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Educing Education Majors' Reflections about After-School Literacy Tutoring: A Poetic Exploration

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Abstract

Contemplating one's teaching has long been an essential part of teacher education. Accordingly, as an instructor of a literacy methods course with a tutoring component, I asked education majors in the class to send me weekly e-mail reflections about their teaching experiences. However, they had difficulty considering their lessons. I knew poetry stimulated introspections. Therefore, hoping to evoke the education majors' reflexivity, I requested they create two poems (middle and end of the semester) that portrayed their perceptions and dilemmas related to their teaching practices and lessons. Using constant comparative analysis, I explored the education majors' lyrical forms. Writing in a poetic voice prompted the education majors' contemplations. However, rather than focusing on their lessons, their initial poems portrayed their anxieties about teaching while their end of semester poems centered on concern for children. Thus, as is typical in arts-based research, the study afforded generativity (puzzlements meriting additional investigation).

Introduction

> "*Reflection on practice rooted in poetic form can illuminate … tensions [and], foreground previously silenced experiences" (Kinsella, 2006, p. 35)*
>
> *"Poetry allows the heart to lead the mind rather than the reverse. It can be used as an analytical or reflexive approach as well as a representational form in qualitative work. It is a form of inquiry"* (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 3)

Considerable research on teacher beliefs and cognitions indicates effective teachers routinely and purposefully reflect about all aspects of their work (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Schon, 1987; van Manen, 1991; Zeichner & Liston, 2007). For example, they contemplate why lessons succeeded, or failed, and consider how to help children with issues that impact children's school behavior, learning, and wellbeing. They also keep in mind children's individual languages, dialects, and backgrounds when they plan lessons and take into account their various talents and abilities (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). They teach with intentionality as well. That is, they examine their educational beliefs and teaching styles and align their theoretical orientations with their pedagogy. Especially noteworthy is that they adapt to changing circumstances, construct new meanings about their work in light of their past experiences "and make conscious choices about how to act in order to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of their work" (Çimer, Çimer, & Vekli, 2013, p, 136) (also see Clift, Houston, & Pugach, 1990; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Leahy & Corcoran, 1996; Lortie 1975). As a result, reflective teachers have a strong sense of agency and professional identity and "gain ownership over their teaching and learning" (Sakamoto, 2011, p. 202). In light of the strong connection between teacher reflectivity and teacher effectiveness (e.g., see Çimer et al, 2013), critical contemplation of one's teaching has long been an essential dimension of teacher education (Smith, Yendol-Hoppey, & Milam, 2010). But, rigorously inspecting one's pedagogy is often challenging and elusive for neophyte education majors.

In this paper I explain why, as a professor of a literacy methods course accompanied by an after-school tutoring program, I asked education majors to create poetry to portray reflections about their teaching. I also describe a poetic inquiry I conducted in which I explored in what ways composing poetry might stimulate the education majors' motivation and abilities to thoughtfully consider their teaching. In addition, I share discoveries from the research and offer insights for those who may wish to employ poetic inquiry in their own investigations. To help ensure the integrity, verisimilitude, and usefulness of the study, I deliberately reflected on my own pedagogical decisions to identify and acknowledge my inadvertent errors. In this way, I inspected my practices, just as I expected my education majors to reflect about their lessons. As recommended by arts scholars, throughout the paper, I execute full disclosure about these oversights and tell the story of the study as it occurred (e.g., see Eisner, 2008ab;

McNiff, 2008). Thus, I followed a principle of exemplary inquiry in which, "the researcher's motivations for and commitment to research are central and crucial to the enterprise" (Schratz & Walker, 1995, pp. 1-2). My intent in transparency is to inform others about the significant possibilities, questions, and tensions associated with poetic inquiry. My hope is others will find this approach useful in their research initiatives.

Poetry as Data

There is no single definition of poetry, but scholars agree poetry is a genre of literature, comprised of rhythm, disparate features, imagery, repetition, intonation, metaphors, ambiguity, and/or language that often sounds unusual and denotes unique meanings (Belliveau & Prendergast, 2013; Rasberry, 2002; Rifenburgh, 2015). The incorporation of these elements along with poetry's patterned arrangement of language (rhymed or free verse) contribute to poetry's musical qualities and unexpected speech patterns that differ from conventional print and oral communication. All of these dimensions "evoke strong imagery and emotions" (Ely, et. al., 1999, p. 135). As a tenet of psychoanalytic theory explains, imagery and emotions often symbolize unconscious wishes, conflicts, or fears (Bargh, & Morsella (2008).

Because of poetry's emotional content, poetry as data is considered one of many ways to tell a story through the arts (Pink, 2001). Consequently, the poetic genre has become significant to qualitative inquiries because this mode of representation allows individuals to express feelings and perceptions that might be too elusive to capture in prose (Trainor & Graue, 2012), or were "not quite conscious prior to writing" (Kinsella, 2006, p. 42). Thus, poetry has the ability to clarify human existence (Hirshfield, as cited by Faulkner, 2007). Toward that end, authoring poetry may stimulate new ways of knowing (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009), provide sudden epiphanies and insights (Shidmehr, 2014), and inspire "the conception of ideas" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 19).

Poetic Inquiry

Poetic inquiry, as a category of arts-based research, is the incorporation and exploration of poetry as a component of a qualitative study (Prendergast, 2008). Considered a methodological innovation, poetic inquiry emerged to address issues that arose from new theoretical insights and challenges from postmodern theory, feminist postmodernism, and feminist post-structuralism that explored and validated the "articulation of human experience" (Leavy, 2015, p. 79).

Epistemologically, poetic inquiry is not antithetical to other qualitative research practices. However, there is no doubt poetic inquiry, as an emerging, innovative research approach,

pushes the boundaries of creative thinking and "breaks out of the conventional as defined by each qualitative research tradition" (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 13). Specifically, poetic inquiry challenges current qualitative research paradigms because poetry as data has the potential to produce new insights and thus confronts the hegemony of dominant discourse **(**Barrett & Bolt, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Giroux, 1991; Hanauer, 2010; Kinsella, 2006; Leggo, 2015; Prendergast, 2008; Rolling, 2013).

In the research I describe in this paper, I turned to poetic processes as an unconventional method of self-discovery for education majors and as an alternative approach for me as a researcher to explore education majors' self-reflections about teaching literacy in an after school tutoring program (see Furman, et al., 2008). In fact, the problem I studied and attempted to unravel (i.e., to evoke and discern education majors' reflections about their tutoring lessons) dictated the methodology I employed (see McNiff, 2013). Specifically, I relied on a specific category of literary work termed *participant-voiced lyric poetry),* which is poetry authored by individual study participants that represents "moments of subjective feeling and emotion" (L Richardson, 1997, p. 183; also see Falkner, 2007; Prendergast, 2009; Sparkes, 2003). This mode of discovery is unusual in educational research because it "seeks to reveal and communicate emotions and feelings via creative expression (Elliott, 2005).

Responding to the uniqueness of an inquiry in which emotions and creativity are at the forefront, I assumed a researcher's role in which I took on the persona of a learner (Ryan, 2006). In this role I asked education majors to compose poems as a heuristic (i.e., a mediator) for prompting their self-reflections about their teaching experiences. Minus the poetic component of the inquiry, I would have missed the opportunity to acquire insights into the education majors' expressive, emotional nature, empathy, and major concerns. At the same time, as is expected in arts based research, the education majors' poetry prompted new questions and considerations (i.e., generativity; e.g., see Barone & Eisner, 1997).

Questions that Guided the Inquiry

In the inquiry I sought to answer the following three questions:

1. In what ways does the content of the education majors' initial and end of semester reflective poems vary with respect to themes (i.e., ideas, values, emotions, insights, concerns, and understandings about self, children, and teaching)?
2. In what ways does this research contribute to our understanding of participant-voiced, lyrical poetry (i.e., portraying feelings and emotions) and poetic inquiry?
3. In what ways does this inquiry inform my own reflective pedagogy?

Ars Poetica: Locating Myself as an Arts-Based Researcher

Poetic inquiry requires researchers to take on the dual persona of both researcher and artist

(Levy, 2015). This duality usually requires training in and affinity for both artistic and research pursuits. Consequently, a number of scholars in the arts argue that researchers who employ poetry in their studies should submit "an *ars poetica* expressing why they are drawn to poetic inquiry" (Faulkner, 2007, p. 223). Hence, to provide credibility for the research I report here, I position myself as a professor of literacy and qualitative inquiry, a qualitative researcher, and as an artist with considerable training in voice performance and piano in addition to my studies in education and research. Inherently, the arts and arts-based inquiries are congruent with my creative worldview. Arts based-research compliments my artistic nature. I value and appreciate an aesthetic way of knowing and my aesthetic perspective influences the research I do "at every level because it shapes … [my] epistemological foundation" (Rolling, 2013, p. 4). As a result, I am comfortable and confident conducting studies in which the arts, in some way, are significant to uncovering study participants' experiences and perspectives. Toward that end, I have published considerable work in which a variety of educational artistic data are the focus of inquiry.

This is not to say those whose talents and aptitudes reside in domains other than the arts cannot successfully engage in systematic studies that encompass the arts although some arts scholars disagree (e.g., see Faulkner, 2007; Piirto, 2002; Prendergast, 2009). For example, while there are certain skills needed to conduct arts-based studies, this genre entails a process of discovery that may suit those who are flexible and open to new ideas and think conceptually, symbolically, and metaphorically (Saldaña 2011). In fact, "experimentation with the method and learning more about it can even be a primary outcome of the research and an aide to future professional applications" (McNiff, 2008, p. 33).

Background for the Inquiry

The Context for the Inquiry and the Program's Philosophy

Tutoring in schools provides a context where novice teachers can develop their professional identities (Hall, et al, 2010; Richards, 2010). Therefore, I planned the literacy course to enable the education majors to tutor small groups of children in a public elementary school located on my university campus. I particularly chose this context because many children in the school were in need of extra instructional and nurturing support. Appropriately, an ethos of care (Noddings, 1984, 2005), and confirmation of children's worth were underlying principles of the program.

The Education Majors

There were 16 education majors in the literacy methods course who had previously completed undergraduate degrees in various fields of study, such as psychology, English, political science, and business, etc. However, for various reasons they decided to obtain a Master of

Arts degree in elementary education with the goal of obtaining a teaching position. Their ages ranged from 22 to 45. There were two males and 14 females and all were white and from middle class backgrounds. They were halfway through a two-year Master of Arts in Education program and none had taught children prior to tutoring in the after-school literacy program.

The Students in the After School Program

Many of the K-5th grade children in the after school program received subsidized meals in their schools and typically scored at or below the 20th percentile on annual reading and language arts standardized assessments administered during the school year. Eighty percent of the students were African-American, 15 percent were Hispanic, and 5 percent were Caucasian. The majority of the Hispanic students were English language learners.

The After-School Literacy Tutoring Program

Following one-hour class meetings, the education majors tutored for two hours one afternoon a week and received three semester-hours of credit for the course. Two education students worked together to plan and teach weekly research-based reading and writing strategies and best practices to small groups of six children arranged according to grade level, K-5. The education majors chose the grade level they wished to teach and worked with the same children throughout the semester. There were eight tutoring groups with a total of 48 children in the tutoring program.

The education majors began their tutoring sessions by dialogue journaling with their individual children partners. (e.g., "Hi Donald, This weekend I went to see the Star Wars movie. What did you do? I liked the way you paid attention to the story today. Your tutor"). They also modeled and helped children participate in strategies to foster their self-regulated writing, and taught writing genres (e.g., fiction, poetry, and persuasive and informational text). In addition, they worked with each child to write and illustrate a creative book and connected multiple literacies to their lessons, such as music, technology, and the visual and dramatic arts. Consistent with teacher care and concern, children were not isolated from their peers to receive needed academic, or behavioral attention. Rather, all children were valued and accepted within their learning context.

Attempting to Evoke the Education Majors' Reflexivity

Early in the semester, I attempted to motivate the education majors to thoughtfully consider their lessons. I responded to all of their required weekly e-mail reflections to me by asking questions to encourage their reasoning (e.g., "What problems are you experiencing with teaching?). I also suggested they look at specific dimensions of their pedagogy (e.g., "Do you think your group needs to get up and move around a bit? Maybe, a dramatic enactment of the

book you are reading together might have settled them down. What do you think?"). Moreover, I urged them to look carefully at individual children's achievements in order more accurately formulate differentiated instructional plans (e.g., "What do you believe Paulo needs to learn next about writing in his journal?). However, the education majors continued to display little understanding of critical reflection. Instead, they composed happy messages that Korthagen (2001), van Manen (1977), and Zeichner (1987) typify as non-reflective descriptive writing (e.g., "We love our little group of first graders. They are so sweet"). As a long-time teacher educator, I recognized the education majors' lack of reflexivity ensued from lack of teaching experience. Furthermore, as Fuller and Brown (1975) found, most beginning teachers, such as the education majors in this study, are in the survival stage of professional development and lack the experiences needed to reflect about one's teaching. Perhaps, more importantly, I realize now, I incorrectly assumed the education majors would develop their introspective abilities and motivation to reflect about their pedagogy merely by authoring weekly e-mail reflections. In hindsight, I needed to help the education majors develop reflexive dispositions through related readings, group discussions on teachers' reflective habits, and demonstrations of my own reflective thinking. For whatever reasons, the education majors' e- mail reflections continued to conceal phenomenon rather than elucidate them. In essence, their prose was disengaged from their experiences and demonstrated no evidence of reflexivity (see Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

The Inquiry

Research Methodology: Turning To Poetry

In the hopes of stimulating the education majors' self- reflections about their literacy lessons, I turned to poetry. I knew from other arts-based inquiries I had conducted that poetry evokes and stimulates feelings, attitudes, and reflection, and can bring unconscious ideas to consciousness (Cahnmann-Tayor & Siegesmund, 2009; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Leggo, 2012). In fact, "feelings and their spontaneous overflow are necessary for poetic production" (McGrath, 2013, p. 77). Thus, I had a hunch composing reflections through poetic forms might enable the education majors to more freely express themselves. I also reasoned since poetry is not a specialized academic language associated with a specific profession, such as education, poetry, as an assistive heuristic device, might liberate the education majors to uncover what they themselves had not previously recognized (see Bakhtin, 1981; Toulmin, 1953). After receiving approval from my university's Institutional Review Board to conduct the inquiry and obtaining Informed Consent from the 16 education majors, I initiated the study.

Literatures Informing the Inquiry

As in all exemplary research, "in arts-based research, the researcher has to draw from various sources to ground the study and create a theoretical framework" (Suominen, 2003, p. 37). Consequently, after a thorough review of the literature, I turned to four diverse bodies of work: teacher education; constructivist theories; poetic inquiry; and, the discipline of philosophy to provide the foundation for the inquiry.

As a starting point I referred to scholarly works that indicate beginning teachers usually need interventions to carefully consider the consequences of their work in order for them to learn the attitudes and skills required for the reflective process (Richert & Bove, 2010; Schön, 1996).

I also relied on ideas "predicated on a constructivist epistemology that posits there are multiple realities and ways of doing and understanding" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, n p). With this in mind, scholars urge researchers to "uncover and deconstruct previously accepted ways of using language, genres, methodologies, and paradigms of research (Shidmehr, 2014, p. 165).

In addition, I looked at frameworks to support poetic inquiry. I found that scholars and poets connect the lyric qualities of poetry with sensitivity, insightfulness, emotion, and intensity. For example, Canadian poet, musician, and philosopher, Jan Zwicky (2012), mentions "the lyrical (i, e., poetry] is a form of intuition" (p. 28).

Moreover, French philosophers Descartes (see Cottingham, Stoothoff, & Murdoch (1999) and Bergson (1946) considered intuitive knowing as a highly intellectual activity in which individuals rely on emotions rather than rationality. These scholars' views alerted me to the power of poetry to capture heightened feelings that may be concealed just below consciousness (e.g., see Woods, 2002). In fact, the famous poet, Wordsworth, believed poetry was "the spontaneous overflow of feelings" (cited in Woods, 2002, p. 8) (also see Wordsworth in Norman, 1962).

My Directions to the Education Majors about Reflecting through Poetry

Since I had not anticipated I would ask the education majors to reflect about their teaching experiences though poetry, I did not list this assignment on the class syllabus. However, when I read the education majors' initial superficial e-mail reflections**,** I requested in class that they continue to send me weekly reflections in prose, and that they also create two poems about their teaching experiences (one mid-semester and another during the final week of the semester). I asked that they send the poems to me via e-mail.

I must acknowledge I did not provide any information to the education majors about the specific elements of poetry, or how to author a poem. I also did not consider how creating only two poems might serve to enrich the education majors' reflections throughout the course. But, in retrospect, my underlying rationale for the lack of directions about how to author a poem and my requirement of only two poems was that I did not want to usurp time the education majors needed to prepare and offer their lessons. In addition, as an artistic individual with hubristic tendencies, I am inclined to think that if I can "create art" then my students can easily do the same. In all honesty, I also worried they might resent the idea of having to take the time to compose poetry. Time constraints also created another issue. I had hoped the education majors would be able to compare their initial and final poems with one another since I knew how profitable it would be for them to examine their own data to gain some conclusions about their growth as reflective practitioners. There is considerable value in teachers' interpreting their work, especially when they can consider why they make pedagogical decisions and how those decisions affect what children learn (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). Yet, time slipped away; this contributed to another lost opportunity for the education majors and added to another pedagogical oversight on my part.

Analyzing the Poems

At the end of the semester, I chose constant comparative analysis (Ryan & Bernard, 2000) as the most appropriate method to analyze the education majors' poetry. Arts-based researchers, who choose constant comparative analysis as a tool for discovery, search for and document patterns in data. Consequently, at the end of the semester, I chronologically collated the data sets (16 mid-semester and 16 end-of-semester poems). Next, I read and reread the data, discovering, comparing, and making notes about what I believed was pertinent information (e.g., I jotted down my assumptions, underlined possible patterns, and compared the emerging content for possible themes and connections (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). My next step was to engage in axial coding (Bernard & Ryan, 2010), in which I looked for similarities and differences between the two data sets for each education major. Then, I employed selective coding to devise encompassing themes.

Analysis of the Mid-Semester Poems

My analysis of the mid-semester poems showed that not surprisingly, emotionality and feelings were at the heart of all the poems (see Lineberger, 2015), and all of the poetic forms portrayed the education majors' anxieties, confusions, and insecurities about teaching. This is understandable since considerable research indicates, "novice teachers tend to begin their professional lives initially concerned with self and their own survival in the classroom" (Jenkins & Lloyd, 2001, n p.. In this survival stage beginning teachers are preoccupied with their own security rather than on their lessons, or their students' learning and instructional

needs (Borich & Tombari, 1995; Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975). For example, the following three mid-semester poems (two rhymed, one free verse and rhymed) illuminate individual education major's feelings of distress about teaching that include feeling scared, feeling caught and captured, feeling anxious about making mistakes, and feeling frustrated about children's behavior. The authors' word choices denote these emotions and moods (e.g., struggle; worry; scared; caught; distraught; fears; dread; glum; mistake). All of these feelings may be explained through dimensions of psychoanalytic theory. Although aspects of psychoanalytic theory remain controversial, aspects of this personality organization theory clarify that much of our behavior and emotions, such as "memories, motives, feelings, and the like" (Bornstein, 2010, n p) are largely inaccessible to consciousness and are related to early life experiences (Bargh & Morsella, 2008; Blatt & Levy, 2003; Bornstein, 2010). In turn, alternative pathways to psychoanalytic approaches include poetry in which "familiar analytic ideas seem revitalized when they reveal themselves in art, [and] our understanding of them deepens" (Lieberman, 2011, p. 111).

A Free Verse Poem

I struggle, I admit
They want to jump
Up and down
They want to color
The scream out
For attention above all else
They say they can write
Their own name
But they can't
I worry
Worry, worry, worry
About me
About how scared I am
To teach

A Rhymed Poem

I'm a spider
Caught in my web
I thought I could do this
That's what I said
But now I have fears

About teaching these kids
I thought I could do this
But it's what I now dread
I teach children
It's intimidating and not fun
Is this my life's work?
If so-
I'm glum

A Poem that is Both Free Verse and Rhymed

Do you learn to teach
By teaching?
What do I know?
Not much
Then how will I know
If I make a mistake?
There's more to teaching
Then I thought
Help me God
I am distraught
I cannot give up my plans
To teach
But right now
It's beyond my reach
The kids don't listen
They talk and squirm
They tell me
They don't want to learn

A RAP Poem

What am I doing here
Thinking I can teach
I don't know a damn thing
It's out of my reach
I 'm scared
Yeah, scared bad
Petrified personified
Can't turn back though

I've got to try and try

Analysis of the End-of-Semester Poems

Of interest is that similar to the first set of poems, a core feature of the education majors' end of semester poems also highlighted their highly emotional states of mind. However, 14 out of 16 poems portrayed solicitude and compassion for individual children. The literature on phases of teacher development indicates it is only when teachers feel comfortable about their teaching abilities that they feel secure enough to turn their attention to their pupils' needs (Borich & Tombari, 1995; Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Brown, 1975). Yet, my observations of the education majors' tutoring efforts showed they continued to concentrate on themselves and demonstrated continued insecurity about their teaching abilities. Moreover, the education majors authored their second poems six weeks after their initial poems and research indicates it may take more than two years before entry-level teachers began to see children as individuals with individual needs (Fuller & Brown, 1975). The following four poems illuminate the education major's preoccupation and worry for individual children and focus on children's need for care and attention from the education majors. Although the poems focus on children rather than self, just as in the early semester poems, these end of semester poems portray emotions of anxiety, worry, concern, and apprehensiveness through the authors' phrase choices and questions the authors posed (e.g., heart pounds; weak in knees; I worry; left behind; who will care for her? when I am gone, who will listen? I can't stand this; he's troubled; his life is such a mess; I need to stay here; I can't leave him alone). The end of semester poems also revealed the education majors' recognition of children's vulnerability (e.g., slipped through a crack; can hardly read or write; can't recognize alphabet letters; left behind; her little whispers; sweet face; she needs me; he's such a scared little kid).

A Free Verse Poem

She slipped through a crack
She can hardly read or write
She can't recognize alphabet letters
I worry for lost children like these
My heart pounds, and I feel weak in my knees.
Left behind in writing
And reading and math

A Free Verse Poem

Who will care for her
When I am gone?
Who will listen to her little whispers?

Look at her sweet face?
Hold her hand?
Sit next to her?
I can't stand this
How can I leave her?
She needs me

A Free Verse Poem

He's troublesome
'Cause he's troubled
His life is such a mess
No wonder
He thinks school is stupid
I need to stay here
With him
Tell him
He's beautiful
Will he believe me?
This is our last week
To be at this school
How can I leave him?
He pretends he's cool
But he's just a scared little kid
I can't leave him alone
I will be back

A Poem Like a Church Hymn

Let him know Lord
I cared, I cared
Let him remember me
As loving and not bad
For leaving him here
I cannot do this Lord
Just walk away from him
It's like a sin- my sin

Limitations of the Inquiry

Prior to making sense of the data and presenting the contributions of the inquiry I must

acknowledge several limitations pertinent to the study. One possibility is that reflective data in another art form, or data collected from a different group of education majors working with different aged children in a different teaching context conceivably would not produce similar discoveries.

Another consideration explained by hermeneutic principles is that "we see things not as they are—but as we are" (Cohen, 2015, p. 8). In all probability my professional background and personal experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and world-views influenced my interpretations of the data. Others might interpret the data differently.

There is also a limitation connected to my dual role of course instructor and arts-based researcher. In my researcher position, I bracketed (i.e., recognized, acknowledged, and set aside) my preconceptions, biases, values, and beliefs, as I collected and analyzed data (refer to Glaser & Strauss, 1967, for a thorough discussion of bracketing). Yet, there is no doubt as the supervising instructor of the course, I was highly involved with the education majors' achievements and success.

It is also is reasonable to assume that since I was the course instructor, the education majors may have withheld information from me, or submitted poetic content they believed would please me, or satisfy course requirements. For example, the overarching theme permeating the after school-tutoring program was an ethos of care for children's wellbeing (see Noddings, 1975). This inclusive principle may have influenced the education majors to author end of semester poetry they thought might meet the tutoring program's philosophical orientation to teaching and learning.

Making Sense of the Data through Psychoanalytic, Philosophical, and Arts Theories

As I repeatedly analyzed the data**,** although poetry is recognized as a vehicle for stimulating emotions, I found myself pondering why all of the education majors' poetic forms (both mid and end-of-semester) were fraught with emotionality while their reflective e-mail prose continued to contain inconsequential information. Although there are some conflicting theories surrounding human emotions (Johnson, 2015) and a "lack of agreement on [what constitutes] basic emotions" (Scheff, 2015, p. 111), psychoanalytic theories that explain aesthetic processes provided some answers to my question. Succinctly stated, among other internal states of mind (e.g., joy, sorrow, anger, grief), emotions reflect individual's needs and concerns (Burton, Western, & Kowalski, 2013). Although I cannot decipher what went on in the minds of the education majors and I do not know their developmental histories, (see Lieberman, 2011) it is reasonable to assume the education majors' emotionality reflected their strong apprehensions and worries (i. e., mid semester concerns for self and end-of semester concerns for individual children). Psychoanalytic theory also posits that for various reasons,

emotions may remain repressed until some heightened experience brings them to the surface (Burton et al., 2013). Recognizing that poetry allows individuals to express emotions too elusive to capture in prose (Trainor & Graue, 2012), or were "not quite conscious prior to writing" (Kinsella, 2006, p. 42), I believe the act of creating poetry provided an experiential conduit that permitted the education majors' emotions to emerge. Views from symbolic consciousness (i.e., the ways we think and communicate through symbols and images) elaborate on this phenomenon (e.g., see Suzanne Langer 1948).

Philosophical insights also help to explain the connection between emotionality and poetry. For example, Suzanne Langer, a renowned philosopher, developed a prominent theory that explains artistic expression as forms of feeling that communicate lived experiences (1953, 1957a,b). She observed that the emotional quality of an event, or ongoing experiences is vividly clear in artistic communication (such as poetry) and this emotionality reveals individual's subjective realities as knowledge and truth that embody the externalization of subjective perceptions and feelings (1953). Moreover, Elliot Eisner, esteemed professor of art and education, believed the arts liberate emotions by providing opportunities that are "free from the structures of literal description" (2002, p. 89). To that end, it appears poetry served as a communicative platform that liberated the education majors to write from their hearts and discover their innermost feelings rather than cautiously monitor their words and conceal their emotions from me and even from themselves. As Leavy (2015) states, "poems push feelings at the forefront" (p. 77). Simply put, the process of creating poetry allowed the education majors feelings to emerge. Robert Frost 1874-1963), the highly regarded American poet supported this notion of poems emerging into being. He emphasized that poetry is "something that comes to the writer as an intuition out of the unknown, an event, an experience in itself" (in Eliott, 2012, p. 64).

A Question Remains

Consistent with arts based epistemology, this inquiry afforded a question but no answer (see Elliott, 2012). An unresolved vexing puzzle remains that warrants further investigation. That is, the content of education majors' end-of semester poems portrayed concern and worry for individual children. Fuller and Brown's revised model indicates it is only in the fourth stage of development when teachers feel secure that they can concentrate on "the social and emotional needs of pupils" (1975, p. 37). Yet, my observations of the education majors' pedagogy showed they had not moved through the precursor necessary stages of teacher development: (1) vague anxieties about teaching; (2) self survival anxieties) (3) mastering content and teaching knowledge) to enable them to enter the fourth stage of teachers' concerns and concentrate on children's individual emotional needs (see Fuller & Brown, 1975).

Moreover, there was only a six-week time span between the education majors' first and

second poems. One possibility is that since poetry evokes emotions, the process of creating poetry allowed the education majors' strong feelings of care and concern for individual children to emerge from the unconscious to the conscious level. These strong emotions may have surmounted the precursor stages of teacher development explained by Fuller and Brown's (1975) revised teacher development model. As Leavy notes, poems capture heightened moments of social reality as if under a magnifying glass" (2015, p. 63).

Contributions of the Inquiry

Notwithstanding some pedagogical oversights, and the limitations of the study, the inquiry expands understanding of poetic inquiry. Another contribution is that the research meets a critical principle of arts-based investigations; that is, arts-based research must be at the heart of the inquiry (Sinner et al., 2006) and "the chosen art is an integral and informative part of the process, producing knowledge otherwise inaccessible" (Suominen, 2003, p. 34). Although the education majors' poetry did not focus on their lessons, their poems, both mid and end-of-semester, revealed considerably more about their emotions and perceptions than did their weekly e-mail communication. Certainly the arts framed, influenced, and informed this inquiry. Minus the arts, the study would have provided entirely different, incomplete, and largely inaccurate perspectives of the education majors' perceptions about their teaching experiences.

I believe another contribution of the study is my willingness to candidly expose and draw attention to my pedagogical oversights. Scholars remind us there is a dearth of literature that provides authentic revelations about the challenges and complexities of arts-based investigations (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, 33). Therefore, I think my disclosure of problematic issues will prove useful to those who seek new ways of discovering study participants' emotionally driven lived experiences. Without a doubt, the inquiry illuminates the special language and power of poetry to represent "actual experiences in such a way that the distance between self and other blurs" (L. Richardson, 1997, p. 183). In truth, "we find ourselves in poems" (M. Richardson, 1998, p. 459).

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