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Incorporating Arts-Based Pedagogy: Moving Beyond Traditional Approaches to Teaching Qualitative Research

ABSTRACT

Arts-based pedagogy has the potential to reimagine “traditional” research to engage learners in expanded and innovative methods, while also creating space for student voices. Grounded in a Deweyan experiential framework informed by arts-based pedagogy, this reflective dialogue revolves around a pedagogical reframing of a data analysis unit in a qualitative research course with specific focus on the incorporation of creative analysis. We came together as three participants (instructor, student, and scholar) within this experience to collaboratively share insights on the pedagogical approach, particularly as experienced through the eyes of the learner. Implications include how arts-based experiential inquiry can empower novice researchers to explore new avenues for sense-making while also extending across disciplines to support the inclusion of arts-based reflective practices in higher education.

KEYWORDS

qualitative research pedagogy, data analysis, poetic inquiry, experiential learning, students as partners

INTRODUCTION

Despite repeated calls for qualitative research pedagogy (Drisko 2016; Lapum and Hume 2015), the praxis of teaching qualitative methods is still a developing body of literature with only a handful of scholars taking the lead (e.g., Nind and Lewthwaite 2018; Swaminathan and Mulvihill 2018). Within these instructional pieces, few are specific to data analysis (but see Mallette and Saldaña 2019; Mulvihill, Swaminathan, and Bailey 2015), with many focusing primarily on the procedural how-to approach of coding and thematic analysis (Maguire and Delahunt 2017; Scharp and Sanders 2019). Braun and Clarke have likewise noted that their seminal instructional approach to thematic analysis has been largely misinterpreted as a mechanized step-by-step framework (Braun, Clarke, and Hayfield 2022). They argued that it is important to “disrupt that sense of a rigid or stepped process” (428) and that “there’s no one way of making sense of data” (436). Nevertheless, instructors often perpetuate by default a singular correlation between qualitative analysis and thematic analysis because coding is more “teachable” whereas qualitative analysis as a whole concept is complex, messy, and harder to teach (St. Pierre and Jackson 2014, 715).

Mulvihill, Swaminathan, and Bailey (2015) suggested that research educators intentionally counter this singularity of thinking by first teaching “normative approaches (e.g., triangulation, coding, etc.), and then interrupt[ing] them” with other methods of data analysis (1495). In response, this paper

proposes the use of arts-based pedagogy to challenge dominant methods of teaching data analysis and to “release [students’] imagination” (Mulvihill and Swaminathan 2019, 13). We follow in the footsteps of educators across disciplines who incorporate the arts to teach analytic thinking, such as quilting in the graduate nursing classroom for reflective identity practice (MacGregor et al. 2021) or using visual novels to teach science process skills (Wong, Al-Arnawoot, and Hass 2022). Inspired by Freeman’s (2017) reframing of data analysis as “multiple modes of thinking,” and further informed by a Deweyan arts-based experiential framework ([1934] 2005; 1938), this paper presents a stratified approach to teaching qualitative analysis with a focus on the incorporation of the arts as a mode for expanded thinking.

Our work is rooted in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and contributes an instructional unit on data analysis through the reflections of the course professor, the guest scholar, and the graduate student. Within this triad partnership, we highlight the perspectives and work of our student co-author to provide experiential insight, knowing that their voice, and examples of their process, contribute valuable knowledge to this pedagogical reflection. We situate our scholarly relationship within a students-as-partners space (Healey, Flint, and Harrington 2016; Piotti, DeFelice, and Jackson 2022), where we share our perspectives based on the principles of respect, reciprocity, and responsibility to support teaching and learning in higher education (Felten, Cook-Sather, and Bovill 2014). We move beyond simply presenting our individual reflections and instead engage in an interactive discussion that illuminates our “reflection and transformation in relation to oneself and with others” (Healey, Flint, and Harrington 2016, 55). This dialogue also presents broader implications for arts-based pedagogy to work through content with varied, and arguably deeper, modes of thinking.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PEDAGOGY

Wolcott (1994) asserted that the same “creative effort” required to conduct and to write about qualitative research “ought to go into designing courses that teach it” (395). While scholars note that there is still a consistent didactic approach to teaching qualitative research (Abboud et al. 2017), active or experiential learning, where learners experientially engage in research to develop their skills as novice researchers and consumers, is also common in research pedagogy (Chatfield et al. 2014; Drisko 2016). Others have incorporated creative methods for research instruction through contemplative discourses (Bhattacharya 2018), transgressive practices (Hsiung 2016), and holistic pedagogies (Swaminathan and Mulvihill 2018).

Under the umbrella of qualitative research pedagogy, some scholars have shared innovative approaches specific to data analysis. Scharp and Sanders (2019) taught thematic analysis with candy; they had groups sort and categorize candy in response to different research questions. Waite (2011) introduced researcher variability in data analysis by having students first sort a deck of cards and then resort the cards in different ways. In doing so, students conceptualized how categorization can fluctuate and how it is framed by the individual researcher. Mallette and Saldaña (2019) adapted a party game to simulate building thematic relationships and narrative stories. Mulvihill, Swaminathan, and Bailey (2015) instead used imagined dialogues where students created dinner party conversations based on their research studies to highlight that meaning-making is dependent on context and interactions.

Arts-based qualitative pedagogy

There is growing dialogue on the use of arts-based pedagogy in qualitative research education to encourage students to explore new avenues for sense-making, to dive deeper into their intuition and the

voices of their participants, and to ask themselves “what *else* is going on?” (Bhattacharya 2021, 378). By building on arts-based educational research (ABER) which values creative ways of knowing and meaning-making through the senses (Barone and Eisner 2012), more scholars are taking up arts-based inquiry in their qualitative research texts (Denzin and Salvo 2020; Leavy 2020).

However, few scholars have discussed how arts-based approaches are explored in the qualitative research classroom (but see Bhattacharya 2018). Chatfield et al. (2014) examined the student experience in learning qualitative inquiry through arts-based practice. They compared two groups of students learning data analysis—one using collage and found poetry and the other doing traditional coding—and found that the group who engaged in the arts felt they were able to learn more creatively, emotionally connect with their work, and understand qualitative research at a deeper level than the group who participated in traditional methods did.

Lapum and Hume (2015) incorporated arts-informed activities such as film, storytelling, and dance to teach the interpretive process. Students, for example, watched a dance performance and were prompted to describe exactly what they observed or understood from the dance. Sharing these answers with each other opened discussion about observation and reflection and how they intermingle in interpretivism. Bhattacharya and Cochrane (2017) instead used arts-based pedagogies to help “trigger the authentic inquirer within” (48) and deepen students’ understandings of self and positionality in relation to research. They combined contemplative practices with an arts-based self-portrait assignment that served as the source for a duo-ethnographic interview project and as the foundation for becoming more reflexive and self aware.

Poetic inquiry

Within arts-based approaches, numerous scholars have turned to poetic inquiry as a means for conducting and representing qualitative research (Cutts and Waters 2019; Guthrie 2020). The use of poetry provides a multidimensional platform in a generative space that is open to the senses and to felt experiences (Freeman 2017). Poetic inquiry is broad in that it can be used for research methods in data collection or analysis, but it can also extend to representation and how the researcher chooses to present the findings through either their own words or those of participants (Cahnmann-Taylor and Zhang 2020). Guiney Yallop (2016), for example, intermixed poetry and storytelling to explore and communicate the life history of their Indigenous grandmother. Other scholars have engaged in various types of poetic methods including, but not limited to, poetic autoethnography (Zhang 2021), erasure poetry (Hare 2021), and concrete poetry (Schoone 2021).

Poetic form varies with each researcher and can express multifaceted meanings. The choice of form “bears significantly on the kinds of meanings people are likely to secure from the work” (Eisner 1981, 7). Shenfield and Prendergast (2021) individually chose to represent meaning from the transcripts of participant-teachers within the same article. Shenfield played with the poetic format to express a deeper cohesive analysis by stacking or spacing the words out in each poem whereas Prendergast instead focused on individual voice and used elements such as repetition to intensify participants’ words. Ultimately, these methods demonstrate original, non-traditional approaches to thinking in qualitative data analysis.

Thinking through poetry

Taking an experience and translating it poetically opens the door to interpretations of meaning that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. In this sense, poetry becomes a “method of discovery” in research (Cahnmann-Taylor 2009, 13). Freeman (2017) further described this evocative process: “Poetical thinking focuses on those hard to reach felt experiences that transcend specific contexts and create forms of expression that expand and challenge the imagination” (9). Through poetry, researchers can engage with the emotionality of the data, resulting in sense-making at a holistic level. Bhattacharya (2013) highlighted the ability of poetic inquiry to invoke meaning from the silent spaces: “Poetic representation heightens the saliency of critical incidents, delving beyond what appears on the surface, working between the lines to hint at data-enriched silences” and opens the door to “analytical strategies that are multidimensional and refuse to allow the data to settle at the end of the sentences” (610). In this way, thinking through poetry invites expanded meaning-making and connections with data.

COLLABORATIVE NARRATIVE

The following collaborative narrative relates to our mutual experiences within a qualitative educational research course taught in the fall of 2020. We come together in this reflection as the instructor who taught the course (Rhia), as a student in the class (Katie), and as the guest scholar whose articles formed the backbone of the unit on creative analysis (Kate). We first introduce the context of the course followed by Rhia’s description of how she approached the development of the instructional unit. We continue with our individual reflections within this shared experience and conclude with a reflective exchange to collaboratively analyze the teaching and learning experience.

Context

The research course was part of the online educational specialist (EdS) graduate degree program in a college of education located in the southeastern United States. The EdS students are typically primary and secondary school educators who are teaching while completing the program. The focal course was an asynchronous 15-week introduction to qualitative research with 20 students. It included an experiential practicum where students collected data in the first half of the semester and then spent the second half on analysis and writing. This latter half became the focus for this reflection.

As an asynchronous online course, Rhia communicated with students through discussion posts, emails, and drop-in virtual sessions. Due to the nature of the course, students were in control over how much support and interaction they wanted or needed from the professor beyond the required course tasks. Katie actively communicated with the professor and it was through these one-on-one discussions that Katie’s analytic process was unveiled. As Katie expressed both uncertainty and excitement in her process, Rhia became more attuned to how students might be experiencing the analysis unit and was able to use that intel to reach out to the whole class with clarifications and to offer support.

Following Katie’s experience throughout the semester was the impetus for inviting her to co-author this reflective piece. Rhia felt that Katie’s experience showcased the undulating learning process of many students. Nonetheless, Katie’s experience is not representative of the whole class because she opted to engage in multiple rounds of creative analysis rather than just the required single round. While Katie’s experience is her own and not indicative of all the students, there were similarities to how the other students moved through the unit in terms of their questions, commentary, and final reflections on their learning experience.

Rethinking the teaching of data analysis

As a research educator, I (Rhia) often encounter resistance to qualitative thinking beyond mechanized or procedural steps. My students want a step-by-step process to guide them through data analysis and reassurance that they are doing it right. This “am I doing it right?” question is not only common in the emails from my students; it is an ongoing concern in general for students learning qualitative analysis (Mulvihill, Swaminathan, and Bailey 2015). As novice researchers, they balk at my response that analysis is an iterative practice of thinking and are confused when I tell them to sit with the data in as many ways as possible. I realized that I needed to scaffold the learning so that students would experience what I meant by this continual process of meaning-making.

My approach to teaching is informed by John Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience, specifically his principles of interaction and continuity. We learn as we interact with and reflect on our current experiences while making connections to previous and future experiences across an educational continuum. Dewey ([1934] 2005) further conceptualized the doing of art as a mode for experiential reflection. Therefore, as I designed the data analysis unit, my intention was to teach analysis as an experiential continual process that layers and builds upon previous rounds of thinking, with opportunities for varied and creative analytic approaches over a series of four weeks (detailed in Table 1).

Table 1. Data analysis unit

Course data analysis unit comprising four modules

Unit modules	Topics
Module 1	Reflexive analysis (positionality and subjectivity)
Module 2	Thematic analysis (categorization and coding)
Module 3	Creative analysis (arts-based and poetical thinking)
Module 4	Writing as analysis (initial findings)

Within this overall unit, I introduced creative analysis as an umbrella term to incorporate various arts-based approaches.

The first module of the data analysis unit focused on reflexivity. I asked students to consider their own positionality and subjectivity and to question how their bias and previous experiences inform how they begin to think about their data. Following Mulvihill, Swaminathan, and Bailey’s (2015) pedagogical recommendation to first present normative approaches and then interrupt them, I introduced coding and thematic analysis followed by creative analysis. The fourth module of the unit transitioned into writing up initial findings as another round of thinking and analysis. While each of the four modules contributed to how students iteratively explored their data, this paper focuses primarily on our collaborative experiences with module 3’s creative analysis.

We also find it helpful to note that discussion of quality or trustworthiness in qualitative analysis is important for any introductory research methods course. Qualitative researchers hold numerous perspectives on what it means to “get it right” or “do it well” (see discussion in Tracy 2010), with some aiming to disrupt traditional conceptualizations of validity and reliability, claiming these notions favor objectivity over subjectivity. When working with arts-based approaches especially, we expand our

thinking beyond validity and reliability within a creative analytic framework to include criteria such as incisiveness, concision, coherence, generativity, social significance, evocation, and illumination (Barone and Eisner 2012), or, as Kate presents later in this work, empathetic validity (Dadds 2008). Thus, the pedagogical objectives of the following learning activities prioritized challenging learners to think in creative ways and explore varied perspectives of meaning making.

Module 3 creative analysis

Within the creative analysis module, I asked students to first read an introduction to Freeman's (2017) *Modes of Thinking for Qualitative Data Analysis* since it presents qualitative analysis as "thinking, not thought" (5). Freeman explains that there are many ways to approach thinking about data and argues that they are not exclusive from each other: "their development is the result of co-existence and conversation, and is, therefore, best understood in dynamic relation" (10). I found this reading to be foundational to my stratified approach of engaging in different methods of thinking across the four analysis modules.

For the module on creative analysis, I created space for students to choose various mediums and approaches. I gave particular focus, however, to poetical thinking because I wanted to center on Kate Hobgood Guthrie's poetic narrative work. Kate had recently published two articles based on the same dataset but with different analytic methods: thematic and poetic (Guthrie 2019; Guthrie 2020). I felt this would be a powerful learning tool for students as they would be able to see how the interpretation of data can vary depending on the analytic approach. Students also participated in a guest lecture on Kate's experiences using the different methods.

Student application

Following the readings and guest lecture, I asked students to analyze their own data by creating either a "poetic" or "artistic" reflection based on what they were noticing across their data. I presented them with the following two options for creative analysis:

1. Write a "poetic" reflection: It's okay if you are not a poet! This is simply a free-form way to get your thoughts out and can take the style of a poem, song, rap, or any other written reflection that is not bound by traditional writing conventions.
OR
2. Create an "artistic" reflection: You do not need to have artistic talent to do this! Instead, you are thinking through creation. Use any style or medium of art that is not predominately based in text, such as sketching, drawing, painting, making a collage, sculpting, multimedia production, digital work, photography, etc. You can add text, but the format should not be purely textual.

Much of the class chose option one which followed the poetic focus of the readings. Their poems were all different ranging from rhyming to free form. About a third of the students chose option two and created various artifacts including collages and sketches. Some students interspersed direct quotes into their creative reflections whereas others used their own words or only included visual elements. Katie started with option two and created a visual artifact that combined emojis with words. Katie was then inspired to also complete option one by writing a series of poems based on her process. Upon completion, all students shared their pieces with the class in an online forum along with a

description of their analytic thinking process. Students then posted comments to each other regarding their peers' analyses.

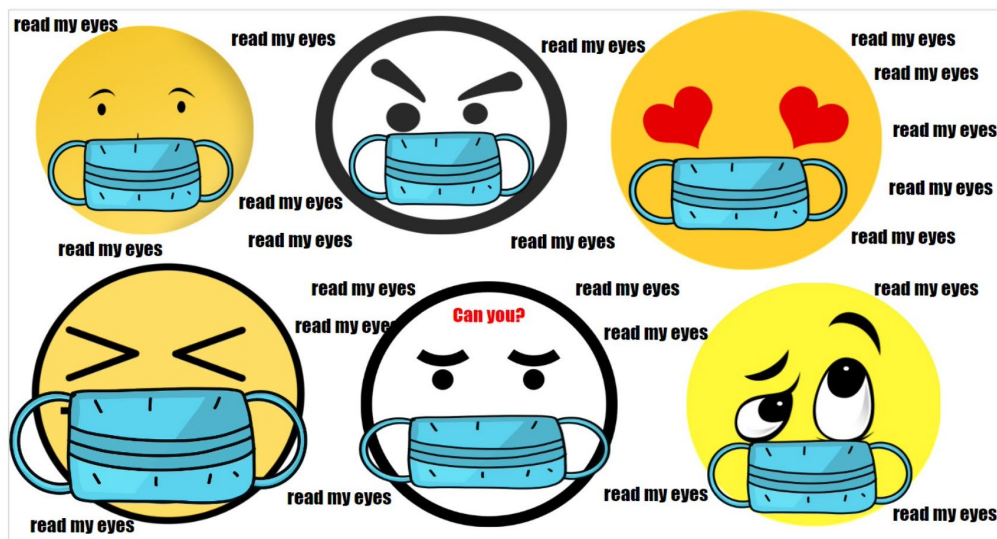
INDIVIDUAL REFLECTIONS

Katie (student)

Before taking the course, I had zero background in qualitative research. I also want to add that I am not a poet, and I do not really consider myself artistic. Not only was this class highly intimidating to me, but the idea of creative analysis also felt foreign and too open. I wanted structure. I wanted a bulleted list of assignments I could complete and check off.

For my practicum, I collected data on a kindergarten teacher's experience wearing a mask while teaching in a face-to-face learning environment during COVID-19. I started the analysis unit by writing my reflexivity statement with my own experience in mind because I, too, was teaching in-person and wearing a mask during the pandemic. I then moved into thematic analysis, but I found myself simply going through the motions of coding. Once we started the creative analysis, things sort of went sideways for me. As an elementary school teacher, I felt myself connecting emotionally to what my participant was going through as I re-read the interview transcript. At the same time, I was able to look at it from a different perspective: as someone on the outside looking in. It triggered my own emotions about our shared experiences, which became heightened as I dove into my first attempt at creative reflection. It began with a visual representation (Figure 1) of what I was feeling which I expressed through the creation of various mask-covered emojis.

Figure 1. Visual representation: "Can You?"



I added the repeated phrase "read my eyes," which I felt grasped the essence of what my participant had communicated to me during her interview and throughout my observations of her teaching. Creating the design helped me understand data analysis on a more emotional and personal level. The visual representation portrayed my perspective of what our students saw each day, but also conveyed how trapped I felt as an educator when trying to connect with them. In this way, I could completely relate to my participant.

After reading Kate's poetic narrative and seeing how poetry expressed her findings differently, I then moved onto poetry to further think with the data. I realized my data was not limited to a specific method of describing my participant's experience. I probably read Kate's piece 20 times, looking for the different elements of qualitative research we were discussing in class. Her work focused on the essence and emotionality of the participant's situation, and I knew this was the direction I wanted to take.

I started pulling as many examples of poetic narratives as I could find. Initially, I was frustrated with how they were all organized in diverse ways. Again, I wanted structure. I wanted to find "the right way" to construct my thinking. However, as I continued to read, I realized a rigid structure would not have allowed these authors to convey the heart of their research in a way that resonated with their readers, as Kate's work had resonated with me. I tried to let go of the idea of a specific structure and began putting ideas on paper. I realized I just had to find my own points of connection in the data I had collected.

By translating my participant's interview responses into poetic form using literary devices, such as repetition and imagery, I could better encapsulate the emotional effects of their experience. One of my biggest takeaways from Kate's writing and speaking was to work toward honoring the voice of my participant through artistic representation. As Freeman (2017) stated, I felt able to "enter the flow of human understanding, experiences, and feelings" (9). I was able to deconstruct the meaning behind their words, body language, and practices using poetry to emphasize essential elements of this experience and to evoke the emotions they expressed.

In total, I wrote three poems, using a combination of poetic strategies. For one poem, I employed a found poetry method where I used my participant's actual words from the interview in response to my question about how she would describe herself as a teacher. I strung her words together in stanzas and I italicized adjectives that she emphasized. I found it powerful that it helped illuminate for me the balance she had found between structure and flexibility in her learning environment and the love and care for her students. In my other two poems—which I share here—my intention was to create a third hybrid voice that combined the essence of my participant's voice and my own to highlight the idea that the research interpretations were shaped by us both. The following two poems, "Read My Eyes" and "Feel Safe" were guided by the data, but constructed through my own words as a hybrid voice.

"Read My Eyes"

I see you.
I see you with your
little mask
covering
your
sweet smile
and
chubby cheeks.
Can you tell
I think you are
amazing?
Can you tell
I see you

working hard?
 I giggle
 when I read your writing -
 your inventive spelling
 and
 creative thoughts.
 Can you see me smiling?
 I hope so.
 Sometimes, you don't
 follow directions.
 Can you tell
 I need for you to
 listen?
 I want you to feel
 loved
 when you are in
 my classroom.
 I want you to
 see it on my face.
 But you can't.
 Half of it is
 covered.
 You have to read my eyes.
 Can you tell?

"Feel Safe"

I've had the same goals...
 The only difference is
 I'm trying to make my kids
 feel safe
 feel safe.
 Sanitize before you touch
 and wear your mask.
 Wash your hands for twenty seconds
 and wear your mask.
 Wipe your desk
 and wear your mask.
 Don't put your pencils in your mouth!
 Don't yell *Corona!*
 when someone sneezes or coughs.
 Sit three squares away from each other on the carpet.
 You can't sit on the carpet today.
 No, you can't

Play with John from the other class
at recess.
Even though
I know he's your best friend.
I'm doing this
Because I want you to
feel safe.
feel safe.

Rhia's introduction of creative methods opened my eyes to a new conceptualization of analysis as a continual and subjective process that has no one right or final interpretation. Mackenzie-Dawson's (2018) words resonated with me: "Poetic inquiry embraces uncertainty, allowing multiple meanings and understandings to exist within a word . . . a poem, or the research itself" (74). Throughout this assignment, I opened myself up to seeing where the poems would lead my analysis. Kate discussed how tackling this form of research forced her to think outside of the box, but that it also led to a new perspective on her data. Indeed, the poetic outlet helped me connect the dots on what felt like a more holistic level that illuminated more senses and expanded my interpretation of the data. I was left with a deeper understanding of the value of qualitative research and how creative methods allow ideas to transcend the traditional narrative. It was a powerful process.

Kate (scholar)

When Rhia first contacted me about the analysis unit and speaking with her class, I was excited to hear how my scholarship supported her pedagogical goals. I, too, am an assistant professor and I teach qualitative research courses in an education doctorate program. Knowing what it is like to try and create engaging activities around qualitative data analysis, plus my own familiarity working with primary and secondary school educators and leaders, I felt I could play the role of scholar well within the analysis unit.

As mentioned earlier, the two articles Rhia used in the course reflected my attempts to think about qualitative analysis differently. The first article (Guthrie 2019) represents my attempts of thinking categorically or thematically and using "traditional" deductive and inductive approaches through coding. I generated common threads among my participants' experiences of raising "intense" gifted children. Yet, during this process, I found one participant's experiences were both difficult to capture categorically and difficult to describe in rich enough detail. Feeling as though I had an obligation to translate my inquiry and findings transparently, I leaned on Dadds' (2008) rendering of empathetic validity and Freeman's (2017) approach to poetical thinking to write the second article (Guthrie 2020). Since the premise of Rhia's instructional unit centered around arts-based approaches to working with data, my reflection here primarily spotlights my intentions for choosing to conduct an arts-based approach as an alternative mode of analysis.

Dadds (2008) broadly defined empathetic validity as "the potential of the research in its processes and outcomes to transform the emotional dispositions of people toward each other, such that more positive feelings are created between them in the form of greater empathy" (280). Dadds further conceptualized two dimensions of empathetic validity: internal empathetic validity, for which the researcher and participants are influenced/moved/changed, and external empathetic validity, in which

the audience is influenced/moved/changed. I wanted to create a poetic representation to potentially evoke readers' empathetic connections. I turned to Freeman (2017) for guidance: "Researchers using poetical thinking strategies do not ask what the story means: rather, they ask, how does this story participate in the unfolding flow of meaning?" (9). These two ideas, empathetic validity and poetical thinking, laid the foundation for my arts-based approach (Guthrie 2020) and ultimately served as the main discussion points for speaking with Rhia's class.

For my guest lecture in Rhia's course, I recorded a video for students to view alongside reading my two articles. I aimed to "pull back the curtains" and describe my experience as a scholar. I organized my presentation with guiding questions such as: Why did I choose to use two different analytic approaches? What am I most proud of? In what ways did using two different modes of thinking help me explore and understand the data differently? What were some analytical challenges I faced? By revealing some of my decisions as a researcher and scholar, I wanted to (1) humanize the researcher and research process and (2) help normalize the creative aspects of qualitative data analysis for Rhia's students.

After my guest lecture, Rhia shared reflections about how the module landed with students. I was delighted to hear about Katie's approach to viewing her own inquiry through an arts-based lens and how my scholarship inspired Katie to take a risk and see the data differently. Any time we, as professors or scholars, can inspire an emerging researcher to cross boundaries and think differently about how to approach research in the field, I count it as a win. Teaching people how to think critically and creatively is no easy feat, and I applaud Rhia for championing arts-based pedagogy in a scholarly practitioner program.

Rhia (instructor)

I continually look to the arts for new ways to enhance and deepen students' learning processes within my various courses, regardless of the specific field, such as tableau embodiment in teacher preparation courses, digital storytelling in an undergraduate language classroom, or multimodal reflections in critical pedagogies for doctoral students. Based on my previous research using arts-based pedagogy to explore the concept of culture (Moreno 2021) and those of others doing similar work in research education (e.g., Bhattacharya 2021), I felt that the arts would provide a new space for reflective thinking in the teaching and learning of data analysis.

As I was engaging with my students throughout their analytic journey, I noticed immediately that the creative analysis module stirred up mixed emotions, ranging from intrigue and excitement to discomfort and anxiety. Students' varied reactions were especially tied to the idea of being artistic or creative. There appeared to be a standard of creativity to which the students often compared themselves and, initially, this so-called standard seemed to cloud how successful students felt they would be in their data analysis. There was a tendency for students to self-categorize as "creative" or "not creative" as a preface to their reflective posts. These labels were often followed by an explanation of their artistic abilities and a description of their initial reactions to engaging in the arts, even though I had prompted them only to discuss their analytic reflections regarding their data. I found it particularly interesting, however, that some of the students who labeled themselves as "not artistic" also described feeling proud of the poems that they wrote or the pieces that they created.

I also encountered some resistance to the creative analysis module beyond concerns of artistic ability. Like Katie, some students communicated feeling uncomfortable with the openness of creative reflection. They wanted a step-by-step process to guide them through data analysis with reassurance that

they were doing it right, but as Cahnmann-Taylor (2018) argued, “There’s no ‘getting it right’ in the arts” (247). I admit that I found these conversations somewhat fun because I believe part of my role as an educator is to gently nudge students outside their comfort zones, especially in low stakes settings. I did not attach grades to their creative pieces as it was solely a vehicle through which they could engage in different ways of thinking without the pressure of having to be judged.

The creative analysis module also brought my attention to the role of voice and how this pedagogical approach seemed to support the development of both the researcher and participant voice in the analytic process. As I reviewed students’ discussion posts, I noted that some students described their analytic experiences as feeling more connected to their participants after the creative reflection process. Students seemed to tune in more to the voices of their participants and how they understood them via their own positionality and subjectivity. I could also hear more of their researcher voices in their final reports than I had in previous classes. Rather than passively writing what their participants said, the students seemed more confident in discussing their analytic interpretations as novice researchers.

Finally, as the teacher, I felt engaged in their work because there was so much variation in how students approached their data. Chatfield et al. (2014) noted that their students found arts-based methods “fun” and “adventurous” and that it “offered a rare opportunity as graduate students to express themselves ‘outside the lines’ in what is otherwise quite a structured and formal learning experience” (6). My own students—even those who professed a lack of creativity—produced fascinating and interesting pieces that showed the individuality of student thinking. I found that the arts provided a platform for unique student expression beyond what I saw normally in traditional analytic written reflections.

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION

Qualitative analysis is an open and iterative process, and we would argue the same for analysis pedagogy: there is always room for fine tuning and innovation. In the following discussion, we attempt to engage naturally with each other in order to examine the unit from our three perspectives. We hope that this style of discussion might produce a broader understanding of what worked and where we see room for improvement.

Katie (student): What started as a required course became a meaningful life experience that challenged me in unexpected ways. As a student, I can see how complex and strategic the teaching of qualitative research must be. However, had Rhia not given me the opportunity to learn about and explore arts-based inquiry, I would have finished the course the way I entered it—uninterested and unsure of its relevance to my practice. Instead, I feel just the opposite. I feel that novice qualitative researchers need a firm understanding of how organic the entire process can be, particularly when exploring data analysis through creative methods.

Rhia (instructor): Katie’s experience in this course was ultimately what I had hoped for when I designed the data analysis unit. While she was initially unsure about her creative reflection (the emojis piece) and whether it was “what I was looking for,” she embraced the challenge of pushing herself to try out different ways of thinking. This came after meeting with me to discuss her initial hesitancy and after receiving clarification about the task objectives. My conversation with Katie prompted me to send out further explanation to the whole class about why we were engaging in creative analysis. However, despite my reassurance that you did not need to be “artistic” to engage in this type of reflective thinking, a handful of students struggled to move beyond their initial self-categorizations of not being creative.

Since being artistic was not the goal of this unit, I would suggest being even more forthright about the objectives behind arts-based analysis as a means for accessing different ways of thinking—rather than focusing on skill. I would also introduce Freeman (2017) earlier as an introduction to the entire analysis unit rather than waiting until the creative analysis module. Additionally, I would recommend adding various examples of what this might look like. Since this was the first time I had taught the course with these methods, I did not have student examples to share. However, in retrospect, I could have created and shared my own arts-based reflections. I would recommend this to other educators as a way to share in the vulnerable process alongside our students, while also providing examples of various ways to engage in creative reflections regardless of skill level.

Kate (scholar): As instructors, students, and scholars, I think we can all relate to similar sentiments. Whenever we aim to think creatively, we agree to take a risk. We challenge ourselves to think originally, break boundaries, take different perspectives, and choose nonconformity—these are essential characteristics and behaviors that foster creative thinking (Torrance 1979). Choosing to incorporate creative thinking activities in advanced graduate curricula is not easy, but as we can see from Katie’s and Rhia’s perspectives, I think the risk and resistance we may face is often worth it.

Rhia: Yes! And as Wong, Al-Arnawoot, and Hass (2022) found in their use of visual novels to teach critical thinking, the incorporation of creative activities encourages students to be more flexible and creative in their learning processes.

Katie: Initially, the idea of creative methods was extremely intimidating, but now, I do not know if I would want to do research any other way. I understand the freedom of creative expression when it comes to analyzing data, and I can honestly say I felt like a poet while reading over my final product.

Rhia: In designing this course, my aim was to explode the idea of what qualitative data analysis could be. I wanted students to understand that there was no one way to think about data and my method to support that was to scaffold the instruction so that each week, students engaged in a new mode of thinking. This seemed to work for many students, including Katie; however, I noticed that some students interpreted this process as a definitive analytic approach. While the consecutive layered process supported experiential learning about analytic variation, some students equated what we did with all qualitative analysis. In the future, therefore, I would be more intentional with explaining the data analysis unit. I would also emphasize that analysis is not defined by a particular series or combination of methods and can simply be one approach, such as poetic inquiry or thematic analysis.

Katie: I will say that the scaffolded instruction worked well for my personal learning process and transformed my initial understanding of qualitative research. I feel this process was aided by being exposed to Kate’s two versions of data analysis. Kate’s work was a catalyst for my own research and analysis of other poetic inquiry pieces. While a basic foundation of qualitative research methods was necessary at the beginning of the course, I believe it would have also been beneficial to see examples of various types of literature which used creative methods right away. This may have eliminated my early assumptions that the research would be done in a step-by-step approach.

Kate: This is an interesting thought, but speaking to my own development as a scholar, I felt I almost needed the exercise of thinking thematically and categorically to think differently (and ultimately choose to think poetically). When learning something new, sometimes exploring non-examples helps us better understand true examples. I think we often get caught thinking retrospectively, wishing that our Aha! moment would have come sooner. As for my scholarship, there were certainly moments during my inquiry and analysis that pulled me into one mode of thinking (e.g., thematically) versus another (e.g.,

poetically). Although these two perspectives do not need to be mutually exclusive, I knew that in practice, I needed to commit to one method of representation before I could fully and truly present an alternative representation.

Rhia: This is a good point. Like Kate, I came to arts-based thinking after learning how to code and conduct thematic analysis. However, I have found that my initial familiarity with thematic analysis has often led me to naturally want to fall back on thinking categorically, making my engagement with creative analysis a more intentional interruption. I do wonder if I had first been introduced to arts-based methods, would I have initially moved in that analytic direction? From the teaching standpoint, I question if it would be better to introduce creative analysis before coding and thematic analysis to avoid positioning the latter as dominant. This would certainly be a topic to consider and research further.

Katie: Now that I reflect on the learning process, I agree that it was beneficial to be able to recognize just how different creative modes of data analysis are from traditional methods. I probably would not have appreciated how to deconstruct meaning-making through poetic inquiry had I not also been introduced to the idea of thinking thematically and categorically as part of a process. I felt able to convey much more about my participant's experience and voice through poetry than when I used thematic analysis. As Cutts and Waters (2019) stated, "While all research is the interpretation of one voice through yet another voice, poetic inquiry offers the opportunity for participants to truly speak for themselves" (1). During my member check with my participant, they actually became emotional reading the poems that I had written and they felt that I had captured the essence of what they were experiencing and trying to express.

Kate: Yes! This notion of interpreting voices is so important, and one that I feel must not be overlooked. I am glad Katie mentioned this as it is the researcher's responsibility to be honest, ethical, and transparent in the representation of participants' experiences. In my work, I chose to see the products from my arts-based approaches as representations of a third voice—a voice that represents a combination of myself, the researcher, and my participant. We engage in rich meaning-making during collaboration with others. The fact that Katie's participant was moved by Katie's poetic representation of their experience seems to illustrate poetic thinking's ability to ". . . reach beyond a search for knowledge or meaning into the sensual, efferent and afferent, difficult-to-grasp, or to put into words, experiential world" (Freeman 2017, 73). We can lean on others or work collaboratively to help bring our own sense-making to light.

CONCLUSION

Our collaborative discussion provided a space to develop a broader reflexivity regarding our continued—and mutual—development as educators, scholars, and learners. Our conversation helped us each reflect on our own processes and come to new considerations. We aligned with Preissle and deMarrais' (2015) conceptualization of qualitative pedagogy when they wrote: "We advocate as part of qualitative pedagogy approaching research not just as an activity or job, but also as an inquiring, mindful lifestyle" (189). Not only did we reconceptualize current practices, but we focused on collaborative reflection to be more intentionally "mindful" of how pedagogical experimentation is experienced by those involved.

We recognize that not every student was as deeply impacted by this approach to data analysis as Katie. While everyone completed the tasks, it is likely that some students were simply checking the box on their course requirements. Knowing how Katie moved through the analytic process, we feel that one-

on-one communication with each student about their own process and subsequent feelings and questions would be preferable when possible. General notes to the whole class—even when explaining the same sentiments—are not always internalized by each individual nor do they necessarily motivate each student to engage in the learning process and take risks. Nevertheless, students in this course responded positively overall to this experience in their final reflections.

While our SoTL efforts to foster creative approaches to teaching and learning were specific to research education, analytic thinking is not limited to the research methods class. Arts-based pedagogy has the potential to invigorate teaching and learning across disciplines and contexts. The arts can be used to stimulate new pathways for sensemaking, extending from the humanities to the sciences. Having students creatively reflect on material—whether it is on course readings, lecture notes, or even presentation content—will stimulate new pathways for sensemaking, extending from the humanities to the sciences as well as in other learning contexts such as workshops and faculty learning communities.

Dewey (1938) challenged us to think beyond traditional approaches to teaching and learning, to ask ourselves in what ways can we foster different means of experiencing an experience and how might that shape our understanding of past, current, and future experiences. Our approach presented here is one among many. We also hope that our varied voices and positions in these learning activities may help crystallize pedagogical techniques for readers who can locate themselves amongst our collaborative narrative.

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