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Researcher-Portraitists: An Exploration of Aesthetics and Research Quality

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Abstract

In this article, we critique the use of portraiture as a qualitative research method, emphasizing the relationship between the fundamental aspects of portraiture and the recurring themes of research quality associated with alternative qualitative inquiry. To accomplish this goal, we conducted a study of culturally responsive practices of three first-year teachers and analyzed the data using both constant comparison and portraiture techniques. In addition to constructing poetic portraits of the teachers, we examined the intersection of aesthetics and quality research, especially in relation to researcher identity. The study—and subsequent critique of portraiture—challenges critics who question the value and goodness of the method, the same constructs emphasized by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot in her 2005 exposition of

portraiture as a social science method. Further, we critique our own methodological comfort zones, thus rejecting the either/or mentality of methodological fundamentalism exhibited both outside and within the field of qualitative research.

Introduction

Metamorphosis—
from traditionalist
to portraitist,
From binary to hyphenated,
I tentatively flap my still wet wings
Shedding the vestigial traditions
That anchored and bound me[1].

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), in a daring critique of traditional standards used to judge qualitative research, introduced the method of portraiture as a novel blend of science and art. *The Good High School*, a study of the culture of six secondary schools, challenged scholars to consider a method of inquiry that would blend art and science, thus embracing the "descriptive, aesthetic, and experiential dimensions" (p. 6) of research. Portraiture is a form of narrative inquiry where the researcher uses qualitative tools in a "systematic and purposeful way to describe phenomena while using the beauty and aesthetic properties of art" (Quigley, 2013, p. 841). Lawrence-Lightfoot's recognition as a sociologist studying schools and education experiences is notable: MacArthur Fellow (1984), Harvard's George Ledlie Prize (1993), the Margaret Mead Fellow of The American Academy of Political and Social Sciences (2008), and a host of other prestigious awards. In spite of so many accolades, though, Lawrence-Lightfoot and her vision of portraiture is rarely mentioned in Education. Why is portraiture so fleetingly represented? What are the traditions that portraiture calls on us to challenge? How must researchers who engage in portraiture transform? These are the questions we asked along our own metamorphic journey of understanding qualitative research methods and how alternative methods, like portraiture, fit into even the most liberal of designs and methods.

Precluding the general critics of qualitative research—and those specifically aligned against 'non-scientific' research—Lawrence-Lightfoot maintained the value and goodness of portraiture. Social science inquiry, she said, is not antithetical to the aesthetic experiences of art. In later discussions of portraiture, Lawrence Lightfoot and Davis (1997) described

[1] All poems included in this manuscript are the work of the author, Leah Schoenberg Muccio.

aesthetic aspects of art as the expressive content that goes beyond simple representation and gives the work meaning. They characterized empirical research as strongly guided by researchers who shape data and interpretations through the use of rigorous procedures and methodological tools. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis tasked portraitists to combine the five components of portraiture; context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and the aesthetic whole; to create and authentic portrait of a research setting or research participants. Portraiture was "welcomed and resisted, embraced and criticized by the scholarly community" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 7) due to the explicit blending of aesthetics and empiricism, the rejection of the incommensurability of the two, and the positioning of portraiture as an alternative to research dogmatically guided by the epistemological paradigms of postpositivism or postmodernism.

Particularly in education, though, those favoring an evidence-based methodology shunned researchers who conducted artistic research (Chapman, 2007; Hill, 2005). Even within more progressive qualitative research circles, portraiture has lagged behind the more popular narrative and performance methods. Meanwhile, portraiture has found a footing with a number of researchers (e.g., Gaztambide-Fernández, Cairns, Kawashima, Menna, & VanderDussen, 2011; Murakami-Ramalho, Piert, & Militello, 2008; Newton, 2005). These researchers focused their inquiry on the lived experiences of people in terms of race and ethnicity. The portraitists explored the participants' experiences, identities, and processes of learning while they negotiated the boundaries that emerged from embracing complexity and contraction.

Qualitative scholars still answer to critics about the general value of their research—and the specific value of so-called alternative methods. Thus we chose to address these criticisms directly and explore two basic questions about portraiture: a) What is the value of portraiture as a method, and b) How can a portraitist-researcher claim a quality method, especially in relation to one's discipline and professional identity?

Questions about what constitutes good research are not just conceptual for us; these are real and immediate in terms of our roles and researchers, teachers, learners, and scholars. When we wrote this, Leah was a doctoral candidate in early childhood education incorporating portraiture into her study of culturally responsive practices of first-year teachers. Earle was a qualitative methodologist who challenges traditional methods, but with an eye toward quality and audience. Julie was Leah's dissertation advisor and mentor. At a time when aesthetics and empiricism seem so deeply factionalized, we chose to come together to understand how portraiture could be "good research".

While we rejected notions of scientific neutrality, universal truths, and researcher dispassion

(Fine, 1994), we believed that researchers must claim the quality of qualitative work (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, & St. Pierre, 2007). To us, these stances are complementary rather than incommensurate. Our two-fold goal was to use portraiture as a tool to "work the hyphen" (Fine, 1994) 1) to engage in critical conversations and explore the possibilities of using qualitative research for social justice and 2) to expect rigor in the sense of probing our use of the arts-based method of portraiture for technical and epistemological quality. But can qualitative researchers *work the hyphen* and expect rigor at the same time? What would that mean for our research and desire to engage in culturally relevant work?

The following section considers the past literature about portraiture in relation to quality methods. We review the debate—very much present when Lawrence-Lightfoot published her first study using portraiture—and then contrast the qualitative/quantitative methodological wars of the 1980s with the ongoing battles across alternative methods in qualitative research.

Portraiture: Yet Another Definition of Quality?

Our discussion explores how quality in qualitative research is critiqued, confined, supported, and demanded; and how those arguments segue from one study of how preservice teachers were prepared to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. We will discuss the literature specifically about portraiture and about the so-called methodology wars between qualitative and quantitative scholarship.

Portraiture and Quality

The question persists whether traditional standards of quality—and those only from the social sciences—can or should be used to evaluate artistic qualitative research. Alternative qualitative researchers emphasize the artistic and evocative elements in qualitative inquiry and expand the audience for the researchers' work (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005) by communicating "research findings in multi-dimensional and more accessible ways" (Hill, 2005, p. 95). Artistic qualitative social scientists make use of poetry (Brady, 2005; Wiggins, 2011), drama or performance art (Bagley, 2008), and other story rich formats (Willox, Harper, & Edge, 2012) as the tools to provoke, engage, and stimulate the readers. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) equate the portraitist's standard to one of authenticity to the participants' experiences and voices.

Debate, Dialogue, or All-out War?

A number of educational researchers shifted their attention in the late 1980s from incommensurability to the complementarity of qualitative and quantitative scholarship. Guba (1990) and others argued that paradigms are not commensurable due to ontological and epistemological differences, but "mixed methodologies (strategies) may make perfectly good

sense" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 200). Firestone (1987) took the argument for accommodation of methodologies a bit further, noting the distinctive epistemologies associated with each, still arguing that "they are not antithetical" (p. 16).

Many educational researchers claimed the methodology wars (or "paradigm wars," according to Oakley, 1999) were finished and set about to prove that qualitative and quantitative methods could at least augment one another toward a more comprehensive understanding of social reality. Some have claimed that educational research would be incomplete without both, thus refuting claims of paradigmatic incommensurability (Oakley, 1999).

Obviously, the methodology wars did not end; it is still a reality for qualitative educational researchers, especially for those whose research is defined as outside the acceptable bounds of credibility (Freeman et al., 2007). Federal legislation in the United States, though, addressing an apparent "lack of confidence in the quality of educational research" (Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002, p. 5), has reignited long-standing tensions surrounding methodology. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, replete with "111 references to 'scientifically-based research [SBR]'" (p. 4), is the subject of considerable debate among educational researchers regarding issues of research quality. Lincoln and Cannella (2004a) vehemently renounce the methodological—and subsequent epistemological –consequences of reducing qualitative research to mere subjectivity. "Research is not only political," they conclude, "it has never been more politicized than in the present" (p. 197). The value of qualitative scholarship is no longer just debated; it is now legislated (see Lather 2004a).

Critics of qualitative research like Feuer et al. (2002) have concluded "that experimentation… is still the single best methodological route to ferreting out systematic relations between actions and outcomes" (p. 8). Of course, this perspective goes hand in hand with politicized reports and policies that equate research quality with objectivity and have skewed evidence toward measurement and generalizability. In *Scientific Research in Education*, Shavelson and Towne (2002) stated that portraiture is not an example of scientific inquiry because it does not meet the guidelines of independent replication and generalizability established by the National Research Council (NRC) committee. This straw man argument not only ignores the subjectivity of all research design and methods, but also positions qualitative and quantitative methodologies in opposition.

The battle lines have never been so clearly drawn. In response to the politicization of educational research in terms of funding, scholars have countered with their own arguments regarding the value of qualitative research. A special issue of Qualitative Inquiry (2004) offers various critiques of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and the 2002 NRC report. For example, Lather (2004) situates the SBR mandate in the "discourse practices of Foucauldian

policy analysis, feminism via Luce Irigaray, and post-colonialism via Stuart Hall" (p. 16). In a similar vein, Lincoln and Cannella (2004b) "problematize contemporary critiques of qualitative research by the conservative Right" (p. 176). Other articles criticize the NRC's six guiding principles of scientific research (Bloch, 2004), experimentalism (Howe, 2004), and the lack of public discourse regarding educational inquiry (Ryan & Hood, 2004).

A number of other qualitative scholars, like St. Pierre (2004), question the impetus for the new guidelines, urging researchers to analyze issues of power and politics driving this trend. Her critique of the federal guidelines extends the methodology debate beyond issues of technique or even philosophy of inquiry; St. Pierre questions the epistemological foundations of the new regulations surrounding federal funding. Just as Bloch (2004) noted, "the role of power in the naming of rigor, truth, and science is denied" (p. 101).

The "Other" Methodology Wars

For those who pursue a qualitative agenda in educational research, the issue is no longer just one of commensurability, but of viability. Qualitative researchers, in general, face dwindling grant funding and journal space—two bulwarks of knowledge production and dissemination. And even the most traditional qualitative methods and designs (e.g., case study, ethnography, grounded theory) must be defended in this evidence-takes-all context.

Artistic methods like portraiture are considered edgy even in some qualitative research circles, evoking still more skepticism, both methodological and epistemological. While narrative and performance research have an established following (e.g., Alexander, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Denzin, 2007; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008), portraiture evokes less support due to the combination of art and science. We wondered if this lack of backing is an issue of how quality constrains the application of certain methods in educational research in this specific political and ideological climate. Toward this end, we reviewed general approaches to quality in qualitative research, and then focused specifically on portraiture.

Quality: "Check this box."

The core issue about quality is who gets to define it. Whether or not a study makes a difference is a matter of policy—funding, journal space, even tenure and promotion. In qualitative research, there are no universal standards for quality; there is no pretense of replication or traditional generalizability. But every qualitative researcher, whether cognizant of it or not, applies some mental model of research goodness or quality to their inquiry process. Every research choice reflects the underlying assumptions about quality in research (Reybold, Lammert, & Stribling, 2013). These mental models incorporate two aspects of research quality—technical and epistemological—that guide the reasoning process in research.

Technical quality attends to methodology, specifically design and methods of data collection and analysis. Emphasizing qualitative inquiry as a creative process, Patton (1990) reminded researchers of the "technical side to analysis that is analytically rigorous, mentally replicable, and explicitly systematic" (p. 462). In other words, the creative aspects of qualitative research do not negate attention to the quality and credibility of a study. Although there is an ongoing—and often contentious—debate about how to identify rigorous qualitative research (Freeman et al., 2007; Hostetler, 2005; Lather, 2004b; Piirto, 2002), many continue to argue that any research—qualitative or quantitative—must attend to methodological rigor.

Epistemological quality, on the other hand, emphasizes elements of perspective, subjectivity, and meaning inherent to qualitative inquiry. Quality research is more than requiring a set of techniques to guarantee some level of validity and reliability during design and implementation (Fine, 1994; Grafanaki, 1996; Heshusius, 1994). At the epistemological level, quality research questions the very representation of the study, both within and beyond the design. Why are certain participants selected? How are interview questions crafted? How can I best represent my findings? Who am I in this decision-making process? Epistemological quality accounts for multiple interpretations and readings of the research text; this approach assumes that many "others" will determine the goodness of the research, including participants, journal editors and reviewers, and the reading audience.

While qualitative researchers have used a range of arts-based inquiry methodologies and arts-based representations (Finley, 2005), researchers have used poetic formats to show rather than tell through expressive texts (Lahman, Rodriguez, Richard, Geist, Schendel, & Graglia, 2011) The qualitative researcher uses poetry to depict the data imagistically, metaphorically, and symbolically (Piirto, 2002) when other modes of representation will not capture the stories that the researcher wants to illustrate (Faulkner, 2007).

> Poetry can educate and move us to awe, mystery, the sublime, and related realizations by "stirring things up in us". It thrives on empathy and emulation and draws us into the sensuous—intellectual anchor for all knowing—that which comes from lived experience. (Brady, 2005, p. 1003)

Poetry research provides a vehicle for evoking the lived experiences of research participants with the aim to inform, move, and *stir things up* for the readers.

Portraits of First Year Teachers: Our Journey with Portraiture

In order to explore quality and portraiture, we chose to answer Lawrence-Lightfoot's (2005) call for portraiture to "spread to places where it will be challenging, illuminating, and useful" (p. 14). Our research followed on the heels of a more "traditional" qualitative study in which Julie and Leah examined preservice teachers' culturally responsive dispositions and literacy

teaching practices (Muccio & Kidd, 2014). As we followed the teachers into their first year in their classrooms, we decided to use portraiture to support the goals for the research and asserted that it would also provide an opportunity to explore the method in depth through direct use.

Method: Enacting Portraiture

Hatching a plan.

After we all agreed to our foray into portraiture, we felt the exhilaration and terror that comes with the freedom of an emergent design using a non-traditional method. If we were going to evolve into portraitists, we needed to read everything we could. We devoured anything Lawrence-Lightfoot had written and poured over inquiries guided by portraiture. We also immersed ourselves in the literature on preservice and early career teachers and culturally responsive practices in order to build our theoretical perspectives to inform the portraits. As a third source for sustenance, we revisited the poetry we had read and written, surrounding ourselves with well-worn, dog-eared anthologies.

We used interpretations from *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) as a guide for the data collection, analysis, and reporting process. We realized this would be an interpretive experience without absolutes or certainties, and began to understand what Lawrence-Lightfoot meant by the art in the development of science. We seesawed between boldly embracing a completely emergent design guided by portraiture and retreating back to the tested approaches we'd used in our previous research. We compromised and would use research questions and interview protocols, code for both emergent themes guided by constant comparison and for resonant refrains guided by portraiture, and present the portraits first as stories before ultimately transforming them into poems. In this first phase of the research, Leah championed aesthetics and Julie championed empiricism, and our collaboration facilitated the authentic blending of the two.

For our definition of culturally responsive practices, we connected to researchers (e.g., Au, 2007; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995) who suggest that culturally responsive practice is a range of teaching strategies to work with diverse children and increase their school success by building bridges between school and home experiences. They further emphasize that it is important that for teacher educators to prioritize providing experiences that have the potential to transform preservice teachers' culturally responsive dispositions and teaching practices as an essential part of their teacher licensure program (Goodwin & Genor, 2008; Howard, 2005; Risko, Roller, Cummins, Bean, Block, Anders & Flood, 2008). In our work, we believe that preparing preservice teachers to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students is one of the most important and challenging mandates for teacher preparation programs committed to principles of social equity.

Participants.

One of our most important decisions was who to choose as participants because relationships with participants are so central in portraiture. We chose three graduates from a new Master of Education program leading to initial licensure in Early Childhood Education (ECE). We had experiences with these students. Leah taught this group of students in a content area course, and Julie served as the program director and an advisor to them. We considered the time that we spent teaching and working with the students as a period to listen and observe and develop initial relationships with the participants. These were students we cared about. As instructors and professors deeply embedded in the teacher preparation program, we were most curious about the experiences of these three students upon graduation and wanted to understand their first year experiences: Jennifer, a former preschool special education teacher; Mary, a career switcher moving from journalism to teaching; and Christine, a stay-at-home mother entering the field of education as her children got older.

Data collection: Growing from their stories.

We contacted Mary, Jennifer, and Christine during the summer after their first year in the classroom. We believed that we would be able to listen for these teachers' stories as we asked them about their experiences in the classroom and their reflections on our program. We interviewed each participant during the summer and fall after they completed their first year teaching. The first interview was more "traditional," because it was based on a semi-structured interview protocol but we wrote the second interview protocol to fill the role of "the portraitist as the finder and sharer of story" and "as the forger and keeper of rapport" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 160). The first interview was much like taking the photo a painter uses as the basis for a portrait; the teachers' experiences and insights provided a foundation for the second interview.

During the second interview, we embedded these portions of the portraiture method: (1) co-constructing the narrative, (2) accurately evoking the voice of the participants, (3) gathering artifacts to represent the participant and gain insight into her context, and (4) asking participants directly to represent her experiences through metaphor. Here is where we began to sketch the outlines of the portraits, asking the participants to react to how we represented them and add their own lines and colors through prompting them to share their own images and metaphors. The interview participants responded to mini-portraits that we wrote around their responses in the first interview in terms of content and tone. We also asked them to reflect upon the interview in terms of evaluating the most important ideas, using metaphors to describe their beliefs. The raw images we co-created with participants during the second interview would become the main elements of the portraits.

Data analysis: Metamorphosis.

How did we form (and re-form) what came from the two interviews into portraits of each participant? We collaborated to determine the exact form of analysis we each would conduct and how to develop and present the data through portraits. We coded the data of each of the three teachers for repetitive refrains, resonant metaphors, and institutional and cultural rituals as informed by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' (1997) descriptions of data analysis informed by the portraiture method, in order to develop emergent themes for each participant. This analysis was the key transformational experience. We could see how exploring the data through this lens was different than other forms of analysis we had done in the past. This process enabled us to name convergence with the language of insiders. We also coded the data for emergent themes using a constant comparison method. With this dual coding strategy, we were mindful of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' recommendation (1997) to maintain "the tension between organization and classification on one hand and maintaining the rich complexity of human experience on the other—the tension between developing discrete codes and searching for meaning" (p. 192). Next, we discussed the themes from these two different forms of analysis and believed that this served as a form of triangulation as represented in *The Art and Science of Portraiture*. According to the authors, "using triangulation, the researcher employs various strategies and tools of data collection, looking for points of convergence among them. Emergent themes arise out of this layering of data, when different lenses frame similar findings" (p. 204).

Data representation: Portraitist emerging.

Based on our analyses of the data, Leah and Julie wrote separate representations, one in the form of a discussion of the data around the themes and research questions, another in the form of narrative portraits. To create the portraits, we used the "generic outline" (p. 263) suggested by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) as the organizational structure for the portraits. We wrote shorter narrative portraits that wove in the emergent themes and used direct quotations for each participant and turned these short portraits into introductory paragraphs and expanded upon each theme with examples and quotations in the longer narrative portraits. Julie read and provided feedback by responding to the empirical and aesthetic dimensions of the narrative portraits. Her feedback was guided by the definition of resonance in *The Art and Science of Portraiture.*

> In constructing the aesthetic whole, the portraitist seeks a portrayal that is believable, that makes sense that causes that "click of recognition." We refer to this "yes of course" experience as resonance, and we see the standard as one of authenticity (p. 247).

Transforming the narrative to the poetic portraits was a challenge. After drafting the poetic portrait for one of the participants in free verse, we were wholly unsatisfied with the poem

because it seemed forced and mechanical and the resonance we'd achieved in the narrative portraits was erased. Our fears that the poems would not honor the stories of the participants or that they would be the kind of drivel written by angst-riddled seventh graders weighed us down. We wanted to avoid the inferior poems that Piirto (2002) cautions against or that Faulkner (2007) even more frankly calls lousy poetry. In order to overcome our block, we began to think about why we wanted to create poetic portraits in the first place, revisiting our favorite poems for inspiration. Poetry offers the opportunity to use rhythm, the musical quality created by word and syllable order, and tone, the attitude conveyed by the style to express the unique voice of each participant. Using poetry also allows the writer to use literary devices to provide an interpretive sensory experience for the readers.

To help achieve resonance, we first reviewed each of the narrative portraits and re-listened to the interviews to ground ourselves in the participants' stories and voices. We developed a common metaphor that represented the experiences of each of the participants (webs). We believed that the use of the central metaphor would be a powerful tool to anchor the portraits and "connect the inner and outer, to make the implicit explicit, so that we can better understand, more deeply experience, and more eloquently express who we are and what we do" (Campbell, Parr, & Richardson, 2009, p. 211). Reconnected to the participants' identities through metaphor, we next identified the tone or poetic style that matched each participant and selected a poet match for each participant. The poet matches for Mary and Christina were easy to identify. Mary's story could be represented by Walt Whitman's poems and Christina's story evoked the works of Rosario Castellanos.

A match for Jennifer was a little more difficult to pin down. After trying out Pablo Neruda and William Carlos Williams without success because they did not match Jennifer's pace and speaking style, we identified Allen Ginsberg as her poetic match.

We selected one poem that would serve as the poetic inspiration for each of the portraits. With the published poem and the narrative portraits in front of us, we wrote the small section of the poetic portrait to elicit the common metaphor for each participant in the style of the inspiration poem, while ensuring the style we selected authentically gave voice to the participants. After revising for resonance, we expanded to write the entire poem for each participant, resulting in the poetic portraits of Mary, Christina, and Jennifer.

Discussion: Exploring Quality and Portraiture

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) believed portraiture could employ "forms of representation that might capture the fluidity and complexity of the living world" (p. 9). We believed we could better understand the phenomena of culturally responsive practice, first-year teaching and the role of teacher preparation by "rais[ing] a reflective glass to the stories that shape lives,

pedagogy, and institutions" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 36). The individual stories of program graduates foreground the voices and experiences of teachers and the diverse experiences that meaningfully prepare teachers to enact culturally responsive practices. Our separate analyses revealed striking similarities in the themes in the stories of each of the teachers and across their experiences: (1) building relationships, (2) critical reflection, (3) coursework in developing culturally responsive dispositions, and (4) addressing the discontinuity between program teachings and classroom realities. Weaving these themes into the poetic portraits enabled us to understand how the themes were evident in each participant's experiences, emphasizing both continuity and individuality in their stories.

Portraiture enabled us to facilitate self-reflection for our participants, and to explore their ideological and philosophical views, an important foundation for authentic culturally responsive practice. Using portraiture as a tool "to examine elements of strength and possibilities for success in various educational settings" (Chapman, 2007, p. 160) helps to inform the ECE and teacher education fields regarding the preparation of teachers of young children to enact culturally responsive practices. The work situates culturally responsive practices within particular social, political, and community contexts, and therefore supports our commitment to social justice by improving our ability to help teachers change their practice to better serve diverse students.

Reflecting on the Portraiture Process: Aesthetics and Quality

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) urged social scientists engaged in portraiture to recognize the potential impact of their work by highlighting the strength of the portraits. "The personal dimension of the portraits and their literary, aesthetic qualities create symbols and images people can connect with, offer figures with whom the readers can identify, and ground complex ideas in the everyday realities of organizational life" (p. 378). We believe that the use of portraiture and the development of poetic portraits aided us in achieving understandings that we could not have otherwise achieved. Our theoretical and aesthetic experiences allowed us to facilitate learning about culturally responsive practices of first year teachers while avoiding the use of mechanical methods (Charmaz, 2004). The method that we developed to create the poetic portraits added an additional layer of analysis as we framed each participant's story with their matching poet and poem. Although we called on existing works to inform our portraits, we believe this approach resisted a conservative view on art by using poetic forms as a tool to more deeply explore our participants' lived experiences. In our discussion, we named this part of the analysis process *poetic fitting*.

In selecting Walt Whitman as the poet to inspire her Mary's portrait, we wanted to evoke Mary's brainy exuberance, her enthusiasm for her students and their families, her confidence and whit, and her intellectual strength. Mary talked about passing on her love of literature to

her students, including a love for classic stories like Charlotte's Web. This representation of Mary as Charlotte became the central image and inspired Leah to select "A Noiseless Patient Spider" (Whitman, 2004) as the specific Whitman poem. The length and content of Whitman's verses, the slightly formal language, the sense of wonder, and the vivacious manner of speaking reflected Mary's experiences as a first year teacher (see Figure 1).

Mary: "I can't imagine teaching in a school where everybody's the same."

Mary teaches third grade in an extremely diverse school
And her eyes dance, flickering like they did in class
When she made clever connections, linking theory to practice
She is contemplative and exuberant as she tells me
How boring it would be to teach in a school without diversity

Ever thinking, ever seeking joy and fulfillment in her work
Connecting to her students, her families, reveling in their individual stories
Examining her own presumptions to become the kind of teacher that she wants to be
Building her classroom community, a home away from home, a family
Mary thinks deeply about the realities and possibilities of teaching diverse students

She laughs and says her brain is fried, but her words are thoughtful
Her reflections mirror back a confident, curious, and warm teacher
Mary is serious in her commitment to learn from her experiences, her connections
Realistic, as she recounts the challenges of teaching, wishing she'd been more prepared
Surprised, but not bogged down by the onerous parts of the job

A teacher who delights in her discoveries, the process of finding and growing
From teaching children who speak nine or ten different home languages
She jokes that her life as a teacher is like a duck, calm on the surface
But underneath, she's going a hundred miles an hour
To me, Mary seems less like a duck, and more like a famous spider

Mary is Charlotte, the proud and cunning spider
Unflappably perched on her web of reflectiveness
Jubilantly secured, productive, spinning filaments of thoughts and actions
Diligent, iterative in her works, ever flinging the threads of her evolving practice
Mary triumphantly shows off her joyful accomplishment.

Figure 1. Mary's poetic portrait

For Christina, we were personally heart-broken by her story, especially because her negative first-year experiences in the classroom so closely mirrored some of Leah's own. We originally thought of an elegy, a poem of mourning, because she wanted to reflect Christina's real grief for the loss of her idealized understanding of teaching once she entered the real classroom. More than mourning, however, Christina seemed defeated, and we wanted to reflect the general sense of someone being ground down. This evoked the somber, introspective works of Mexican poet Rosario Castellanos, but her poem titled "Elegy" (1988) had a bitterness and

passivity that wasn't a good fit for Christina's story. We thought something shorter would reflect Christina's quick, bursting responses and also echo her hurt and anger and found this in Castellanos' poem "Nocturne" (1989). This piece conveyed a literal and figurative darkness and Christina's unsettled self-questioning. The metaphor of the web was a reality that trapped Christina, and her sense of futility and defeat was echoed in Castellanos' work (see Figure 2).

Christina: "It's a little bit harder in reality."

Christina, bruised by a first year
Teaching in a Title I school,
Kindergarten, with a focus on test scores,
She struggled, and never could find a balance.

Career changer, wife and mother of two,
In watching her own children discover,
Became inspired and sought out a career for the creative,
Wanted to do something important in her life.

Learning to become a teacher transformed her
She became a different person, her eyes open
To embracing differences, committed to making a difference,
But, maybe, her eyes were opened too wide?

She came out of the program, all gung ho,
But was steamrolled by a school
Whose values subsumed her view to understand each child,
Instead, children, new to school, became test scores.

Weighted down by the space between the possible and actual,
A gap she could not fill,
Disorienting disequilibrium between what she learned
And the way it really is in schools.

The realities of teaching ensnare her,
Trapped by the pressures, sticky threads of expectations,
No fight left in her to advocate against the imbalance,
Enmeshed and unable to break free.

Tough lessons learned on the job
Resigning herself to unfair practicalities,
She'll get a fresh start,
Teaching first grade, in a more affluent school.

Figure 2. Christina's poetic portrait

For Jennifer's portrait, pinning down her matching poet and poem was more elusive. After a few unsuccessful matches, we honed in on the image of Jennifer during the second interview, trying to squeeze in eating her lunch that she couldn't get to until the end of the day. There was an urgency to Jennifer's rapid-fire answers to the interview questions, replete with

detailed examples. The pace and cadence of her interview was similar to Allen Ginsberg. Even though the content of Jennifer's discussion differed entirely from the subjects of Ginsberg's works, "Howl" (2001) mirrored Jennifer's forcefulness, a purposeful wandering, and her role as a participant-observer. "Howl" expresses some measure of lament, as Jennifer did using long lines that evoke this measure. Ginsberg's rebelliousness and frankness also evokes Jennifer's story; the web image represents her relationships, and the web is something sustaining rather than binding (see Figure 3).

Jennifer: "Building relationships with my kids and families is vital to their learning."

Jennifer, former preschool special educator, now trying
To do the best she can,
Teaching first grade in a school
That serves such a needy population,
Trying hard to provide the best learning environment,
Wondering if what she does is enough,
Her voice betrays the fact that she wishes,
She could do more,
Because her students learn
In so many different ways.

She has a better sense of calm,
After her hectic first year teaching,
With so many responsibilities, expectations,
She knows what is really important,
Building, maintaining relationships,
Differentiation with small groups, visuals,
Checking for the kind of understanding
he hopes the students can gain,
Fulfilling their hopes and dreams.

Learning by doing, and through others' modeling,
Different ways of teaching,
Connecting to diverse learners and families,
Jennifer prioritizes the children,
And their individual needs,
In her practices, which she measures,
Against the infinite yardstick
Of being transformative in her teaching,
Sometimes, when measuring herself—
She decides that she comes up short.

Weary from not measuring up, strained
From her numerous self-imposed,
School imposed duties;
Her web of relationships lifts her up
She depends on the authentic attachments she makes,
Buoying, joining threads that lighten her load
Her web of connections sustaining her,
Suspended above from the pressures of teaching.

Figure 3. Jennifer's poetic portrait

As these reflections and poems illustrate, the portraiture process was both deliberative and creative. Bloom and Erlandson (2003) asserted that the objective of portraiture is to represent the participants' experiences through a coherent, compelling, and credible story. We believe we achieved this through the iterative portraiture process, particularly through our new approach of poetic fitting; using the published works of poets as inspiration to reflect the rhythm and tone of the participants. We also believe that we elevated the quality of the poems by providing a method to pay attention to poetic craft (Faulkner, 2007) such as images, music, voice, emotion, and story. By relying on the structured poetic forms inspired by the poetry cannon (Lahman et al., 2011), we followed Furman's (2006) recommendation that research poets draw more heavily on traditional poetic forms. Our research method was emergent and transformational in terms of our use of and understanding of arts-based methods, and our exploration of the teachers' stories led us in new directions, expanding the method of portraiture with the promising new practice of poetic fitting as an approach to developing the poetic portraits with greater rigor and adding an additional layer of analysis.

Exploring Portraiture and Quality

Throughout our inquiry, we found ourselves "working in the tension of simultaneously doing science and troubling it" (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 3). We wanted to interrogate our process to evaluate the purpose and quality of our work. In many ways, our exploration of goodness, aesthetics, and rigor in and through portraiture is just beginning. However, we assert that we did gain insights into the struggles and triumphs of new teachers in relation to meeting the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Additionally, by engaging in alternative qualitative methods, we learned about research quality from a new perspective. In terms of the political debate surrounding qualitative research, we believe that our research actively resists "methodological conservatism" (Lincoln & Cannella, 2004a, p. 7) by rejecting narrow definitions of research quality and rejecting the concept that discussions of rigor have no place in qualitative research. Particularly, we believe that our work addresses issues around technical and epistemological quality through an analysis of issues pertaining to methodological rigor and the search for goodness.

Technical Quality

By making our processes for using portraiture transparent, we address English's (2000) caution when he stated, "for portraiture to find acceptance as a research methodology it cannot be so esoteric as to render it impossible for competently trained practitioners to teach or utilize it" (p. 21). We were able to interpret the methodological guidelines put forth by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) and utilize them to inform our data gathering, analysis, and reporting. We also believe we were able to expand the method to include a new approach for developing the poetic portraits through the process of poetic fitting.

Our inquiry meets the standards of "goodness" proposed by qualitative scholars like Patton (2002) who emphasized a) the need for transparency about the research process, b) qualitative research as iterative and responsive to changing goals and questions, and c) clarity about the fit between conceptual framework, methods, and findings. We engaged in peer review and critique throughout the process, and we held portraiture accountable to our three different evaluation criteria.

The inquiry we conducted was sound and systematic, and it was in line with the goals of portraiture. We are reminded that Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) criticized "those who make a mockery of the emerging forms of eclecticism;" as well as "those who will use boundary crossing as a way to avoid the rigors and standards of both art and science" (p. 9). We resisted the idea that quality should not be considered with arts-based approaches to inquiry (Finley, 2005) and instead believe that research poetry can be evaluated based on aspects of aesthetic and poetic craft (Faulkner, 2007). Our methods successfully "bridged the realms of science and art" reflecting portraiture's "cross between art and science, its blend of aesthetic sensibilities and empirical rigor" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005, p. 6).

Epistemological Quality: A Search for Goodness

Concurrently through the research process, we worked to achieve methodological rigor while we engaged with participant experiences and "searched for goodness" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983) in their stories. The research stance of the search for goodness puts regard for participants at the center of the research method and echoes the concept proposed by Fine (1994) of working the hyphens. Portraiture enabled us "to resist the tradition-laden effort to document failure" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9). In exploring the depth and nuance of the teachers' stories and using their stories to inform our understanding of culturally responsive practices, we acknowledge that the teachers themselves do not provide researchers with a source for treatment or fixing typical in other methodological paradigms within social science research, but instead are resources for rich understanding. Therefore, we worked against "the tendency to focus on what is wrong rather than search for what is right, to describe pathology rather than health" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, p. 10) that seems particularly salient in our current educational research climate. Portraiture enabled us to enact research that is both ethical and rigorous. Hostetler (2005 pointed out that "good" education research serves people's well being. Grounded in a belief that "we need to think about how we can make life better for people" (p. 21), our study helps us to achieve our goals of better serving teachers and children.

The Risks and Rewards of Border Crossing

Guided by our two-fold goal to conduct high quality and artistically meaningful inquiry, we constructed nuanced and robust portraits of our participants that met multiple definitions of "good" research. In the end, we embraced portraiture—though to varying degrees. For example, Leah has begun to explore how critical perspectives aimed at disrupting hegemony have manifested in an ironic twist of methodological fundamentalism (House, 2006) in terms of "acceptable" alternative qualitative research. Earle and Julie were willing to support a student's exploration of portraiture for a class project; but ultimately each had to confront her own limited expectation for portraiture in relation to preferences for other forms of analyses.

We have come to realize how narrow even a liberal methods stance can be, and we reject the either/or mentality of the methodological fundamentalist from either side of the artificial empirical/aesthetic divide. Our understanding of portraiture has been transformed by a willingness to cross the borders of our own methodological comfort zones. Otherwise, we would have been guilty of imposing an untenable *sameness* across qualitative research.

The drum beats of beauty, poetry pulsing through me
Thumping in my brain, echoing a new purpose
Drowning out the din from blue-faced, red-faced squabblers
Vaulted beyond the fray
The sounds from my emergence
That I, researcher
Compose
Becoming the lovely sounds that you
The hearer
And I
Create
Music rises above the cacophony
Banging out scholarship, demanding alternatives
Echoing the syncopated language
Of empirical aesthetic
Goodness.

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