

Poetic Inquiry as a Reflective Method for Instructors of Academic Writing



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Abstract

It is important for instructors to reflect on and develop their teaching practices and pedagogy. Using a poetic inquiry method, this article offers an alternative model for reflecting on academic writing and teaching practices using a found poetry cluster. My example focuses on graduate academic writing instruction. I create found poems from my own written reflections and literature on graduate writing and organize them into a cluster to identify connections and dissonances. I finish with a discussion of my critical analysis of the poetry cluster and how using poetic inquiry as a reflective method helped me to develop both my writing process and teaching pedagogy.

Keywords: reflective teaching, poetic inquiry, graduate students, academic writing

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As a graduate academic writing support specialist, I see my work as helping students find their voice and write for clarity. This goal is connected to my personal experiences—and frustrations—with my own academic writing and the writing of others. My relationship with academic writing was affected by my mentors and instructors, and in turn I affect the students I support. Thus, it is important to create a reflective practice to unpack my approach to and conception of academic writing, so I can continue to grow as an educator by challenging my own biases and blocks to broaden those approaches and supports.

Knowing that my own experiences affect my pedagogical approaches to teaching academic writing led to three reflective research questions:

1. How does my understanding and experience of academic writing affect my approach to teaching it?
2. In what areas are the assumptions that guide my approaches to teaching academic writing valid and accurate? In what areas are they not?
3. What assumptions in my and others' approaches to teaching academic writing fail to support graduate students?

These questions came from my past research and teaching development in critically reflective teaching practices, which call on teachers to approach their pedagogy through different lenses and perspectives in order to discover unhelpful and harmful biases and assumptions (Brookfield, 2017; Pang, 2017). We all come to teaching with our own assumptions based on our past experiences and we, in turn, need to examine our assumptions through critical reflection to check their validity (Brookfield, 2017). I previously wrote a prose scholarly personal narrative (SPN) to reflect on and improve my teaching of writing and English literature. I critically analyzed my personal teaching and learning experiences using the reflection-on-action approach to evaluate and reframe my teaching by using new perspectives and lenses (Munby, 1989; Pang, 2017), including literature on student well-being, universal design, accessibility, and flexibility in teaching and assessment. However, I believe that I could have learned more from the process. I was unable to be fully open and vulnerable in the narrative that I told, which meant I could not fully discover or assess my assumptions and biases. Thus, I searched for an alternate means to reflect on my teaching, assess my assumptions and biases, and learn from other voices and perspectives.

This article represents my exploration of an alternative approach for reflective teaching, specifically in relation to teaching academic writing to graduate students. This reflective approach uses the method of poetic inquiry to improve my ability to express my own writing and teaching experiences, and in turn assess my assumptions of writing and teaching practices through the critical analysis and comparison of found poems.

The purpose of this article is to provide other academic writing educators with an alternative reflective method for critically analyzing their assumptions around academic writing and how it affects their teaching pedagogy, with the goal of improving their supports for graduate academic writers. It is also an attempt to force myself out of my academic writing comfort zone and question my assumptions of academic writing by using the norm-breaking method of poetry in my data collection and writing process. My intention is to broaden my concept of and approach to teaching academic writing, so I can better support the diverse needs of graduate student writers.

Graduate Writing and Development

Academic writing is a struggle for many graduate students. The challenges and stress of the writing process can lead to anxiety and an inability to write (Badenhorst, 2018; Bray, 2018; Fredrick et al., 2020; Jones & Williams, 2018; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020). The growing diversity of the graduate student population has only highlighted their writing “problems” and fueled both discussions and frustrations among faculty (Badenhorst et al., 2015). Writing scholars and instructors believe there are better methods to prepare and support graduate students through the growing pains of academic writing than past approaches that left students to find their way in isolation or ignored the larger writing process to focus on mechanics. They point to a need to reframe academic writing, its role in graduate student development, and the source of writing challenges.

At the core of reframing graduate writing is enculturation and the necessity for instructors and supervisors to candidly discuss its intellectual and emotional affects with their students. Fredrick et al. (2020) define enculturation as “the process by which individuals are inducted into the values and practices of a community, including the practices of reading, writing, and creating knowledge” (p. 143). Writing has an essential role in graduate students joining the discourse community of their discipline (Badenhorst et al., 2015; Fredrick et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020). This development of novice scholars into expert academics occurs through learning the language, rhetoric, rules, and structure of the genres of their discipline (Bray, 2018; Douglas, 2020). However, graduate students are often left to navigate enculturation alone and unprepared (Fredrick et al., 2020), viewing their struggles as an individual deficit in skill instead of a socialization process (Badenhorst et al., 2015). Institutional culture and pressures both uphold this misconception and add further stress on graduate students through normalizing silence and isolation around writing struggles (Fredrick et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020). These problems are compounded by a misunderstanding of writing “problems” as simply related to proofreading and mechanics (Badenhorst et al., 2015; Turner, 2019). These challenges are even more difficult for non-traditional graduate students and those with English as an Additional Language, who must contend with larger cultural and language differences

alongside academic enculturation (Douglas, 2020; Fredrick et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020).

Enculturation will always be a difficult learning process, but pedagogies that discuss its challenges transparently and provide navigation tools can support a diverse graduate population while broadening and resisting institutional norms. Fredrick et al. (2020) and LaFrance and Corbett (2020) connect transparency around the enculturation process with reframing failure in academic writing. Failure is essential for learning (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020). To teach graduate writers to develop through failure, instructors must create a space where students feel safe taking risks (Fredrick et al., 2020). To do so, open discussions are critical—between all academics, not just in the classroom—to normalize writing challenges and reframe them as the process of joining the academic community, not exclusion from it (Fredrick et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020). Once graduate students understand that developing academic writing is about learning the norms of disciplinary genres, they can test, resist, and break these norms to discover their personal writing process and their position to these norms (Bray, 2018; Fredrick et al., 2020; LaFrance & Corbett, 2020). However, more established academics and writing instructors need to make new academic genres more accessible to novice academics by modelling and normalizing these alternatives in their own writing, as Bray (2018), Fredrick et al. (2020), and LaFrance and Corbett (2020) demonstrate in their articles, utilizing autoethnographic and narrative elements.

When graduate student writers are given the tools to understand their enculturation process, they can take risks and try playful approaches to developing their writing. As Badenhorst et al. (2015) show, graduate writers succeed when pedagogies assist students to build knowledge of their discourse community, find “authorial voice and confidence” (pp. 9–10) through practice, and develop the competence to resist and challenge genre norms. Understanding the necessity of practice, students can be guided in the importance of revision and utilizing feedback (Achen, 2018). Agency and competence in writing can be supported through building what Badenhorst (2018) calls “discursive emotional intelligence” (p. 110), which helps students recognize emotions that create challenges in their writing, note their individual and larger systemic origins, and make decisions on how to navigate their emotions and positionality within larger power structures. Activities that develop student agency in responding to criticism includes free-writing, categorizing and accessing criticism, and using a toy cat to represent the internal and external critical voice (Badenhorst, 2018). Jones and Williams (2018) introduce playful techniques to enhance graduate students’ “resilience, confidence, and flexibility” (p. 150), such as shape cards and LEGO to help students visualize their writing as well as walking tutorials and yoga/meditation to assist them in connecting their physical bodies to their writing process. Jones and Williams (2018) acknowledge the riskiness of playful approaches and that these techniques will not work for everyone. They emphasize, however, the importance of trying new

techniques and encourage students to keep learning many new writing methods and approaches that they can draw on when needed.

Methodology: Poetic Inquiry

Poetic inquiry aims to share knowledge in creative and emotive ways (Adams et al., 2015; Owton, 2017). Poetic inquiry calls researchers to write creatively and reflectively (Owton, 2017). It is an alternative method to analyze data and discover new complexities and insights about our research and ourselves (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009; Owton, 2017; Sparkes et al., 2003). Poetic inquiry can also break down our expectations for scholarly research and academic writing, creating the potential to challenge the status quo of what it means to do and write about research in both its method and reflective approach (Owton, 2017).

Poetry, as a form, is open to interpretation and its meaning cannot be fully controlled by its author. The reader and author work together to create meaning (Owton, 2017). This process of co-creation removes the researcher from the position of sole meaning-maker and opens the interpretation of findings to a wider audience. The accessibility and approachability of poems, especially their creativity and emotivity, extends research and findings beyond the specialist to engage a more varied group of readers (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009; van Rooyen & d'Abdon, 2020).

I chose poetic inquiry as my method to unsettle traditional processes and expectations of academic writing. The goal of the poems is to invite engagement and allow for multiple interpretations—including those different from (or opposed to) my own. The process of writing these poems was intended to push my own boundaries and challenge my comfort in and understanding of academic writing. I chose poetic inquiry for this research because the intentionality and effort I require to write poetry lends itself to reflective practice, vulnerability, and openness.

There are a variety of poetic forms and approaches to choose from to do poetic inquiry. I created a cluster of found poems. In the context of poetic inquiry, found poems use words and phrases from specific texts (e.g., data, journal entries, articles, notes) that are subsequently rearranged into poetic form (Butler-Kisber, 2002; James, 2009). Found poetry is restrictive because it only uses the words from documents or data. However, that restriction can help to accurately represent the story or voice of the person behind that data (Butler-Kisber, 2021; Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009). By cutting up the text and using only the most significant words and phrases, the poem that is formed intensifies the images, feelings, and intentions of the original text (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009; James, 2009).

Poetic inquiry inherently situates the researcher within the research. Even with poetic forms like found poetry, which use only original words and phrases, the researcher still influences the poem through the creation process of selecting words and creating their poetic form. Thus, these poems will always be a collaboration between the researcher and those voices in the data or document. The researcher's voice is always present because of the process of poetic creation (Owton, 2017). By cutting up and reworking printed texts, as I do, the relationship between reader and text shifts, and the original text becomes more open to multiple interpretations (James, 2009). The result for my found poetry is that although I can represent other voices, these poems are a product of what I drew from them, and thus I will always be implicated in any analysis and/or criticism brought to these poems. As co-creator of these poems, I must accept the vulnerability of my position to critically approach them. I also must accept that others' interpretations and readings of these poems are just as valid as my own.

I use the method of clustering to help unpack the meaning in these found poems. A poetry cluster is a series of poems based around the same theme or topic (Butler–Kisber & Stewart, 2009). Analyzing poems in clusters is useful in poetic inquiry because it allows for layers of meaning, as it simultaneously reveals both individual nuances and general experiences, which in turn highlight the multiplicity and individuality of meaning (Butler–Kisber, 2021; Butler–Kisber & Stewart, 2009). By creating a found poetry cluster that represents the academic writing and teaching experiences of myself and others, I give space for both connections and dissonances to better voice the variety of experiences while also finding where my voice fits within them—and if I am content with that position. The goal is for you, the reader, to do the same.

By using found poetry, I aim to highlight voices and perspectives that can be lost in the density and mass of the prose in a typical academic text. In creating found poetry from my own reflections, I distill my own thoughts and draw out those that are unexpected or hidden from my general observations. In clustering the poems, I bring these voices together to make connections and understand my and others' experiences and approaches, much like Schoone (2021) uses a poetry portfolio to help “make sense” of his experience as a teacher in alternative education (p. 226).

My approach to creating the found poetry cluster in this article draws on suggestions from Butler–Kisber (2021), Butler–Kisber and Stewart (2009), and van Rooyen and d'Abdon (2020) on how to write autobiographical, generative research poetry and found poetry from data, interviews, or other texts. The found poems in my cluster come in two varieties: those from my own writing and those from published academic literature. The main difference between the two is the first stage of the process. The first group resulted from texts that I intentionally created for the purpose of reflecting on my teaching and writing. The second group are from

texts that I found through previous and current research into teaching academic writing. The first represents my reflective practice and the second represents the literature. Both come together to form one poetry cluster to support my reflective practice.

My reflections come from a series of free writing sessions on 10 predetermined questions, which took the form of journaling. I specifically crafted these question prompts with the goal of expanding my reflective practice and focusing my reflections on the topic of teaching and learning academic writing. Some questions were created to be specific to the topic, while others were broader to uncover experiences and beliefs that may affect my thinking in unexpected ways.

The question prompts for my free writing sessions were as follows:

1. What is my academic writing journey?
2. What is my relationship to writing?
3. How do I approach writing?
4. How do I edit/critique/refine writing?
5. How do I define “academic writing”? What makes it different (from other writing)?
6. What are my goals in teaching academic writing? How does my approach help or hinder those goals?
7. How do I give individual feedback to students?
8. What is my focus/approach in group sessions/workshops? What are my goals?
9. Where do I currently see room for improvement (both in my own writing and in my teaching/instruction)?
10. What outside forces affect(ed) my academic writing and view of it?

For my written reflection on each question, I set a 10-minute timer and intentionally wrote non-stop during that period. I found the 10-minute minimum helpful for getting started, but generally wrote for 30 minutes or more on each question. I struggled to find the motivation to write these reflections, which I believe was related to the vulnerability I felt in openly exploring my challenges and failures as a writer and teacher. My intention was to write these reflections electronically, but when I continued to stall, I tried writing in a journal-style notebook instead. Changing the medium was surprisingly successful. I was more comfortable sharing my personal thoughts and experiences in this format because I kept a daily diary for 10 years as a teenager and young adult. It also allowed me to better find and create comfortable spaces for my reflection writing (e.g., a quiet couch I came across on campus), as a notebook is very portable and manageable. I would encourage those who wish to replicate my approach to experiment with different mediums and spaces for their reflections.

I used the same approach to create found poetry for both my reflections and the literature. I reviewed the text multiple times to find and highlight impactful words and phrases with a focus

on the topic of teaching and learning academic writing. I then typed the highlighted sections into a blank document and began to play with order, line breaks, and spacing. I would then return to the poem draft over several days to make additional edits. I pre-set restrictions so my found poems would be only mildly “treated” (Butler–Kisber, 2021, p. 23), maintaining as much of the word order, syntax, and meaning of the original text as possible. In adding poetic elements, such as line breaks and spacing, I aimed to uphold, if not emphasize, the original meaning. Changes in font and placement of text are my attempts to distinguish between different voices and perspectives. Several texts from the literature include autoethnographic narratives from several authors or quotes from their students’ experiences, so I used font and position changes to distinguish between these unique voices that would otherwise appear contradictory. For example, in the poem, *The Space Between: Enculturate*, I used normal font to represent the collective voice of the four authors in Fredrick et al.’s (2020) text and used italics and position on the page to distinguish between the four individual voices of their autoethnographic narratives.

My process for analysis of the found poem cluster is related to its organization. The found poems were created from my personal journal reflections on the question prompts, which were written over 2 weeks. The found poems from the literature each draw from a single text. I specifically chose to mix the found poems from my reflections with those from the literature—a very visual way to situate myself within the literature and among other perspectives. Similarly, I ordered the poems to separate those with similar topics to encourage deeper analysis and discover less obvious connections. I used a critical close reading approach to compare the poems, looking for broader themes and agreements, but also unique voices and differences. I was especially attentive to perspectives that challenged or problematized my own, as my aim was to critically assess my assumptions related to the academic writing process and instruction.

Positionality Statement

I am a white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, middle-class woman who has the great privilege of being the third generation of women in my family to receive a postsecondary education. Student well-being has been a core aspect of my teaching pedagogy as both a course instructor and writing support specialist. I gained a new understanding of the importance of having flexible and accessible instruction and assessment options when, part-way through my doctorate program, I suddenly and unexpectedly found myself dealing with chronic illness and needing accommodations which continue to this day.

I identify as a recent graduate student and writing practitioner. I defended my doctoral thesis in 2022 at a Canadian university as a domestic, English-speaking, graduate student. A week after my defense, I took a position as a writing support specialist for domestic and international

graduate students in English–language programs across all faculties at another Canadian university.

I intersperse my voice with voices from the literature by clustering the found poems. The literature is represented in the section above on graduate writing and development. These texts were published between 2018 and 2020 and the authors include faculty, “writing practitioners” (Turner, 2019, p. 88), and current and former graduate students. The texts focus on the experiences of graduate students, both domestic and international, and English as a First Language and English as an Additional Language, in English–language programs in the U.S., U.K., and Canada. The literature represents an academic landscape built from experiences that both align with and differ from my own.

I see my positionality statement as imperative to my reflective, methodological, and writing approach. The personal and unique position from which I wrote my reflections and created the found poems affects both what is emphasized and what is overlooked. My positionality statement is also a reminder to myself and my readers that the researcher cannot be fully separated from their research. My positionality statement is not meant to dictate how the poems are read but to give insight into their content and acknowledge my influence on them. In turn, I encourage readers to both consider the position from which they read these poems and to find their own meanings and critiques.

Critical Reflection on Teaching and Learning Academic Writing With a Found Poetry Cluster

Reforming my journal reflections into found poetry and clustering them with other voices on the topic of academic writing has helped me to reframe my own academic writing experience and, in turn, my approach to supporting graduate student writers. The found poem method did the intended work of drawing out experiences and assumptions I did not recognize from simple reflection, and the clustering of the poems allowed me to discover these hidden aspects of my writing and teaching process.

My completed found poem cluster consists of eight poems from the literature and three poems from my reflections. For space and clarity, I will share some sections of the cluster and my learnings that came from writing, clustering, comparing, and critically analyzing the poems. The poems below appear in the same order as in the cluster. The origins of each found poem are indicated by the citation following its title.

The Space Between: Enculturate (from Fredrick et al., 2020)

Enculturate:
The graduate school
baptism by fire

Recognize the tension
Encourage high-quality mistakes
Wallow in ambiguity

*Tell me how to accept academic failures
without feeling like a failure as a person.*

A fraud.

No longer safe

to write

*- the emotional and physical consequences
of enculturation.*

Quality of failure

- safety net -

Lifted weight.

Learning can be unbelievably messy.

I am not a fraud.

*Built a shaky bridge
on my own.*

*I wanted and needed
more transparency.*

Spinning wheels

Unable to gain traction.

*My passion, my joy, my escape
had become a prison sentence to endure.*

Square peg.

Round hole.

I was never going to fit.

I never once regretted leaving graduate school.

A vast sense of peace.

Transition

- A wonderful time to

Resist material

Take chances and

Explore -

Essential to enculturation.

*Forced into a box
I felt myself begin to*

Resist that push.

I wanted to find

My own way.

I hungered to

*make my own teaching decisions
and mistakes.
I needed a good pair of
strong and worn
Professional shoes and
a tweed jacket
to walk in.*

*As the consultant
I had to appropriate the student's intentions
in order to meet
the professor's expectations.*

*Practicing the profession
outside of the classroom
An essential part of
the enculturation process
- A wonderful position of
Learning and transition.*

I failed to speak
Candidly and openly
with my students about
Enculturation and to
give them ample opportunities for
Reflection and dialogue.

Openly validate
Strong transitional emotions.
Need not make graduate school
Easier,
Rather the goal should be to
Normalize the process of
Enculturation by making it
Clearer.

Writing Stories (from my reflections)

My writing
- my stories -
represent a version of me
at a particular time.

Reflect me in that moment.

In my undergrad
writing as a game
- a puzzle -

learn the rules
get the marks.

In my Master's
I found myself trying to *be* something
Emulating
– dense and impenetrable –
worried about being legitimate.

In my doctorate
writing became a *tool*
My space
 for thinking and exploring
 for growing and learning.
Time and space
– permission –
 to sit and draft and mess
 to sit and edit and rethink
 to breath and rework and discard.

A new appreciation of
brevity and clarity
inviting readers to learn along with me.

The found poem cluster method allowed me to identify my own enculturation process. The varied enculturation experiences illustrated by Fredrick et al. (2020) draw out my enculturation experience from within my reflective poem. My intention in crafting *Writing Stories* was to track my understanding of academic writing and the development of my writing process. However, positioning this poem after *The Space Between: Enculturate*, I discovered my own enculturation story that I had never recognized or acknowledged. My initiation into graduate-level writing was also one of silence, isolation, and lack of clarity. I always felt that I was a good writer and that it generally came easy for me, but that is only in a very narrow understanding of writing. *Writing Stories* reveals the underlying frustration I had when joining my academic discourse community and feeling I had to write in “dense and impenetrable” prose to belong. I see this experience echoed in the graduate student voices in *The Space Between: Enculturate*, in such lines as “forced into a box” and “Tell me how to accept academic failures/ without feeling like a failure as a person./ A fraud.”

I now understand my change to viewing writing as a process and tool during my doctoral program, as represented in the latter half of *Writing Stories*, eased my own entry into my discourse community. With guidance from my supervisor, I went from a “writing up” mindset

(Turner, 2019) to viewing writing as an essential tool for every part of my research process. Again, *Writing Stories* and *The Space Between: Enculturate* share similar words and phrases, such as “Time and space/ – permission –/ to sit and draft and mess” and “learning can be unbelievably messy,” respectively. Since I did not read the literature until after writing my reflections, the similar language in describing a graduate student’s reframing of writing is striking. Before creating this poetry cluster, I did not have the language of enculturation and discourse communities, nor saw their connection to my own writing process. Now, I can properly share these insights to help students find agency in their enculturation process. I now make specific choices to validate graduate students’ writing challenges, share my own challenges, and emphasize the messiness of the writing process.

Writing Right (from Turner (2019))

Writing practitioners

mediating between students and institutional expectations

tension

the improbability of perfect prose

the cultural demand for pristine prose

a climate of non-understanding

reducing writing issues

to proofreading.

Proofreading

is deeply implicated

in the western cultural ideology

of pristine prose.

Academic language is nobody’s mother tongue

– the internationalization of universities

– the internationalization of English

accelerating language change and diversification

differ from the ideal of pristine prose.

Move reliance on traditional normative standards

to more flexible and internationalized approach.

Writing practitioners need to recognize

the intellectual hard labor

of the language work

in the nuanced analysis

at the higher levels of academic achievement.

uncertainty

for writing practitioners

as institutional intermediaries

to take a principled stance for change
when pressure on students and
individual academic reputations at stake

Break with
the culturally habituated expectation
of a smooth read.
Break with
proofreading
as a process of cultural sanitization
making all texts conform.

Emotions, Play, Writing (from Badenhorst, 2018)

Play ruffles students
Provides the space
To step outside the rules
To negotiate tension
Working within a system while
Thinking outside of it.

Students are highly critical
of themselves
of their writing.
Paralysed.
Writing anxiety and expressing emotions
an indicator of an inability
to cope with pressures
rather a normal part of the process.

Discursive emotional intelligence
helps students become aware of
their positions of power within the discourse and
make decisions about how to negotiate their positionality.

Playful activities
Promote risk-taking and
Lateral thinking in writing.

Free-writing:

Separate composition from editing
Keep internal critical voice quiet
Technique to negotiate emotions.

*I believed I was a lonely writer.
Now I realize that writing is a team job.*

Dealing with negative internal dialogue:

Explicitly discuss
need for self-compassion
amid discourses of
competition and
individual deficit.

*There will be people who will criticize my writing,
but it is all part of the process.*

Using objects to externalize feelings:

Plastic toy cats represent
internal critical voice or
critical voice of a supervisor.
Externalises the voice
so internalised
they cannot hear how much
they criticize themselves.

*When my critical thinker over took my creative thinker
I made it a habit to pull out the cat and asked it to "be quiet."
It really helped me.*

The challenge is to help students to acknowledge
the benefits of feedback and critique
in a hypercritical environment,
to recognise that although their internal voice is theirs,
it also consists of influences around them,
while at the same time developing some
agency as an emerging scholar-writer in a discourse.

*If I choose, I can change the storyline
which alters how I feel about
the writing process, my role, and behavior.
I have agency.*

*And I realize that once you become a friend with your writing,
you can have fun.*

Discourse Community Fail! (from LaFrance & Corbett, 2020)

We become better writers by failing,
Sometimes abysmally.

"Expertise"
– or "good writing" –
is situationally dependent.

The majority of writers will learn through

the trail and error gauntlet
persistence in the face of failure.

Queer
 graduate learning and teaching
 Challenge the
 dominant paradigm of
 Conformist U:
 Resist mastery
 Privilege the naïve or nonsensical
 Suspect memorialization

Failure is currently read as
 a mark of outsidersness.
 Re-see it as the very means by which
 we come to belong.

Failure is a bruise,
 not a tattoo
 – *A necessary part of the process.*

Good work is not always convenient
 or entirely pretty
 or even half-way happy-making.

Writers at all stages
 talk to others candidly
 about failures
 and learn.

The clustering of the found poems revealed underlying themes. Underneath the discussions of enculturation, reframing academic writing, playful approaches, and supporting diverse groups of graduate student writers, there is a common thread that connects them all: resistance to the restrictions and barriers of traditional academic writing. This theme comes forward especially when reading through *Writing Right* (Turner, 2019), *Emotions, Play, Writing* (Badenhorst, 2018), and *Discourse Community Fail!* (LaFrance & Corbett, 2020). Placing these poems side by side emphasizes the interconnectedness of breaking academic writing norms and playful writing techniques. The theme of resistance is also present in the literature that calls for flexibility and diversity in academic writing. It also points to my complacency with the writing norms that can create barriers for graduate students.

Writing Right includes Turner's (2019) acknowledgment of the challenging position of writing practitioners to enact change when they must support students to be successful within the

current confines of academic writing: “uncertainty/ for writing practitioners/ as institutional intermediaries/ to take a principled stance for change/ when pressure on students and/ individual academic reputations at stake.” I reflect on my own position as a writing support specialist in *Tough Questions* (see below) and question if my work is helpful or harmful: “I exist in this unsettling position/ of helping students reach writing goals/ Dictated by restrictive/ institutional expectations./ Am I actually helping?” I have learned through the process of writing, clustering, and comparing these found poems that I do have agency and tools to help work towards new norms in academic writing and give graduate students room to play and test current boundaries. Turner (2019) calls for writing practitioners to be advocates for graduate student writers and Bray (2018) (found poem not included in this paper) encourages established academics to push genre boundaries in their own writing and be models for graduate students and new scholars. To draw from *Discourse Community Fail!*, “Queer/ graduate learning and teaching/ Challenge the/ dominant paradigm of/ Conformist U.” Although I am in a more vulnerable position as a new academic and non-faculty member, I have taken the opportunity to write this paper and share it, with the hopes it will help to push the boundaries of academic writing. I am also working on creating safe spaces within my workshops and consults so graduate students feel safe to take risks and try new writing methods. As noted in *Emotions, Play, Writing*, “Playful activities/ Promote risk-taking and/ Lateral thinking in writing.” Going forward, I will have more playful options available to graduate students in my support spaces.

Tough Questions (from my reflections)

Who am I writing for?

Myself

- my career -

The lure of academia

- the prestige of a published journal article -
is tough to shake.

And here I am again,
writing my self.

Who am I writing for?

Academic writing

- in my mind -

is an expectation of rigour
of joining larger conversations
and supporting claims with evidence
and acknowledging those

we speak to
and for.
It is communication,
not an intelligence contest.

Broaden definitions
of knowledge
of expert
include voices
with particular experiences
not a particular degree.

Who am I writing for?

How do I view myself?
Am I an academic?
Equating the position
to publishing academic writing
– *traditional* academic writing –
The hierarchy of the university
ingrained in my approach,
what I see as productive and worthwhile.
I need to decolonize my mind.
Am I not producing and sharing knowledge
when I work with students?
Am I not helping them to produce
their own knowledge?

I exist in this unsettling position
of helping students reach writing goals
Dictated by restrictive
institutional expectations.
Am I actually helping?

So I attempt to move beyond self-focused writing
to be vulnerable
to challenge myself
to support graduate writers
with care.

Tough Questions speaks back to the rest of the cluster with a depth I did not expect. The question, “who am I writing for?” was initially intended to challenge my understanding of academic writing and what I saw as productive and legitimate knowledge creation. However, my musings reflect solutions suggested by other voices in the cluster: vulnerability, reframing, modeling, and care. It further emphasizes the need for challenging institutional norms to

support graduate writers. The question “who am I waiting for?” also asked me to consider my motivations for attempting this new reflective method and writing this paper. Although my intention was to improve my teaching to better assist students and to push the boundaries of academic writing (if only a little), I began to question if my motivations came from a selfish place of professional standing. After going through the process of creating the found poetry cluster and analyzing it, I think the true answer is somewhere in between. However, what this reflection-turned-poem has accomplished is to continually remind me to take the risk of being vulnerable as a graduate academic writing support specialist and an academic writer. It shaped this paper and illustrated how the method of poetic inquiry met its intended purpose of allowing me to be more vulnerable and critical in my reflective teaching practice.

My reflective poetic inquiry method has helped me to discover several new tools to develop graduate students’ writing process, along with my own. As a writer who generally finds visual methods unhelpful, it was important to be reminded that playful tools are options I need to learn and share with graduate students, such as exploring the shape of your writing through LEGO (Jones & Williams, 2018) or using toy animals to externalize and appraise critical voices (Badenhorst, 2018). The method of my research has itself become a tool for my own writing development. Creating found poems of the literature helped me determine major topics when writing my literature review. I also had the opportunity to test using personal reflection and found poetry creation as a teaching tool to guide students through learning reflections. I plan to use the method in future writing workshops to enhance “students’ resilience, confidence, and flexibility” (Jones & Williams, 2018, p. 150).

Conclusion

The process of writing personal reflections and reading journal articles on graduate writing development to create a found poetry cluster has been a difficult but productive exercise for me to evaluate, and determine changes to, my instructional approaches as well as my own writing process. I encourage other writing instructors to attempt their own version of this reflective method utilizing autoethnography, poetic inquiry, arts-based inquiry, or any other method that is unfamiliar and challenges them to work beyond the usual boundaries of their academic writing.

My three research questions led me to poetic inquiry as a reflective method for academic writing and teaching pedagogy, but the method also allowed me to approach these questions in a more critical way. Poetic inquiry guided me towards reframing my writing process, which in turn has shifted my approach to teaching academic writing to graduate students. I learned the language of enculturation and discourse community, but also came to understand that the push to recognize these aspects of the writing process are interconnected with vulnerability, resistance, and student agency. The literature pointed to a need for experienced academics and

educators to model genre play and share their writing struggles. Poetic inquiry gave me the opportunity to put this resistance into practice with a playful writing and research method that required reframing my approaches to and concepts of academic writing.

The major limitation of this research was time and space. For personal reflection and development outside of the constraints of a wordcount, the reflection and poetic creation process could be lengthened and expanded, adding newfound poems to the cluster when new teaching reflection and literature reading occurs. An ongoing reflective process could help instructors and writers to create a process for continual development.

In relation to academic writers in general, I cannot ignore the accessibility barrier to this method of poetic inquiry. One's experience and agency as a writer and instructor may affect their ability to try this method. The norms of discourse communities remain restrictive in many fields, programs, and institutions. New members of more flexible discourse communities are more likely to have the agency to use more resistive and norm-testing approaches like reflective found poetry clusters.

Academic writing instructors and academic writers should engage with different mediums and spaces for their writing reflections and poetry creation. For example, if they are visual thinkers, they could add doodles or sketchnotes to their poetry cluster, perhaps making it into a collage. The most important requirement for this method to be successful is to find an approach and space that feels safe and allows for risk-taking and vulnerability. Although it is a risky method, the potential for critical reflection and development makes it worthwhile. While my focus was on academic writing instruction, this method of creating found poetry clusters from personal reflections and academic articles could also be applied to reflective teaching practices in other areas and fields.

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