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Revisiting Interview Data Through a Post I-Poem

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Abstract

A former participant in a research study on adolescent writers was invited to read and respond to a Post-I-Poem (PIP), a poetic transcription constructed from her interview data in what is now a closed study. The purpose of this investigation was to explore what could be learned from doing a PIP in the first place and what lines of inquiry this investigation could raise for why a researcher might revisit old interview data. Analysis of one student's PIP suggests that using poetic transcription to revisit retired transcriptions offers researchers potentially new directions for further study.

Keywords

Interviewing, Qualitative Research, Investigative Poetry, Alternative Methods, New Methods and Methodology

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Revisiting Interview Data Through a Post I-Poem

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A former participant in a research study on adolescent writers was invited to read and respond to a Post-I-Poem (PIP), a poetic transcription constructed from her interview data in what is now a closed study. The purpose of this investigation was to explore what could be learned from doing a PIP in the first place and what lines of inquiry this investigation could raise for why a researcher might revisit old interview data. Analysis of one student's PIP suggests that using poetic transcription to revisit retired transcriptions offers researchers potentially new directions for further study. Keywords: Interviewing, Qualitative Research, Investigative Poetry, Alternative Methods, New Methods and Methodology

At an American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference, I, Rebecca Leigh, met then doctoral student, Michelle Zimmerman from University of Washington, now adjunct faculty at Concordia University Wisconsin who gave a talk on how she used poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997; Richardson, 1992, 1994a, 1994b) as a process for clarifying themes and patterns from her data with third grade children in a study on dance.

Zimmerman's roundtable session was engaging. As a researcher, it was particularly exciting to hear about an alternative way of looking at and engaging in the member checking process, to learn that there is a precedent for using poetic transcription in a research design, and that the use of poetry in research is gaining momentum in the field (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008; Lahman et al., 2018, Poindexter, 2002; Raingruber, 2009; Richardson, 2002).

Defining Poetic Transcription

Poetic transcription is a methodological process that can be used to clarify themes and patterns gleaned from data, such as interview data, with participants. It involves "the creation of poem-like compositions from the words of interviewees" (Glesne, 1997, p. 202), as the researcher takes sections of text from in-depth transcripts to create a composition or "I-poem" (Simpson & Quigley, 2016) that still retains what the participant said in an interview. Like found poetry, words and phrases are selected; however, the researcher neither adds words nor manipulates word order and syntax, which can impart new meaning. At first glance, a poetic transcription may look poetry-like but it is not poetry (Glesne, 1997); the language can feel more forensic than lyrical and meanings are typically more explicit than implied (Day, 2015). By removing unnecessary words such as *the, and, but,* etc., for aesthetic and interpretive purposes but still retain hedge words – that is, words that convey uncertainty such as *maybe* or *I guess* – poetic transcription can help researchers listen more fully to participants' voices and investigate meanings. The poetic transcription process also empowers participants by placing their voices in the "center of inquiry, analysis, and discussion rather than on the margins" (Tillman, 2006, p. 282). Poetic transcription affirms their voice (Glesne, 2006) and enables the participant to see his/her words – that is, thoughts and feelings experienced during a research study. As noted by Richardson (1994), poetic inquiry also supports the possibility of recreating participants' lived experiences that can evoke emotional responses to experiences.

When working with young children in particular, poetic transcription allows for a developmentally appropriate member check (Glesne, 2006) that is accessible to a child's reading level. It also helps reduce researcher bias (Canniford, 2012; Prendergast, Leggo, & Sameshima, 2009) since it calls for participants to read and reflect on their own words rather than the researcher's interpretation of what was said.

Researchers do not need to be rooted in their identity as poets in order to participate in poetic inquiry. Poems are not written; rather, they are constructed from existing data that hold participants' stories and lived experiences. If there is a criterion for participating in poetic inquiry in one's research, it is remaining open to its possibilities. Poetic transcription invites researchers to explore and consider another pathway for accessing participant voice and intention and therefore clarifying and refining one's data analysis. Faulkner (2007) argues that there is considerable value in using the "special language" of poetry, which can in general resonate with more diverse audiences than traditional modes of research reporting.

Poetic Transcription in Context

In a study on how adolescent boys and girls construct mathematics identity in single-sex mathematics classes, Simpson (2016) used poetic transcription in the form of I-poems and Word Trees as a process for promoting participant self-reflection as well as enhancing findings by shifting some of her power as researcher to her participants. Similarly, Collins (2015) used poetic transcription to give her participant, Peter, "back some of the power to represent himself, his story" (p. 597) on what it means to be urban poor in the United Kingdom. "He is represented in this poem as a whole person, someone with whom we can empathize, rather than as a fragment of speech quoted out of context to illustrate a more abstract meaning constructed by a researcher" (Collins, 2015, p. 597). In contrast, Reilly (2013) invited her participants to create their own poems from their transcripts, where participant-created found poems revealed "an emotional depth and connection" (p. 1) that was absent from the traditional open coding methods that she also employed. Poindexter (2002) posited that researchers create spaces for empathy and understanding when they delve into poetic representations of research.

As the doctoral coordinator for my department's PhD program, I am interested in talking with graduate students about research practices that stand "in contrast to a more established distanced, authoritative representation buttressed with technical descriptions of sampling, transcription, coding and validation procedures" (Collins, 2015, p. 597), especially when a research design calls for "spaces for expression and inquiry beyond regular modes of representation" (Canniford, 2012, p. 393). These conversations matter as students consider not simply their own academic work but the methods that will help illuminate their work. I remember what it was like to be a doctoral student in a qualitative inquiry course learning about and trying to understand the rationale for using one method over another. Attending Zimmerman's roundtable session at AERA prompted me to talk about poetic transcription with my then doctoral student, Julie Schrauben, now adjunct faculty at Oakland University, leading to her piece below.

Easing into Poetic Transcription

I, Julie Schrauben, have always had an interest in poetry, reading and writing poems throughout graduate school. When I began my own research, it was natural for me that I integrated my love of the genre in my dissertation study on adolescent writers. Noden's (2011) signature five brush strokes, a specific kind of author's craft, were central to each of the ten lessons that I created for the participants in my study.

Throughout my dissertation research, I engaged in rich conversations about poetry and author's craft with Rebecca Leigh, my then dissertation co-chair. From these discussions, I learned about poetic transcription as an alternative method to clarifying themes and patterns with students and from these informal yet meaningful talks she shared with me the conversation that she had with Michelle Zimmerman. I was, in a word, intrigued. And while it was not logistically possible, at that time, to modify my study to incorporate poetic transcription, I read as much as I could in anticipation of my own future research. As I read, the more aware I became of the potential of poetic transcription to help participants express their ideas in ways that prose simply cannot. Cahnmann-Taylor (2008), for example, illustrates the possibilities between poetry and prose: "just as the microscope and camera have allowed different ways for us to see what would otherwise be invisible, so too poetry and prose are different mediums that give rise to ways of saying what might not otherwise be expressed" (p. 16). Poetry and prose simply offer researchers two varying mediums or vehicles to reaffirm participants' ideas. Both prose and poetry can be used to "find out whether the data analysis is congruent to participants' experiences" (Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 92); however, using poetic transcription provides another means to fully access participants' voices and experiences.

Thinking about methodologies that researchers can use to help reaffirm participants' experiences has led me to question and rethink the more traditional pathways to engaging in data analysis with participants. In a summer graduate course, I heard guest poet Paul Janeczko give a talk on the open potential of poetry for exploring ideas. How timely, his talk. As a young scholar, I wondered: What possibilities can be gleaned from constructing a poetic transcription from a former participant's interview data? That is, what qualitative inquiry lies within doing what Rebecca and I call a *Post-I-Poem*?

In the sections that follow, I share my own exploration of one Post-I-Poem (hereafter PIP) with Lia, a former participant from my dissertation study with adolescent writers and from whom we had IRB approval to continue our work. The PIP is a concept that Rebecca and I have developed that involves going back to transcribed student interview data, constructing a poetic transcription from said data, and then inviting the student to read the poetic transcription as a process for gauging new insights about the data from the student.

Constructing Lia's Post-I-Poem

I reached out to two former participants from my dissertation study, inviting them to reread selected sections of their transcripts for the purpose of understanding how poetic transcription could more fully capture their thoughts on brush stroke writing (Noden, 2011) – that is, how brushstrokes supported them as writers. Both participants were selected because of their previous expressed interest in the topic of brushstroke writing, their willingness to participate in my original dissertation study, and their potential availability. Both participants replied to my initial and subsequent email queries; however, Lia was the only one who was able to participate within the specific time parameter that I had provided.

For me, constructing the PIP concerned working with previous interview data. In returning to this data set, which included full-length transcripts from my 12-week study with Lia, my process included first underlining her I-statements (Simpson & Quigley, 2016), organizing line breaks and stanzas (Cahmann-Taylor, 2008) for reader flow but also for capturing a particular idea on brushstroke writing, and finally asking Lia to read and reflect on the PIP. The following six steps offer researchers suggestions on how they can construct a PIP, a list that further illuminates the process for constructing a PIP with Lia but also speaks more broadly to how the post-I-poem could be used as part of a researcher's ongoing analysis.

Creating A Post-I-Poem for Participants and Researchers

- Step 1: Select interview data from which participant clarification is needed. This data may come from a completed study, as was the case with Lia, or from a current study where the analysis is ongoing.

- Step 2: Reread participant interview data and highlight any response or signature line that speaks to themes, broad and/or specific, across the transcripts. By signature, we are referring to recurring ideas that emerge in the transcripts and that the participant would, therefore, recognize in a new format such as a poetic transcription. For example, in the context of creating the PIP with Lia, responses concerning writing and author's craft were highlighted. As noted by Walsh (2006) and Butler-Kisber (2002), there is value in mining interview data for clarification, because interview data closely resembles natural, everyday talk.

- Step 3: Underline I-statements in an effort to establish the participant's voice. These statements or responses may already be a part of signature lines, though not necessarily. Simpson and Quigley (2016) and others refer to this practice as creating an I-poem, which assists the researcher in hearing the participant's voice. Rath (2001) also supports the idea of "doing something with the data," such as gathering I-statements directly from a transcript, "rather than just saying something about it" (p. 117). Put another way, a strong analysis in qualitative research is one in which the researcher tries to understand the data directly from the participant.

- Step 4: Arrange the signature lines and/or I-statements into stanzas that make sense and have reader flow. Exercise some "poetic license" Butler-Kisber (2002) with this step such as organizing the spacing and arrangement of words in ways that illuminate themes or ideas from which clarification is still needed. Poindexter (2002) describes this step as "diamond cutting…the chipping away of all but the phrases and stanzas that seemed most evocative in emotion and clarity" (p. 709).

- Step 5: Invite the participant to read the PIP. If the participant is unsure of a particular stanza and therefore requires additional context in order to fairly clarify an idea, show the participant the full transcripts that were used to create the PIP.

Table 1. Example of Crafting a Poem from an Interview Transcript

Excerpt from Interview Transcript	Poem 1
(Interviewer): What did you learn about the most from the brush strokes that you practiced in class?	I think overall, from the brush strokes, I kind of like got how to use words differently.
P: I think <u>overall I got from the brush strokes were like how to use words differently and details</u>. Cuz, I mean <u>I would never think of using like three verbs together, like straightforward</u>. So it kinda like gave me a little bit more room to so that <u>I could creatively use words instead of just like the normal sentence structure</u> that we're taught.	I would never think of using like three verbs together, like straightforward. I think the main I got out of the brush strokes were like details. I got like how to use words differently-from the brush strokes
I: Okay. So tell me, are there other aspects of your writing that you've notice and would like to share with me?	I could be creative, beyond a normal sentence
P: <u>I think the main thing I got out of the brush strokes were details</u>.	I think the main thing is details Here
I: Okay.	And
P: And how <u>little words here and there can make a paper sound a lot better or even like a poem</u>. It can make you want to read it more rather than just like regular structural things.	There… Can make a paper sound a lot better or like Even
I: How does it make it better?	A
P: Kind of the awkwardness of some of them. It kind of like, it makes it interesting to where its not like unnecessary but you didn't have to use it. So it's like awkward but it works for your paper. So you wanna keep on like reading about it, cuz you wanna know more about it.	Poem

Excerpt from Interview Transcript	Poem 2
I (Interviewer): Do you consider yourself a writer?	I don't really think of myself as a writer
P (Participant): Not really, only because I haven't done it like for pleasure. <u>I only do it for schoolwork</u> and like if I'm completely forced to and if it's a grade but other than that, <u>I don't really write</u>.	I only write for school and if I'm forced to I don't really write
I: So to be a write you have to…	To be a writer you have to like it, and…
P: Like <u>practice, practice, practice</u> and really, really like doing it.	Practice Practice Practice

Challenges and Possibilities in the PIP Process

Initially, I had a lot of questions about this process. For example, would Lia be able to easily recall her stance as a student-writer from four years ago? Would she be interested in working with me? Mindful of the geographic distance between us, what would this process of working together look like? These initial questions helped me to expand my understanding of what is member checking and how I approach it in my research.

Traditional research practices in talking with participants to clarify ideas typically call for participants and researchers to work in close proximity. However, this was not possible in this investigation given that Lia lives several states away. Thinking openly about this process, I used Facetime and Google Docs as my methods for this investigation because they address not only issues of geography but they also provided ways in which Lia could comfortably respond by using platforms (i.e., Facetime and Google Docs) with which she was familiar.

Not having a close physical proximity to Lia, however, provided her with ample time to revisit her feelings, experiences, and beliefs through the PIP. As Lia reread the poems, she had opportunities to reflect on the transcription and to communicate her personal reflections about the content of the PIP. We communicated through Facebook and Lia also produced commentary in Google Docs, independent of a researcher present. Lia revisited, read, and reflected upon the PIP, and by doing so, her comments and reflections assisted me in determining the accuracy of my interpretation of her initial statements. Was I accurately portraying Lia's experiences? The PIP provided an opportunity for Lia to check or confirm (or possibly disconfirm), my analysis of her experiences. Lia could also edit, clarify, or extend upon the analysis. In our first conversation via Facetime, I purposely noted Lia's intonation, gestures, and facial expressions. I felt these observations were important because as Lia explained to me as she was discussing her feelings and reflections during our Facetime conversation, she liked to "talk with her hands when she gets really excited about something," and during our conversation her emotive expressions enhanced what the PIP recreated, which is lived experience (Richardson, 1994b).

Ultimately, these opportunities for revisiting interview data, reading, and reflecting were critical to the process of clarifying ideas. Throughout Lia's responses, she made clear in the data what I was still wondering about. She was able to confirm ideas and challenge what she perceived as erroneous interpretations, all of which contributed to what Rosemary (2013) describes as deepening and extending the researcher's understanding and analysis. Her feedback was critical to better understanding how she sees herself as a writer having participated in brushstroke writing lessons and, in the section that follows, I share three valuable take-aways that I gleaned from the PIP experience.

Learning from Lia's Post I-Poem

First, the PIP allowed Lia to engage in what Collins (2015) describes as a representational practice. According to Collins, in representational practices such as a PIP, a participant is represented in a way that one can empathize with, rather than as a fragment of speech that is extracted out of context from which the researcher constructs meaning. Using representational practices in research is important because using poetry as an approach to represent participants' lived experiences often stands in contrast to a more distanced, authoritarian representation (Collins, 2015). Those who research poetic inquiry argue that the more distanced, qualitative representations of people's lives, that can typically be found in prose, have no more or less of a privileged relationship to reality than poetic representations (Cahmann-Taylor, 2008; Collins, 2015; Lahman, 2011).

One example of Lia engaging in a representational practice occurred after Lia read the PIP and was then asked to react or respond by writing comments in the Google Doc. In response to the line, "I really don't write," Lia stated in the Google Doc that "This was kind of false, I was always writing for school, but I meant I don't write for fun." In this example, Lia makes a specific distinction between writing for school and writing recreationally in her own free time. Later in the interview, she explained how the amount of writing done in school is quite copious, which led her to having no desire to write in her personal time. Lia's reflection and ultimately, her clarification, provided insights into Lia's life, which was important in understanding who she is as a writer.

Second, the PIP evoked emotion for Lia, which enhanced my understanding of Lia as a writer. In the Google Doc, Lia responded "this is VERY true" to the statement "it's the basis of everything for future careers." This emphatic response to this line (noted by caps on the word VERY) compliments the sentiments Lia shared with me during our Facetime discussion. She explained how she understood the importance of writing for future endeavors, such as a career. However, now that she was in the midst of pursuing a public relations degree, the idea that writing is essential in her life was heightened and reaffirmed. Lia continually discussed the idea that writing now matters to her. She mentioned in our Facebook conversation that writing comes "natural" to her because of the meaningful and significant amount of daily writing she does in her classes.

In part of another Facetime discussion Lia eagerly described how the whole poem was a transition. She states, "The poem describes how I was transitioning from not being a writer at all, to learning how to become a writer, to using what I know as a writer, and I remember that being very true at the time." Lia is proud that she identifies the cyclical nature of her feelings at that time, and she confirms by saying that ideas in the PIP are consistent with how she remembers feeling at the time of the study.

And finally, the poetic and creative structure of the PIP invited Lia to revisit her statements, reflect, and respond with ease. For example, as Lia and I began our Facetime conversation, she was invited to read and react to the PIP. The concise nature of a poetic transcription derived from an original 30-page transcript made seeing a defined pattern about self as writer rather accessible to Lia. After inviting Lia to talk candidly about what she noticed about herself as a writer after reading the PIP, Lia was able to describe fairly specific patterns about herself as a writer. She stated, "I didn't think I was a writer, then I was understanding how to write and make it individualized, and now it's how can I write to best get it done." When Lia discussed how she can write to "best get it done," she was referring to the pressure she now feels to "write for other people," and her writing primarily consists of writing for class assignments and professors. I asked Lia, "How do you feel about the topics represented in the poem?" For this specific response, Lia expressed her conceptualization of what she describes as a "three-part change" in herself. As Lia articulated patterns about herself as a writer it

became clear that the importance of the poetic structure of a PIP cannot be minimized, and it is this exact form that offered Lia a powerful way to revisit her practices as a writer.

Insights and Directions

While the concept of a PIP is new, Rebecca and I find support for exploring the possibilities of using a PIP in other qualitative researchers such as Lahman (2018) whose work similarly examines how poetic inquiry can assist researchers in understanding participants' voices through combining the aesthetics of poetry and the science of research. While this investigation concerned the construction of a PIP from rereading transcription data four years after a closed study, we offer here – albeit from one PIP –three valuable insights for the qualitative researcher, both the novice and the experienced.

First, the PIP raises questions about *when* researchers access participant voice. Traditionally, researchers use member checking techniques during a study; however, Lia's investigation demonstrates that using a PIP does not have to be an afterthought; rather, it could be used at the end of a study when all of the data has been collected and analyzed as a final yet purposeful process for uncovering new directions and/or launching future investigations. If the PIP had been an intentional methodology of my dissertation study, as a young scholar new to the field I could have used those insights and directions to help plan future inquiries in my work. Rebecca and I believe that using a PIP as part of my data analysis would have been a useful lens for not simply accessing but refining student voice on what it means to be a writer and how learning about brushstrokes in writing supported their sense of self as writer.

Second, the PIP raises questions about *how* researchers access participant voice. Alternatives to traditional methodological processes are important, for both participants and researchers because choices or alternatives increase participants' comfort and confidence throughout the member checking process (Dolye, 2007). Doyle specifically describes what she defines as a "negotiated process" (p.889) and this process includes participants choosing meaningful ways for how member checking will proceed. Traditional member checking processes do not necessarily offer choices (Lahman, 2011) and continue to privilege prose over alternative methods such as using a PIP. It is important that qualitative researchers look outside scripted prose—which is the singular standard for member checking—and seek varied forms of representation (Lahman, 2011). The very structure of the PIP—including using rhyme, stanzas, and using playful syntax, for example, are ways that make it possible for researchers to explore participants' voices outside of traditional methods such as interviewing. Remaining open to new and innovative ways of approaching qualitative methods supports developing a richer and more in-depth inquiry of a phenomenon—such as the PIP

And finally, the PIP provides opportunities to develop a collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participant (Burdick, 2011). The importance of said relationship cannot be understated, especially for those researchers hoping to extend their research months or years beyond their original study.

Still, having only worked with one participant to explore the potential of the PIP is a limitation of this investigation though it raises for Rebecca and I some important questions. For example, how often could the PIP be applied in a study where the data analysis is ongoing? As noted earlier, participants have constructed their own poems (Reilly, 2013); however, what can be gleaned from a study wherein both the researcher and the participant construct poems from the same interview data as a process for teasing out themes and patterns that otherwise may be overlooked? Finally, what does the process of doing a PIP reveal about communication and trustworthiness? How do researchers create spaces in their analyses where participants feel empowered to clarify their stories and experiences? Other qualitative researchers in the field have voiced the value of creating a focus on conversation and collaboration between the

researcher and participant (Ellis & Berger, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Scheurich, 1997). This is especially important for when trustworthiness and collaboration are not established early in a study, participants may simply agree with research interpretations merely to please the researcher (Rosemary, 2013). In contrast, the very nature of the PIP – that is, its poem-like structure, supports engagement and invites conversation; rich conversation through which the participant can experience an emotional response to the data (Richardson, 1994a) that may also strengthen the conversational current with the researcher. In a globalized world where conversation is at the center, perhaps now more than ever it is time to disrupt the traditional member checking process that has, for years, governed our research designs to consider as well new ways of talking and checking with our participants – though the *Post-I-Poem*.

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