophical evolution (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is an evolution which questions the fundamental underlying assumptions of the gold standard of trustworthiness and therefore, the utility of member checks.

### **The Critique of Trustworthiness**

The notion of trustworthiness has been the subject of critique within the past twenty-five years. In later writings, Guba and Lincoln (1989) noted that using procedures to attempt to establish accurate correspondence carried too positivist an implication, in that there was an underlying assumption that an unchanging phenomena exists, and can, therefore, be logically and methodically checked and verified. This crisis of representation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) called into question the accepted qualitative wisdom concerning truth, method, and representation. Issues of trustworthiness were problematized, along with our notions of meaning and authority. Many qualitative researchers no longer believed they could capture and precisely communicate the lived experience of the researched by conventional methods. Cho and Trent (2006) concurred and noted that researchers guided by this trustworthiness standard may pursue, albeit unconsciously, the likelihood that there is a possibility for a greater, more accurate, "objective" truth than can be achieved by the use of interpretive methods. Despite this coherent critique of the underlying assumptions of trustworthiness as contrary to the fundamental paradigmatic view of interpretivist inquiry, it is still frequently cited as *the* sign of authenticity and veracity. It too often appears as if researchers regard trustworthiness as a formulaic recipe, and mistakenly utilize its approaches as a "methodological sleight of hand" (Manning, 1997, p. 93) to magically produce quality research.

## **The Pragmatic Limitations of Member Checks**

Even in the context of this critique of trustworthiness, member checks are still a typical practice for many qualitative researchers. However, member checks are not without their drawbacks. Participants struggle with the abstract synthesis that is required of comparing their contributions to the coded categorical analysis. They may forget what they said or the manner in which they told a certain story. As well, since, generally, member checking consists of distributing the coded transcripts and / or preliminary results to participants (an inherently passive process within a paradigm that is constructivist), members may participate only to be “good and cooperative” respondents and compliantly agree with the research interpretations in order to please the researcher. Emerson and Pollner (1988) pointed to several other difficulties in using member checks: problems arising from a failure to read all of a report and / or from misunderstanding what was being said; establishing whether certain comments from respondents were indicative of agreement or dissent; inadvertently asking questions with which it would be difficult to disagree; and fears among members about the wider political and social implications of agreement or disagreement, an especially salient point in organizational research. Bloor (1997) argued that it is sometimes difficult to get participants to give the submitted materials the time and attention the researcher would like, since this can be such a time consuming activity. Therefore, indifference, or a lack of time or space, may then be construed as corroboration. In addition, researchers are frequently at a loss as to how to deal with disagreements about interpretations and conclusions from participants (Bradshaw, 2001). Strategies for coping with, challenging, and / or negotiating these issues of divergence are unclear, since untangling the underlying reasons for dissension is ultimately a problematic pursuit (Bryman, 2004).

### **This Inquiry**

Within the context of this inquiry I attempted to develop an innovative and more engaging approach to conducting member checks using found poems in order to bypass some of the limitations of member checks and to establish veracity through empathetic validity (Dadds, 2006). Empathetic validity is an alternative to trustworthiness that is more congruent and aligned to an interpretive stance. It represents the potential of research to transform the emotional dispositions of people towards each other, such that more positive feelings are created in the form of greater empathy. In this way a closer connection and understanding between the researched and the reader is created. As well, the creation of found poems as a type of member checking is conceived as maintaining participant active involvement and voice in the analysis, without the filter of the researcher’s constructions. It is also a process of member checking as a purposeful social invitation in which participants determine the images of themselves that they wish to become public, nominate the realities that they and only they can construct, and engage in ever higher levels of participation in the social inquiries that shape their lives (Cho & Trent, 2006).

### **My Crisis of Representation as a Microcosm of the Greater Dilemma**

I originally was educated in psychology during the heyday of behaviorism at my alma mater. I was schooled in the scientific method through rat maze trials and tightly controlled social quasi-experiments. When I left that milieu because I felt deeply unfulfilled, I gravitated to working with young children in educational contexts as they came to explore and understand the world. I was intensely entranced by how they made meaning of their physical and social environment. This perspective fueled my interests when I returned to graduate

school in educational psychology. I learned the ways of qualitative research in the early nineties in a context that was still strongly influenced by statistics and the post-positivist paradigm. Since that time, I have endeavored to keep pace with the evolution of the field of qualitative inquiry.

When reflecting upon my own praxis as a qualitative researcher I underwent my own personal crisis of representation. In rejecting the idea that my work can accurately depict a stable other, I still found that I wanted my representations and findings to *resonate with participants*, a particularly challenging task when doing descriptive research. My major purpose in doing qualitative research was to learn to see the world through the eyes and experience of another. I strive to come closer to understanding the meanings attributed by others to their lived experiences, and to have my work make some sort of difference in the social world. Most often, I would try and achieve this resonance through member checks. But, I became disillusioned with the member checks I conducted.

When I approached my qualitative research circle with these doubts and questions, I found that my colleagues were wrestling with the same issues. Our study participants were more focused on their spoken syntax and grammar than on the meaning underlying their contributions. They were more embarrassed by their stuttering and stumbling than confident enough to challenge or question our interpretations. How should we interpret the non-responses to our requests to review the findings? One colleague suggested that she was sometimes secretly relieved that some participants only gave a cursory glance to what she sent them. She was unsure how she might reconcile her interpretations with disagreements from the participants or between participants. After this extensive discussion, I was even more unsure of how clearly I was (re)presenting the lived experiences of the participants. And was this not my stated purpose in doing qualitative research?

## Research Question

The research question that guided this inquiry was: Could the use of found poems fill the role of the more traditional processes of member checking? As well, I was interested in what other benefits this method might generate for participants and the conducting of qualitative inquiries.

## Methodology

I conducted this inquiry within a socially constructivist interpretive framework (Creswell, 2012), since this approach was more conducive in understanding the aesthetic inner world of the participants; illuminated the participants' subjective meanings of experience using poetry as a process of learning inquiry and data representation; and allowed me to consider the complex, competing, and possibly contradictory views of the participants and myself within the same socially-constructed space. I employed a cross-case comparative approach (Merriam, 1998) as a strategy of inquiry, with each participant envisioned as a bounded system. This strategy was used since it is flexible and adaptable in describing multiple realities and transferable to other contexts in order to build a foundation of description.

## Participants

I had been working with a cohort of nineteen individuals that was created as a learning organization (Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994), focused on developing personal mastery, examining mental models, creating a shared vision, cultivating team learning, and

enhancing systems thinking. All of these elements were combined in order to nurture work and learning contexts that were generative, i.e. “learning that enhances our capacity to create” (Senge, 1990, p. 14). In an effort to break out of the dominant logico-rational paradigm that is common to organizational learning contexts and to create multiple ways of knowing (Nissley, 2002), I introduced a variety of arts-informed methods, including collage, poetry, metaphor, comic strips, and a mural creation, to the cohort as tools to assist them in their learning and reflection activities (Reilly, 2010). I was particularly intrigued with how poetry seemed to resonate with a number of individuals, and wanted to explore more deeply how poetry could sustain learning.

Six members of the learning organization who used poetry as a regular practice to support, promote, and capture individual and organizational learning, volunteered to participate in the project. Five women and one man between the ages of thirty and forty-five explored the following questions:

- Over the past year, what prompted you to begin to use poetry to facilitate your individual learning and to capture learning within the organization?
- What purpose did the poetry writing serve?
- As you look back over the year, what impact did the poems have on you (thoughts, feelings, conceptions and learning)?
- What future uses do you envision for poetry in your consulting or organizational development work?

## **Ethics Compliance**

Strict adherence to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (CIHR, NSERC, & SSHRC, 2010) were followed. Ethics clearance was received from the University Human Research Ethics Committee.

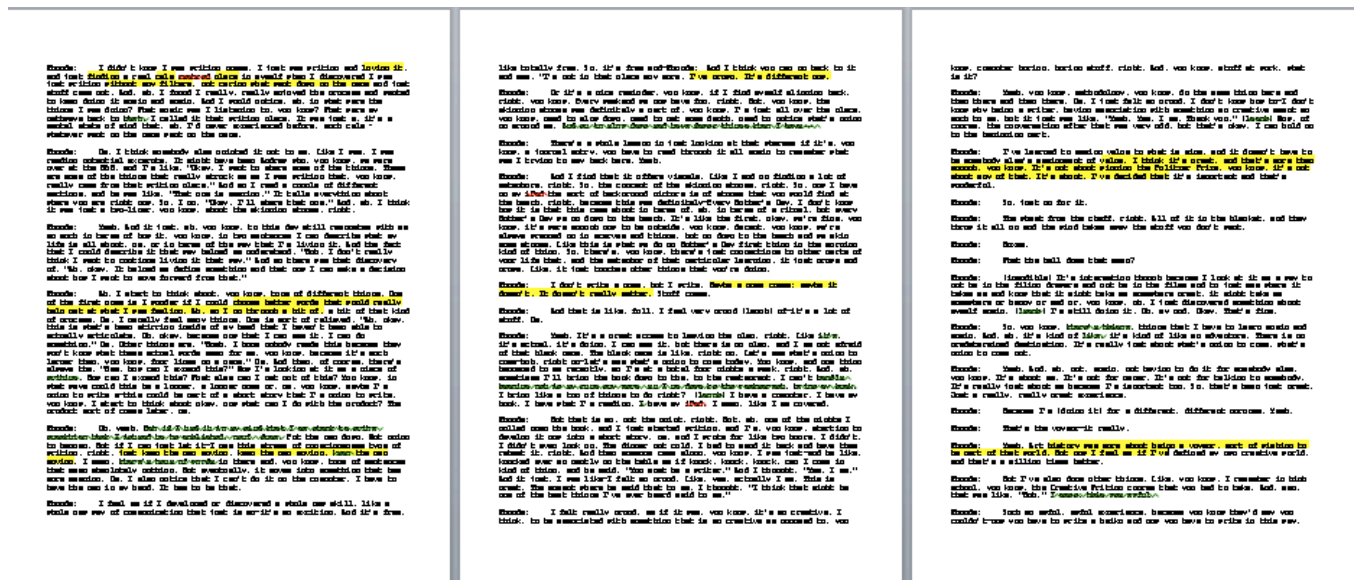
## **Method**

I decided to gather data using a group interview, that is, the systematic and formal questioning of groups of 3 to 4 participants simultaneously (Fontana & Frey, 1994). This method is a socially oriented research technique capturing real-life data in a social environment. I chose this method because of its strengths: (a) It would be able to elicit perceptions, feelings, attitudes, and ideas concerning the use of poetry as an individual and organizational learning tool; (b) It could provide a versatile, interactive, dynamic source of data directly from participants (Morgan, 1997; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996); and (c) The group interaction would stimulate the participants to elaborate beyond the usual boundaries of expression constrained by individual interpretation. Group interviews are particularly useful when the purpose is to explore concepts, sample opinion, and identify trends, rather than explain something in the definitive sense. They also take advantage of the power of group synergy and collective and collaborative thinking (Krueger & Casey, 2000). I conducted two group interview sessions, which lasted two hours, and were audio taped. Each individual participated in only one group interview session.

Several weeks after the interviews, each participant received a transcript of their group interview, which consisted of only her or his contributions. I asked the participants to create an individual “found poem” that resonated with their thoughts about the research questions on the use of poetry as a tool for personal and organizational learning. A found poem, or poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997), is a type of poetry created by taking words, phrases, and whole passages from other sources (or, in this case, the participants’ own words) and reframing them

as poetry by making changes in spacing and / or lines. The six participants created the found poem by going through the transcript, highlighting those sentences, phrases, or words that were particularly meaningful, moving, or interesting to them about using / writing poetry for organizational learning. Figure 1 is an example of one of the transcripts. They then took the highlighted sections and on a separate sheet of paper, reconstructed them into a poem that represented the thoughts and feelings they noted in their own interviews.

Figure 1. An example of a transcript highlighted by a participant.



The participants were encouraged to begin this process by creating an “untreated” found poem (i.e., one conserving virtually the same order, syntax, and meaning as the original source) with minimal alterations (Butler-Kisber, 2010). The purpose of the untreated found poem was to gauge the capacity for the found poem to act in the stead of a member check. They were also given the opportunity to create an additional “treated” found poem (one changed in a profound and systematic manner) if they so desired. The purpose of the treated found poem was to allow participants more freedom in constructing their views and experience with poetry that might expand beyond the confines of the research questions.

### Data Transformation and Analysis

The data consisted of the two group interview transcripts and the found poems, and were treated in two distinct ways. The data from the group interviews were analyzed with a research assistant using standard methods in qualitative inquiries. In order to prepare the data for coding, we each read through the transcripts a minimum of two times, memoing substantive issues and any impressions of emergent motifs or processes in order to prepare the ground for analysis. Based on this initial examination, we tentatively outlined categories. We collaboratively coded the transcripts, at the level of units of meaning, using open coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) utilizing *HyperResearch*. But rather than coding in disconnected, parsed categories, we generated “category strings” in order to retain a holistic sensibility to the analysis (Dey, 1999). The strings signified the relationships of major categories differentiated into subcategories, still connected through meaning. An example is *Dialectical tensions- concept knowledge versus embodied knowledge*. This major category, *Dialectical tensions*, was defined as opposite energies or dynamics participants used when they spoke about poetry or when they compare poetry to other methods of learning; the



subcategory, *concept knowledge versus embodied knowledge*, referred to the push-and-pull differences between drawing on head/conceptual knowledge versus drawing on visceral knowing.

Characteristics of each category string and strand were delineated and defined through unitizing the data and by provisionally categorizing the statements that seem to relate to the same representation. We devised definitional statements to characterize their properties and developed rules for inclusion and exclusion in order to keep the category internally consistent. We then reviewed all the coded data to check for consistency and relevance.

The found poems were analyzed with a different research assistant using standard methods of poetry thematic analysis, collaboratively and dialogically unpeeling the layers of the found poems by (a) noting initial cognitive and emotional reactions to an oral reading; (b) identifying and comparing our separate 3 levels of meaning (if present): literal (the explicit meaning of the text), connotative (the subjective cultural, emotional or imagistic colorations of the text) and symbolic (signs or significations within the text that implicitly represent ideas and / or emotions); and (c) examining prosodic patterns (patterns of stress and intonation, rhythm, meter, sound, shape, and imagery).

The three of us then compared the two sets of analyses (the traditionally coded transcripts and the found poems analyzed using poetic thematic analysis). We then collectively examined how we fulfilled Tracy's eight criteria for rigorous qualitative research (2010): (a) It is a *worthy* topic given the problematic nature of member checks; (b) It displays *rich rigor*, since we used complex, abundant, and appropriate theoretical constructs, time in the field, and data collection and analysis processes; (c) It is characterized by self-reflexivity and transparency; (d) It is marked by concrete detail, explication of tacit knowledge, and demonstrating relationships, as well as multivocality through member reflections; (e) It has the potential to affect particular readers or a variety of audiences through an evocative representation; (f) It provides a significant contribution conceptually / theoretically, practically, and methodologically; (g) It considers procedural as well as relational ethics; and (h) It is meaningfully coherence, in that it achieves what it purports to be about, using methods and procedures that fit its stated goals.

### **Findings: Coding Categories Compared to Found Poems Themes**

There was a degree of resonance between the codes generated in the analysis of the group interviews using traditional methods and the themes of the untreated participant-generated found poems. There were five major threads identified using traditional qualitative analysis methods. The following is an elaboration of the themes from both types of analyses.

#### **“Dialectical Tensions” Compared to the Theme of “Integration”**

In the group interviews, participants talked about opposite energies or dynamics that were tapped into or integrated when they spoke about poetry or when they composed poetry compared to other methods of capturing or supporting personal and organizational learning. Exemplars of this category are:

**Participant 1:** ... *moving back to the linearity and non-linearity thing because I think it is—yes, learning is non-linear and it involves non-linear thinking or a non-linear approach. This is why with some assignments poetry came [to me] in a visual shape. For example, in [a course on learning and change] that is about personal learning and growth... it is non-linear, even with those quite linear textbooks... growth is non-linear. I think that the poetry is totally related*

*to that theme of linearity of non-linearity. But I will go further and I will say that for me, poetry is a way of reconciliation...*

**Participant 2:** *Exactly. Yeah, I feel the same way... I felt it was like a real merge between the head and the heart.*

However, the corresponding found poem focused more directly on the blending of the dialectical tensions into the theme of integration, focusing on a creation of the whole person.

Reflecting  
on new insights, obstacles and inner conflicts  
Confronting  
All my thoughts  
This all embodies me

How I want to be as an intervener,  
All these different branches, all of me  
Converging yet also diverging  
I am at the base of the tree

I feel all  
A merge between the head and the heart.  
Makes me feel proud and tall.  
On paper, as a cue  
A principle, my creation,  
This is my poem; my point of view.

Comfort; to see the whole learning and myself  
I take a step back; I sway

### **“Constraints”: Overlapping Category / Theme**

These were obstacles or blocks that were identified by the participants during the group interviews that would prevent them from engaging easily with poetry as a tool / method for personal and organizational learning, process consulting (Block, 2001), or organizational development work. Exemplars of this category included:

**Participant 3:** *I'm not really sure I want the whole me out... I don't express myself very well, and when I read this I thought, "Oh, that's pretty understandable. Like anybody... a grade three kid can understand that..." And then I started, you know, the self talk, "Oh, it's so juvenile. It's so basic. It's so this. It's so that." And right away I stopped and said, "Okay, where's that coming from?"*

**Participant 4:** *... when I look at it, it's not pretty. I don't think it's beautiful... what's written. So, for me, it's a risk to write it, because I have an image that poetry should be like this. "Oh, it should be... it's so beautiful. You are all lovely!"*

The found poem theme also focused on the fear and the barriers inherited by childhood associations to poetry and poetry writing. "Poems are not painless juggling with words" (Grisoni, 2008, p. 113).

try to stay within the page and the lines  
frustrated and anxious  
joining of everything—that whole oneness  
regurgitation I can't take back  
it sticks in your throat  
when it first comes out, it's not pretty

it doesn't matter what form it comes out, or what it looks like  
it's really important that it comes out of my body  
I can see and learn from it  
inside of me I don't know what it is  
it makes me ill  
it was a risk  
I don't think it's beautiful what's written  
You will know a piece of me  
unblocking or regaining interest

#### **“Benefits as a Means to a Learning End” Compared to the Theme “Liberation”**

These were the many positive outcomes that participants identified during the group interviews concerning using poetry as a tool / method for personal and organizational learning, that they themselves had experienced. Exemplars of this category included:

**Participant 2:** ... *it just consolidated what my reflection was... what my insight was. Having it on paper... it really—again, it just grounded it.*

**Participant 5:** ... *just in documenting my own experience through that project, I wrote poetry instead of doing the journal... “This was my thoughts, and this was what was going on inside...” That just never worked for me. So, I had to find something else that did. And what did was writing poetry. If I read the poem, I knew exactly what that conversation was about.*

**Rosemary:** *So, you did that as your sort of your own field notes to your project?*

**Participant 5:** *That was not the data; I actually took proper data. [laugh] ... what was going on for me and my own experience.*

**Participant 4:** *I think for me it's really unconscious in the sense if I have to be conscious about it- it won't happen... I think it's just something that happens that unblocks me from the linear-ness of writing—when I'm writing a paper, or something like that, and I'm trying to describe a thought, sometimes.*

The found poem joyously celebrated a facet of the self that was set free and released through poetry.

I'm writing and loving it,  
Without any filters,

Not caring what goes down on the page.  
 Just keep the pen moving, keep the pen moving, keep the pen moving,  
 Finding that calm writing place.  
 Maybe a poem comes; maybe it doesn't.  
 It doesn't really matter.  
 I've grown. It's different now. My unconscious has something to say...  
 Oh, this is beautiful writing.

### “Impact of the Poetry Process on Self” Compared to the Theme “Revealing the Self”

This category centered on descriptions of the impact on the participant's insights about self, sense of self-esteem, self concept, and identity that was an outcome of using poetry as a tool / method for personal and organizational learning. Exemplars of this category included:

**Participant 6:** *Writing poetry now is like going back to some of the things that were perplexing to me earlier on in life. And I feel as if I have a new muscle, I guess, to gain more insight into what's going on around me.*

**Participant 3:** *... it was about fear, and it was kind of spaces between the words. And I was kind of writing it like almost afraid to put it on paper... a little bit embarrassed. But actually after, it gives a sense of clarity because it described me, and what I was facing.*

The theme of the found poem (reproduced as it was submitted since font type and size were relevant) reflected an aspect of impact: revelation and disclosure, and in itself illustrated this opening up process.

So, I don't have to share it. I don't—it's me

It's your thoughts.

Write until you feel that the end, is the end.

Oh... I need structure, I need direction, I need to know where I'm going,  
 and there has to be a purpose.

I'm not really sure I want the whole me out.

That's the fear, just letting it be what it is. Its okay

A first step out of my zone of comfort

It doesn't have to be neat and packaged,  
 it is what it is.

You write what you write.

It is what's in your head, it can be very fulfilling

even if it's a risk,

## It opens up just like emotions on a page

### “Impact of the Poetry Process on Relationship” Compared to the Theme “Connecting Self and Other”

This category contained descriptions of the impact of using poetry as a tool / method for personal and organizational learning on relationships and connections between the Writer and Audience: other members of the learning organization, family members, co-workers, friends, etc. Exemplars of this category included:

**Participant 5:** ... *then I feel that I own it, I live it. It becomes a part of me, and it is in a much shorter space... [the poem] is a greater expression of my experience, so it helps me sum it up at the beginning. It brings people in with me. And I don't know if that was the effect Rosemary, when I handed you the paper. But, to me, I wanted to draw my audience in. It's like when I go on stage, the first thing I do is either sing a song that I know will draw them in, or I do something really intimate.*

**Participant 1:** ... *but it's also the risk, as you guys were saying... you want somebody to know a piece of you. But the other side is that, “You will know a piece of me.”*

The found poem built on a personal metaphor and previous life experience, that of a performer, to illustrate this new connection between Self and Other.

I'm just getting started.

#### ***Forgetting***

I had forgotten my talent.  
I forgot that thing that I had.

I thought I *should* put aside this artsy stuff  
I can't sing my paper  
I could sing my poem.  
I feel that I own it, I live it.  
It becomes a part of me...it sets the tone.  
Poetry allowed me to show that part of me and say that it's relevant here,

The experience of, of creating  
music or creating poetry from a much more, ah, visceral space  
so much more moving to me now.

#### ***Come with me...***

It brings people in with me.  
On stage, the first thing I do is either sing a song that I know will  
draw them in, or I do something really intimate.  
I walk out, and I've got this big band, and instead I'd stand there with my mic, and I  
sing

something alone  
I invite them into my space.

*This feels like a joyful practice.*

### **Discussion: My Personal Crisis of Representation Intensifies**

As can be seen, the found poems are a richer and more potent evocation of the themes than the dry and desiccated traditional categories of open coding. And herein lies my intensified crisis of representation. My perception is that the poems injected life, blood, and yearning back into the analysis. The participant-created found poems grounded the analysis in what it means to be human. "Poetry is earthy, rooted in every day experiences, connecting integrally to the flow of blood in our bodies, expressed constantly in the rhythms of our speech and embodied movement" (Leggo, 2008, p. 170). How can I now be content with categories parched of emotional, spiritual, imaginative, physical, and aesthetic images and echoes?

This is the general purpose of poetry. Poetry allows us to access deeper insights into the emotional texture of social interactions. It is a tool for reflection that has an *individual* dimension to the writer alone and a *collective* dimension, since once shared it can resonate and belong to everyone (Grisoni, 2008). Poetry's strength is that it does not flatten out the domains under investigation, or "translate them into rationality" (p. 109), but uses them to understand reality, both subjective and subversive. These participant-created found poems use language to open up spaces of possibility for constructing understanding between the participant and the reader-audience. These textual spaces of possibility not only invite knowing, but also create spaces of becoming and connection (Leggo, 2008).

Since these found poems are phrases that function as distilled essences of meaning for the participants who actively created them, strung together they have a more powerful effect than the distancing that analysis can produce, even when using the exact words of participants from transcript excerpts. Poetry has the potential to uplift the human spirit to a vision of another's reality. It can educate and move us, drawing us into the sensual. "[Poetry] enlists the art of the possible more directly than it does the facts of the actual" (Brady, 2005, p. 1003). It starts with the truth of raw experience as lived from the inside. But the best poetry can also make us aware of a consciousness beyond the written word.

Found poems functioning as member checks allow us as audience to more directly access the emotional life of the participants than more traditional analysis limits. And it allows the participant to more clearly and directly communicate to the audience of the research, bypassing the interpretations and constructions of the researcher. As well, the found poem was able to retain the voice of the participant in a more profound way than just communicating meaning; the found poem honored the participant's speech style, words, rhythms and syntax (Butler-Kisber, 2010). The audience can feel a more connected oneness with participant, the poem created by the participant, and the experiences of the participant. It can also move us to draw comparisons from our own immersive life experiences (Brady, 2005), creating knowable contexts for constructing meaning about the nature of the world and our place in it.

The structure and form of poetry itself contributes to the creation of these spaces of meaning and connection. Poetry is about rhythm and breath (Leggo, 2008). Line breaks and stanza breaks are opportunities to breathe. Those breath spaces also become liminal spaces, spaces of openness and indeterminacy, a transition space which can lead to new perspectives and comparisons -- a well, pooling and collecting the reader's own emotions, meanings, and resonating experiences.

This is the foundation of the empathetic validity that has been created. “Related to the growth of empathy is the enhancement of interpersonal understanding and compassion. Research that is high in empathetic validity contributes to positive human relationships and well-being. It brings about new personal and interpersonal understanding that touches and changes hearts as well as minds” (Dadds, 2006, p. 2). Drawing on Dadds’ notion of external empathetic validity, this is a quality of the research that influences audiences with whom the research is shared, and is very difficult to establish with the presentation and representation of data as categories and subcategories. As Clough (2002) has suggested, we in qualitative research need approaches that allow for depth penetration into life in a way more traditional methods do not permit, ways that “... opens up to its audiences a deeper view of life in familiar contexts” (p. 8). This deeper level of penetration stirs thought and engagement, which make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar. This then creates a closer emotional and poignant connection between the audience of the research (outsiders / the etic perspective) and the research participants (insiders / the emic perspective).

### **Further Dimensions to Using Found Poems**

An additional quality that the “treated” found poems created was a narrative, storied progression that surpassed the discrete categories in conventional coding, revealing another level of meaning about the use of poetry that exceeded the boundaries of the initial inquiry. This poem, *The Journey Captured and Revealed*, exposed the fleeting complexity inherent in learning and relationship, and in communicating that learning to another.

The Traveler says through his Poem  
 “My learning is just an expression;  
 There is no way of communicating it to you”  
 But I am not sure.  
 It helps me capturing few moments...  
 That would be gone forever.  
 And I can go back to them –always-  
 They don’t fade out.

I am the one who put the constraints in the piece of paper  
 And you cry on it.

In addition, the “treated” found poems allowed the participants’ “voices” to blend more fully and prominently into the analysis, and added a fragility, intimacy, and sense of vulnerability that was missing from the traditional approach to coding qualitative data, and may only be created between the researcher and researched after great trust has been established through prolonged engagement. The following is an excerpt that demonstrates this dimension, while it blends multiple layers of meaning, combining themes in a woven pattern.

I haven’t given birth to anybody  
 I am not a woman  
 But I have written  
 I got windows toward myself  
 I can see through them  
 And my life is brighter.

I want to show myself to others;

I could just write the poem  
 And keep it in my house  
 But I needed to lay bridges with people.

I heard you saying  
 “It’s not beautiful because it’s not pretty”  
 But I found you beautiful  
 When I see your *other* side.  
 You appear to me like the music  
 To learn, to sing, to get out of things  
 I don’t need more, I don’t need less.

This was written by a man whose first language was neither English nor French. The “treated” found poem allowed him to express himself more fluidly and emotionally than he was able to in conversation.

There was also an unexpected benefit for the participants. Generally, they reported having a very positive experience creating the found poems. In fact, one participant, an internal consultant and project manager for a high profile multi-national corporation told me that she was so enthusiastic about creating the found poem that she took an extra long lunch break so that she could immerse herself in the task. Participants reported feeling favorably affected by composing the poems, suggesting that this method of member checking may be a more proactive, engaging, and affirming experience than the usual techniques. Drawing on Dadds’ (2006) notion of internal empathetic validity, this is a quality of the research that influences and changes the research participants. Similar to Cho and Trent’s concept of transformational validity (2006), this quality of the research reaches deeper understandings, emphasizes a higher degree of self-reflexivity which included the participants, and both deconstructs and reconstructs meaning in a way that makes initial analytic implications richer. The found poems allow for an image of validity and representation that “combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multi-dimensionalities, and angles of approach” (Richardson, 1997, p. 92).

Though agreement-disagreement in the coding of these group interviews has yet to be explored, found poems may provide an avenue for participants who diverge from the representations of the researcher to express more explicitly what they think and feel. Providing an alternate view of their reality, participants’ dissident voices could stand along side those who are in agreement, creating a sense of multivocality and multisubjectivity. Multivocality, literally “many voices,” is an approach to reasoning, explanation, and understanding that accepts and encourages the contemporaneous articulation of many different narratives or parallel discourses. Multisubjectivity is the collectively created and shared understanding constructed by community members who are working on a collaborative task with multiple and differential levels of understanding and expertise. Multisubjectivity is an important component of complex adaptive systems (Reilly & Mcbrearty, 2010). These two distinctive features of complex, multi-layered, and sometimes paradoxical, human experience are difficult to create and communicate in conventional research reports and academic journal articles.

### **Implications for Organizational and Management Qualitative Research**

Aspects of organizational life can be so intense and multi-layered, traditional forms of capturing it cannot do justice to the lived experience or evoke their texture and complexity (Brearley & Darsø, 2008). These dimensions lend themselves well to artful approaches, which



can develop insights that otherwise might be inaccessible. One can see more clearly, feel more deeply, and express oneself in multiple diverse ways. Recent trends in organizational and management research have reflected this shift with the influx of arts-based methods for data collection and analysis (Barry & Hansen, 2008; Broussine, 2008; Cunliffe, 2002; Darmer, 2006; Grisoni & Kirk, 2006; Taylor & Hansen, 2005). Arts-based methods, as demonstrated in this inquiry may also be used to substantiate dimensions of the research inquiry and more closely and actively involve participants, creating personal connections between the audience and those who work in organizations and systems. Poetry, in particular, may be an effective way of accessing the emotions, desires, and passions of organization members, cutting through the superficiality of organizational encounters (Grisoni, 2008). In this way, organizational and management researchers may deepen their exploration into organizational life, and extend the aesthetic approach, expanding the notion of organization as “social and collective construct... not an exclusively cognitive one, but derives from the knowledge-creating faculties of all the human senses” (Strati, 2000, p. 13).

As well, this alternative method of respondent validation may bridge some of the gaps between “traditional” qualitative research and issues generated by the crisis of representation. Found poems created by either the researcher or the participants may provide a facet for a crystallization approach (Ellingson, 2009) to organizational research (one of Tracy’s (2010) eight criteria of quality), a postmodern re-imagining of the traditional (post)positivist method of triangulation. This approach is based on an initial conceptualization by Richardson (1994), who suggested that using the rigid and fixed metaphor of a triangle carries the same assumptions that plague trustworthiness. A “fixed point” exists that can be triangulated. It would be more useful, Richardson claimed, to address the crisis of representation by using the image of a crystal, which allows for a variety of facets of understanding. When we view an object through a crystal, externalities are reflected and refracted within. What we see depends upon our position and angle of approach. Ellingson has blended theoretical and analytic frameworks, genres and forms of sense making with creative representations of data in order to more visibly articulate multiple perspectives. She offers a messy, multigenre, paradigm-spanning approach that resists the art / science dichotomy. Found poems could function as one of the many facets used to represent the multi-layered complicated realities of organizational life.

And lastly, and possibly most importantly, the use of found poems created by participants may serve to re-assert and re-present the immediate and compelling emotional lives of those living and working in organizations, creating stronger connections between participant and research audience.

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