



Invited Paper

Don't Call it Poetry

by **Dr Peter Willis**

Introduction

This paper explores the use of poetic forms of expressive writing in phenomenological research. The first part recapitulates the expressive agenda and its links with phenomenology. The second part of the paper looks at the genesis of a poetic form I used in recent phenomenological writing which I came to call 'poetised' and now prefer the title 'poetic' reflections. The third part looks at elements of poetry and their value in expressive writing. The fourth concerns the implications of linking art with social research. The fifth introduces a poetic reflection and explores a little its so-called penetrative capacity in research presentation. The final part concludes the project.

The expressive agenda in phenomenology

Some phenomenological researchers inquiring into the nature and quality of human lived experiences have sought to produce texts that were germane to the experience being explored rather than being reduced to a classic 'cooled out' and 'abstracted' report text. Such a text would, in the words of Peter Reason, be 'a systematic, rigorous search for truth, but which does not kill off all it touches'. (Reason and Rowan (1981, p. xiii).

This approach is based on a traditional, epistemological distinction between two modes of knowing: one called 'explanatory' or 'analytic', the other 'expressive' or 'narrative'

(cf. Reason 1988; Bruner 1985; Eisner 1990, 1991, 1993; Barone & Eisner 1997). Elliot Eisner and his colleague Tom Barone have elaborated this expressive approach in their work on applying what they have called 'artistic' rather than 'scientific' approaches to research (1997: 75).

Expressive knowledge is generated by the researcher adopting a receptive rather than a proactive stance, allowing an element of experience to present itself for contemplation, then attempting to construct a text which accounts for that experience in its wholeness.

The researcher's tool for this project is not the surgeon's analytical scalpel but the poetic pen or artist's brush, called upon to produce focused, expressive work. Its quality is to be judged not by the more positivist canons of validity and reliability, but by its degree of verisimilitude and integrity (cf. Garman 1996: 18). Heron (1996: 45) suggests a distinction between 'linear, rational, Apollonian inquiry and Dionysian approaches which are more imaginal, expressive, spiral, diffuse, impromptu'.

One of the earlier researchers who attempted a 'living text' was Clark Moustakas, whose 'Loneliness' published in 1961, pioneered literary and heuristic ways towards a portrayal of a lived

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experience. He was later to outline his heuristic phenomenology more formally (Moustakas, 1990 & 1994).

Peter Reason (1988: 79) wrote of developing research approaches that would express more 'the liveliness, the involvement and even the passion' of the experiences being researched. The researchers in Reason's account began to use stories of their lives and inquiries. In the same piece (p. 80) he suggested that meaning is interwoven with experience and that the inquirer will discover the meaning the experience has been given when he or she engages in ways to make it manifest:

To make meaning manifest through expression requires the use of a creative medium through which the meaning can take form. This is not to be confused with a conceptual grid which divides up experience, it is rather the creation of an empty space...which becomes a vessel in which meaning can take shape.

He goes on to mention the languages of words (stories and poems), of colour and shape (painting and sculpture) and of actions (mime and drama) in which meaning can be created and communicated. He makes a significant point that meaning in this sense is never directly pointed out but rather is demonstrated or revealed 'by re-creating pattern in metaphorical shape and form'.

Phenomenological foundations

Like many philosophical movements, phenomenology has several streams and emphases which have developed over time. The basic tenets of the version of phenomenology I have found most helpful, formed the central part of a paper which was published in a previous edition of this journal (Willis 2001). The central ideas are briefly summarised here as a foundation for the ideas to follow. Readers seeking an elaboration are referred to the previous paper.

Phenomenology as it is used here, is an approach to social research. It refers to an ordered

approach in which humans attempt to put a name to things they encounter (phenomena means - 'that which appears') as experienced in their 'lifeworld' (their experienced world), before attempting to analyze and categorise them. It is thus an attempt to focus on the moment of experiencing as the moment of knowing. Phenomenology wants to slow the researcher down and hold his or her gaze on the phenomenon itself - the lived experience of some activity. It seeks to give space for the subjective in knowing, how something immediately affected the knower while also attending to the so-called 'whatness' of the experience itself. The 'logos' or 'word' representing 'that which appears to the person' would thus need to cater for a subjective as well as an objective element (Cf. Spiegelberg (1959: 78). As I wrote in the previous paper:

Having said this, it seems that 'things' are not simply things but rather become 'things' in the act of perception and naming. This basic naming is always being further shaped and distorted by all kinds of cultural influences on the knowing subject. The phenomenological agenda is an attempt to get back to the first naming: 'to understand and describe phenomena exactly as they appear in an individual's consciousness' (Phillipson 1972). The leading idea is that humans need to be aware of the power of the human mind to distort basic ideas of reality according to culturally pre-set prejudices and ways of thinking. ...As Crotty (1996a, p. 38) puts it, 'the focus should lie with what manifests itself in experience rather than what the subject has made of it' (Willis 2001: 4).

What emerges from this brief account is that phenomenology is largely concerned with a particular form of description and texts purporting to phenomenological need to find an appropriate textual genre which is suitable for the task of portrayal rather than the task of analysis.

It is clear how such a distinction strained the boundaries of activities claiming to be within the boundaries of scientific research to which phenomenology had laid a claim - referring to

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phenomenology as a science, a 'human science'. It may also account for the tension in phenomenological writers between seeking to write in a scientific way while keeping to the task of presenting lived experience. It seems clear that the rhetorical needs of phenomenological writing have often been overlooked. Phenomenological writings with their concern to 'name the unnameable' can easily become impenetrable and unreadable. It has been a serious challenge to see whether, in the array of textual genres available, alternative and more palatable approaches might be tried. The distinction between explanatory and expressive texts has been a useful starting point.

In expressive writing, the mind does not grasp an object to analyse and subdue it. It attempts to hold it in consciousness, to allow its reality and texture to become etched on the mind. It holds back from closure and returns again and again to behold the object, allowing words and images to emerge from the contemplative engagement.

In his book *Care of the Soul* (Moore 1992: 301) suggests ways which can make life more soulful. His idea of 'soul' refers to a quality in people through which they become aesthetically awake and attentive to the texture and beauty of every kind of human experience. He says that we can *read our experiences and learn to express them artfully*. Later in the same paragraph he says that we can... *deepen the impressions of experience and settle them in the heart*.

Further questions of 'soul' as the foundation of aesthetic awareness and awakesness belong in a different paper. The significant point here is that in Moore's sense, borrowing from Hillman and of course the 'blues', 'soul' is a short-hand term for the required pre-dispositions for being appropriately attentive to experience. That is of considerable importance in the expressive arena since in order to write texts of portrayal the writer must have evoked and developed her or his capacity for attentive awareness. And then of

course, the ability to move from experience to appropriate textual representation does seem to require qualities analogous to those aesthetic dispositions referred to as 'soulful'. Two aesthetic textual genres which are most often employed are of course narratives or stories, and poetry and it is the latter which is of particular concern here.

The poetic road

The phenomenological research I engaged in (cf. Willis 2002), aimed to present the lived experience of Adult Education practice. This was to be done by re-visiting and attempting to portray experiences encountered in different forms of Adult Education practice I had pursued and then attempting to construct a distilled account of this phenomenon. The initial work of portrayal required an appropriate textual genre which would carry the immediacy and 'livedness' of the experiences.

I came to use a range of interlocked approaches through which the experience of these different episodes of practice were contextualised, narratively described and poetically re-visited and it is this third element which is of interest here.

The poetic revisiting was a kind of poetic soliloquy used to enrich the personalised reflection on each adult education episode. Using my poet's repertoire I tried to perceive or 'intuit' these experiences of my practice while 'bracketing out' analytic or causative 'readings' of these. The poetic texts attempted to use much of the freedom and distillation of the poetic genre to evoke an immediacy and vividness in the represented experience for the reader. It also sought to make room for the practitioner's desires, fears and joys as well as allowing the 'whatness' of the experience to 'declare itself'.

These 'research poems' thus had, to a greater or lesser extent, two voices - on the one hand a personal contextualised voice, owning, naming a concrete subjective experience and on the other

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an objectifying 'whatness-seeking' voice, harmonising with the first.

Poetic reflections

But I worried about their status as poems. I was an aspiring poet and had had several poems published. I knew that these verses were not the same as the 'free standing' poems I had written. They were part of a larger text and had the ancillary task of illuminating the research findings or perhaps better, 'uncoverings' and making them clear and alive. At the same time I knew that while they were different they still seemed to be useful and indeed illuminating. Eventually I consulted an established South Australian poet who occasionally ran workshops for aspiring poets and gave honest and kindly feedback on his students' work. When we met in a local coffee shop, he handed the manuscripts to me and said that they were useful reflections in verse and had a loose poetic 'feel' which was strong in some places and weak in others. He suggested I call them something other than poems. He said they appeared to him like early stage poems without the kind of density and crystalline structure that could eventually emerge. He had noticed the explicitness of the writing and occasional 'cueing' words aimed at 'telling' the reader the significance of the experience rather than 'showing' or presenting it aesthetically. These 'reflections in verse' tended to be more elaborated and lacked the implicit and oblique character of more developed poems. I ended up calling them 'poetised reflections' but of course they drew their leverage and risk from the nature and power of poetry itself.

The call of poetry

Poetry is a term which resists definition while retaining continuing currency in ordinary parlance as a 'family resemblance' concept. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Micropaedia 1990: 542), poetry refers to:

Literature that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional

response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound and rhythm.

According to this text, one of the most basic things that distinguishes poetry is that it looks like poetry. Poetry is built from the *line* rather than the paragraph or block of text, and this creates in the reader a different feeling according to the 'balance and shift of the line'.

Rosenthal (1974: 4) suggests that poetry is a heightened example of what people do, more than perhaps they realise. In an important text he shows the range of linguistic genres that people use without being consciously aware of them. He writes that:

When people say they do not 'get' poetry, it is because they think of language as factual description and the explanation of ideas. They forget the other ways in which they themselves use it - for social cordiality, for cold rejection or irritation, for outcries of pain and excitement, for joking or 'manly' obscenities or 'feminine' hyperbole... These stimuli, active in every mind create in all of us a hunger to express ourselves accurately and vividly. Words like 'humorous', 'racy', 'dramatic', 'poignant', reveal that we want our speech to have a life of its own, something more than flat statement. So the poet is not working out of mere private eccentricity. The poetic process goes on incessantly in the minds of people who would never believe it, who are sure they have neither an interest in poetry nor the ability to grasp it.

What is also useful to the expressive research I was pursuing is the poet's gift - to objectify and somehow make communicable experiences which she or he has had intensely and concretely. T.S. Eliot (1963: 57) said that the poet:

Out of intense and personal experience, is able to express a general truth; retaining all the particularity of his [sic] experience, to make of it a general symbol.

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Poetic writing is often in the first person so that it is clear from whose soul the words, with their images and cadence, have issued. This is true, even though at the same time it might seem for those to whom the poet's words 'speak' that in the act of reading they can get inside the body and voice of the poet. They are somehow made to feel that the words have taken on their own soul; and that in the making of the magic words of the poem, a dictating force of more than the personal, individuated, named and located poet might somehow have been at work. The question moves now to a consideration of more general elements of poetry.

Elements of poetry

The following is a precis of ideas gathered for my Adult education phenomenological study. Poetry tends to show elements of meticulous crafting, 'here and nowness', illuminating distillation, new-making language, and directness.

Meticulous crafting

Poetry is judged on the expressive ability and elegance of every line, every cadence, every punctuation mark. This was born out by Barry Oakley's experience as a student (Oakley 1996: x). He was commended by his tutor when, commenting on the position of a semi-colon in W. B. Yeats' poem, "The wild swans of Coole", which was placed at the end of the line: *But now they drift on the still water, mysterious, beautiful*; Oakley had suggested that the punctuation mark arrested the word 'beautiful' the way the water pressed against the swans. It seemed that if one might be able to 'get away' with a story that had one or two flaws in view of the brightness of the characters or the insightfulness of its punchline, there would be no such tolerance in poetry. With all its flexibility and distillation, poetry tends to require that nothing be admitted that is not deliberately and meticulously crafted.

Celebrating the concrete and the personal

The simplicity and directness and 'here-and-nowness' of the poetic genre, its concern with the 'whatness' of things (Nelson 1996), are summarised in Dinah Livingstone's paraphrasing of Ernesto Cardinale's guidelines for writing poems:

The guidelines caution against thumping rhymes and metres.... Rather than being based on ideas, poetry should be based on things which reach us through the senses. We should... avoid clichés or hackneyed expressions.... all words that are not absolutely necessary should be left out (1993: 117).

This represents in many ways the rules that governed the poetised reflections attempted throughout this project.

The philosopher Walter Kaufmann (1960) celebrated poetry's intuiting and new-making functions; its search for the essence of experiences. For him it seemed important to acknowledge that the insights of the poets came, in fact, from the experience and feelings of concrete men (and presumably women) reacting to, and as part of, real worlds. He talks of:

He [sic] is not bound by any man's thoughts; he records experience with its emotionally coloured thoughts and his thoughts about emotions...he gives us the experience of a man who is unusually sensitive and thoughtful (1960: 257).

Illuminating and distilling everyday 'lived' experience

The poetic medium takes reader and poet into a depth of insight and representation. Poetry is able to *illuminate and crystallise* experience. As van Doren (1967: xii) said, paraphrasing the poet Thomas Merton:

Poetry at its best is contemplation of things and of what they signify, not what they can be made to signify, but what

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they actually do signify, even when nobody knows it. Their meaning is not something we impose upon them, but a mystery which we can discover in them, if we have the eyes to look with.

It is this evocative power of poetry that inspires the intensifying and distilling of ordinary human emotions. Kaufmann (1960: 260), speaking of Rilke, suggests that:

He realises that in our everyday world is not merely a brute reality but also a human creation that is no longer recognised as such, because the mass of men [sic] have lost the perception of those more poetic, more creative, more childlike men who originally fashioned words and values as a mirror of the mysteries they felt.

Poetry has a significant function in that it names and distils human experience. It does this through vivid language and prosody. Hogins (1974: 5) puts it succinctly: 'if we learn to read a poem well, like the poet, we learn to see things in a fresh way'.

Making familiar things strange so they can be seen anew

As was mentioned above in the quotation from Kaufmann, beside the intensifying agenda of poetry lies its more complex other side which was also highlighted by Crotty (1996a: 155). This is the power of poetry to make familiar things strange so as to create them anew in consciousness. This view is shared by Cardinal (1981: 85-86) in his book on the poetic imagination, when he talks of poets' unusual use of words and phrases:

What he wants from a word which rocks the literary boat by 'sounding wrong' is not just that it should alarm the reader and make him [sic] feel uneasy. Rather, it is that it should awaken him to meanings to which ordinary prose and ordinary thinking have tended to make him impervious...Making words 'sound wrong' is simply a means to revive their latent energies, to lend them an intensity which will allow them to mediate the new ideas, the 'right ideas'.

In this context Cardinal gives a strong case for the depth and integrity of the poetic vision, suggesting that the poet's preoccupation with naming the received phenomenon without shifting gaze from it could lead to words being press ganged into service in new roles and new ways. The unusual uses of language in Blake's 'tiger tiger burning bright in the forests of the night' has been readily understood and valued, and serves as a common example of what poets might do to make the 'realness' of the experienced world visible. Blake's reference to the tiger and the use of oblique metaphors which work not by direct correlation, but by resonance, drawing attention to the evocative power of poetry. By resonance and not direct instruction or experience, it can somehow call up feelings in the reader, similar to those possessed by the poet.

Commanding direct attention

Poetry can command direct attention and the intensity of its confrontation can generate a reciprocal intensity of response which is not always according to the agenda of the poem but may be in resistance or irritation. Poetry tends to be more 'in your face', more risky and perhaps less seductive than stories which take longer but are more inexorable in securing compliance from readers to accept the ideas and feelings desired to be produced. But of course, poems perhaps more than stories, are written to be recited. They are written for performance.

Poetry slows and pulses: you 'tell' a story but you 'recite' a poem. A significant point in the experience is that the person reciting the poem 'disappears' into the poem so that the voice that is heard is the 'poetic voice'. By contrast, when a story teller tells a story, there is the action of the story and there is its narrator who can be complicit in the action but not engulfed by it. When a story-teller tells a story to children, for example, there is often considerable eye contact between the person telling the story and the listening or fidgeting children. When a poem is recited, however, there is no provision for little

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asides or breaking off to call the audience to attention; the poem has taken over and bids the reciter be silent unless she or he is its voice.

Having looked at key elements in poetry that serve to shape the poetising text and give it its particular character, the text needs to explore how, and by what gauge, can the quality of such poetic texts be known or measured.

Criteria of quality

The criterion of the 'goodness' of poetry and those genres derived from it seems to hinge more on its expressive ability than its adherence to canons of genre. Even the most avant-garde story needs to follow some of the guidelines of plot, characterisation and integrity whereas poetry needs to stress flexibility and the power to portray. Poetry is valued as good and useful when it opens up an insightful space that is shared between poet and reader.

Hogins (1974: 6) again:

When you feel a poem is 'right', it is not because you have been swayed by the poet's logic or the evidence marshalled to support his opinion. Rather you have been able to identify with him [sic] and find a common area between his view of experience and your own.

With these brief notes, the exploration now turns to the contribution poetic writings can make to phenomenological research.

Poetic reflection

The extract from 'poetry' in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (1990: 542) has a brief mention of the Authorised Version of the Bible, referring to:

Its appearance in print, identifiable neither with verse nor with prose in English but rather with a cadence owing something to both.

In the service of the expressive research I was pursuing, the poetic reflections I was writing sought a cadence which seemed to owe

something to prose and to poetry as well. Only a less amount of the transformative power of poetry may have emerged in these poetic reflections but even then it is hoped that, in dipping even one toe into its lake of mystery, a change of stance might be evoked in the reader/listener.

It is the contribution of poetic discourse to human articulated reflection on life that makes it so useful and so demanding, and leaves the writer with the dilemma about its implementation. There may well be a higher impact but with it, a heightened risk even when aware that these would not have to meet the total demands of a poem. And so in attempting to use the poetic medium, since it has so much to offer, there has been considerable strain to finish and polish the poetic reflections.

What emerged in the study were meditative reflections written in verse, almost soliloquies. They read as a kind of prose poem in their general genre but were not as distilled as would ordinarily have been expected. The challenge was to produce a vivid reflection that was strong and evocative, even if, as a poem, it was as yet not as distilled as it could conceivably have become. There is a sense that in the circles of hermeneutic exploration, poetic reflections will always have a 'work in progress' feel to them which leads to a more fundamental question about how poetry can in fact be co-opted to play a part in research.

Art and poetry in phenomenological research

The quotation below the title of this paper comes from Maxine Greene's Foreword to the book edited by myself with Bob Smith and Emily Collins (Willis *et al* 2000), on expressive approaches to research, which was reviewed in the previous issue of this journal. Much of what follows in this section is an unfinished dialogue with Greene's ideas with special focus on poetry.

Greene was clear that people claiming to use 'expressive' or 'arts-based' approaches to research

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usually in poetry and less often in graphic images, needed to be aware that such approaches had to be separated from the notion and work of 'art' itself. She suggested using a not uncommon distinction sometimes used, between 'Art' with a capital 'A' referring to acknowledged great works and 'art' with a small 'a' for the array of lesser aesthetic works. As she writes:

The term 'art' [with a small 'a'] is used to refer to any creative or expressive work that may be, say, 'poetry-like' or 'ballet like'; in other words, it is not part of a tradition as are Wordsworth's poetry or Keats' or Seamus Heaney's, valuable as it may be (*ibid*: iii).

In reflections on poetry and its impact, there is an obvious difference between the effects on people of an encounter with acknowledged works of art (like *The Windhover* poem by Hopkins) and encountering an arts-based research poem in which a researcher uses aesthetic forms to portray elements of her or his lived experience. A major question has then arisen as to whether the difference between these expressive verses and acknowledged so-called great poems is one of degree or one of kind. Is there any space for the claims to what would amount to a lesser but still an authentic 'art' status for the work of expressive writers using poetic and imaginative texts to portray the 'livedness' and 'whatness' of experiences being researched. Certainly a small number of research texts have been prepared under this assumption including the one that completes this paper.

One point seems to be that poems understood as great are so designated at least partly because of a kind of unfinished life intensifying effect on those who encounter them. Maxine Greene (2001) writes movingly of the evocative processes of great poetry to speak to and move the soul beyond itself. She writes here, using the work of Elizabeth Bishop as an example, of poetic works:

Which call upon us to experience them from within... [like the]...Elizabeth Bishop poem, *Sleeping standing Up* (1997: 30)

As we lie down to sleep the world turns half away
through ninety dark degrees;
the bureau lies on the wall
and thoughts that were recumbent in the day
rise as others fall,
stand up and make a forest of thick-set trees.
The armored cars of dreams, contrived to let us do
so many a dangerous thing,
are chugging at its edge
all camouflaged and ready to go through.

She [Bishop] says "we," inviting us to place ourselves in imagination at the point from which the poet is related to the world, the bureau, her own thoughts, her dreams. We can take up a "we" like that and involve ourselves in the poet's situation (p. 33).

In addition, when Greene focuses on the person engaging with a work of art, another challenge emerges for the claims to 'art' in arts based research. She writes that:

There is something about the particularities of a work of art that allows it to appeal directly to a perceiver's or a reader's freedom (or her/his indignation, Satre said). Questions surge up, not answers, questions that avoid being screened out by the habitual. (Greene 1999: 5)

This does not seem to fit easily with the stance of the poetry in arts-based research which is used to express some kind of elucidation and closure. At the same time it does not appear impossible that writings or artefacts of one or other expressive researcher might have an unsettling effect on readers analogous to that generated by a great work of art.

In her essay on *Blue Guitars and Curriculum*, Greene (1991: 111) writes that engaging with some works of arts revealed herself to herself as she was taken up in the insights and experiences

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of the artists. Speaking of the effect on her of great women writers like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Kate Chopin, Virginia Woolf, she writes:

I, after all, was lending these people my life; I was, through my reading, allowing them to emerge in my consciousness and, by so doing, to transform it, as social scientific accounts or even psychological ones would never do.

It then becomes problematic whether researcher poets are in fact seeking to generate similar transformative experiences through their expressive research presentations. The major focus for the small number of expressive researchers has been much more to concentrate on the getting of a vivid presentation of an experience in such a way that people can almost feel its immediacy and challenge. The researcher is, as it were chained to what she or he is held in thrall to, committed to telling it like it is experienced. As such, at least to some extent, there is the inquiry *before* there is the expressive text. In this sense the research inquiry sets the agenda and the expressive text making is somewhat ancillary to the research. There is a slight feel that the expressive text is being commissioned and therefore constrained by the interests of the researcher - it is thus a 'research' text before it is an 'poetic' text.

In an introduction to one of his poetry readings, the Nobel prize winning poet Seamus Heaney (1997) described how he was invited by Amnesty International to write a poem about peace and freedom analogous to Picasso's painting of the Dove of Peace. He said that unfortunately 'nothing seemed to be coming'. He was unable to meet the request even though he believed passionately in what Amnesty was doing and in fact several of his poems had been generated by his horror at the troubles in Northern Ireland. He seemed to be pointing to an element in poetry where the writer has the sense of being 'taken over' by some experience rather than being able

systematically to pick a topic and write a poem around it.

This is the elusive element in great poems that makes them perhaps unsuitable for inclusion in almost anything, including expressive research. Many poems seem mostly to have the sense of being 'for themselves', of being the fruit of an aesthetic encounter with an experience realised in poetic form. There is the poet and the experience and nothing else. The poet is not trying to prove something and if this is discerned in one or other of his or her works they are usually regarded as inferior. As Keats wrote in a letter quoted by Spurr (1997: viii) : 'We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us.'

It would appear, at least in the way they are described, that some arts-based approaches come from a kind of deliberate technical/instrumental use of literary and poetic forms to evoke specific emotions. Denzin (1997: 209) notably does not use 'art' references in his comments about experimental texts with a main goal

To evoke emotional responses for the reader, thereby producing verisimilitude and a shared experience.

He cites Ellis (1995a: 318):

'In evocative storytelling, the story's 'validity' can be judged by whether it evokes in you, the reader, a feeling that the experience described is authentic, that is believable and possible'.

Such transitive linking of aesthetics with outcomes speaks perhaps more of the artistry of advertising copy than of literary aesthetics. The research agenda in this case might be satisfied with the evocative effectiveness of the text rather than its artistry let alone any claim to be admitted to the great halls of art.

Denzin's text, which speaks at length of experimental research texts like those of Ellis cited above also mentions those of Richardson

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(1994b) an acknowledged artistic writer and poet who uses skillful and artful poetry and carefully wrought stories. Even in this case where there is considerable artistic merit, he neither claims nor rejects their status as works of art.

It would appear that expressive research with its use of artistic and poetic genres lays a stronger claim to being research than it does to be art. Nevertheless, for every one of the objections which would distance expressive and poetic representations in research from being counted as works of art, there are imaginable exceptions militating against too many blanket dogmas. Poetry and art are elusive enough in any case. It may be that the wisest course is to suggest that expressive or arts-based research borrows from artistic and poetic forms to construct research presentations which aspire to generate emotions, feelings and conceptions which have similarity to those many people experience when engaging with a work of art.

The following is an example of a poem or poetic reflection. It is a chance for readers to explore the claims of expressive writing in phenomenological research without necessarily deciding on the verse's artistic status.

The poetic reflection of invitation

The following is the first poetic reflection in my thesis. Its title, 'Inviting Learning' highlighted one of the key elements in the experience of adult education practice which had been uncovered and made apparent. Having informed the reader this was an essential element in the experience of Adult education practice, I sought to evoke something of that experience in the poetic reflection which followed (cf., Willis 2002, p18), and which is reproduced here.

Some Adult education practice can have a subject-centred or didactic approach that focuses on the learning to be facilitated. Others have a more learner-centred or personalist approach which I tended to use, that focuses at least

initially, on fostering learning dispositions in the learner through what can be called an invitational approach. This seeks to engage the learners in friendly, respectful exchanges while encouraging them to take up the proposed learning agenda, through which they will be enriched. The invitational stance tends to place the adult educator in some jeopardy. It is essentially an engaged rather than detached approach: warm rather than cool, personal rather than purely logical or rational.

The following poetic reflection attempts to portray invitation's contradictory and risky nature.

Invitation

I risk inviting;
I want you here.
And when you come
I feel enriched, believe
you feel the same.

If you refuse,
that says
I have no worth to you,

And if, when you agree to come,
you don't show,
your absence makes a wound
and I fall lower
than before I ever called you.

No-one invites for fun;
if you say 'drop in if you like'
that is not a real inviting;
there's no risk, a bet each way
against rejection.

Inviting is for keeps
a friend, a lover in pursuit:
no half measures.
It's black or white,
not blurred or luke warm.

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And guests know the rules
to dress up, cradle
the eggshell of friendship
at your place;

And trust that
while you stand
unarmed and welcoming,
your bounty spread,
your guests will not turn
to hurt;
refuse to dance
your party's tune
and leave you
undone.

The poem carries the notion of the person making the invitation putting him or herself at risk and of wanting to condense or push what might have been an acquaintance to a more solid friendship: something intimate and challenging where responses cannot be postponed or not acted upon. The poem also carries the sense of heightened tension: that to invite a person is to risk rejection on the first part if the invitation is returned, or a guest who agreed to come does not appear or a full scale shaming as when a guest even slightly attacks the 'unarmed' host or seeks to shame or betray him or her. All these images can be easily applied to educational exchanges between adults where a full range of responses from exhilaration to despair are thinkable.

Conclusion

In practice, encountering a poem as a component of a research presentation (unless as a one or two line quotation at the beginning of a chapter) has tended to generate surprise and intensified attention from the reader as if reading a poem called for greater energy than skimming a report.

I discovered as well that their heightened engagement was often accompanied by a stronger critical reaction (ranging from exaltation to irritation) towards poetic reflections than was accorded to the prose parts of the text. It was

apparent that one took the poetic path at one's peril.

Assessing the risks and benefits

Given that there is an element of risk in including poetic reflections, the question then emerges whether it is worth risking that the finished product will be judged harshly and serve more to irritate than enlighten? Will such risk-taking jeopardise the impact of other textual genres used in the research writing?

To use poetic approaches seemed to increase both the degree of difficulty (as they say in diving competitions) and the risks and rewards that accompany this. It is one thing to be warned that poetical reflections do not belong in scientific research and to rebut such a suggestion using the distinctions between expressive and explanatory knowledge; it is quite another to be warned that the idea is defensible but the level of risk is high. The quality of the poetic texts would have somehow to match or better the quality of the academic prose in the thesis and have enough poetic grace to lift the readers and not condemn them to irritation or embarrassment.

There is of course another more mundane matter relating to poetic writing in research particularly in the exchanges between supervisor and researcher, which is linked more to the nature of poetry than research. People who write poetry or poetic reflections have usually slaved over each word so that they do not take kindly to editorial suggestions which, while considered at least not unhelpful in reference to prose passages, can almost always be expected to generate resistance and resentment. The poetic genre leaves little safe distance between the writer and the text. This may be one reason why supervisors may be loathe to encourage researchers to try a little poetic writing particularly if they have never done anything like it before.

In my case it was caution that had suggested that my poetic reflective approach be trialed and

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tested on a few readers. The affirming response encouraged the continuance of the approach in my thesis. At the same time there has been more time spent on tightening, working and re-working the poetic reflections than on any other part of my writing.

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Dr Willis has made significant contributions to scholarship in the fields of adult education and training, and particularly the use of phenomenological research methodology in Adult Educational research. He has authored and co-authored several books in this area.

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