

WORKING PAPER
Reference Number 3424

**Poetic evidence from emotional landscapes:
A queer way to do research**

John J. Guiney Yallop
The University of Western Ontario

Abstract

Through poetry I journey through the emotional landscape of my lived experiences. This journey includes stops in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Some queer points-of-interest are found in moments as elementary and secondary school student, as university student, as teacher, and as graduate student. The itinerary includes guided tours of identities and communities and of finding voice in poetry.

This presentation will be a reading of four to five poems written for the purpose of my PhD Dissertation, *OUT of place: A poetic journey through the emotional landscape of a gay person's identities within/without communities*. The poems in this presentation are both autobiographical and fictionalized creations of my imagination, borrowed pieces of events, places, and people sewn together into a patchwork much like one of the quilts my mother used to make. Participants are invited to listen, to connect, and to respond.

POEM

“Art makes visible the cognitive life of the senses and the imagination,” writes Peter Abbs (2003, p. 56) in his polemic about education, the arts and postmodern culture. The senses and imagination are passages to and through the emotions; equally, they are passages from the emotions. Abbs also states that “the arts provide the distinctive metaphors and technical means for reflecting the invisible life of human experience” (p. 40). Writing about autobiography, he says that in thinking about it we become aware of “the historicity of the self” (p. 86). Janet Miller (1998) writes about using her autobiographical work to queer the curriculum. Like Miller’s, my autobiographical writings are an attempt to queer educational settings, or “both the subject and the forms that autobiography typically [takes] in educational settings” (p. 367). For my Master of Education research I used stories from my own life to take a critical look at how gays experience school (Guiney, 2002). Currently in the fourth year of my doctoral studies, I am using poetry, i.e. “form,” to research the emotional landscape of a gays person’s identities within/without communities, i.e. “subject.” Shaping the framework for my research are two communities that I have lived in, namely the Roman Catholic and the education communities.

The data for my study is a book of poetry I wrote. The book of poetry includes a few poems I had previously written and published, some poems which I wrote as part of my PhD Dissertation Proposal, and mostly poems that I wrote during the course of the research. Personal artifacts and memory were used as catalysts as I wrote the poems. I am now in the process of writing an exegesis of the book of poetry. The exegesis will

serve both as a critical examination of the work and a reflective exposition of the process of doing this research.

POEM

Poems evoke unexpected images and allow me access to emotional data. Poems also allow for imaginative leaps. What has it meant for me to have identities in communities? What has it meant to feel the same and a part of or, conversely, to feel different and apart from? I used the lens of “difference” to focus my poems by writing about times when I tried to fit in, to be like the other members of the communities, and times when I tried to differentiate myself from others in the communities. I wanted, and I want, to use the lens of “difference” to evoke a different understanding in myself and in others. I want to provoke my readers, and my listeners, to enlarge boundaries, to allow more understanding of what is possible. As well as compiling a manuscript for a book of poetry for possible future publication, I perform my poems at various venues, academic conferences (Guiney Yallop, 2004), such as this one, and by publishing them in literary and scholarly journals (Guiney Yallop, 2005).

Although, as Longenbach (2004) says, “poems cannot help but leave things out, and while the job of interpretation is in some sense to supply what the poem has appeared to omit, we return to poems when they make our job difficult. Poems show us how it feels to like trouble” (p. 94). “Poems, [also]..., give our hearts permission and hope” (Pelias, 2004, p. 172). And, as Anne Hart writes on the front flap of Carl Leggo’s (1994) collection of poems about growing up on Lynch’s Lane in Corner Brook, Newfoundland,

poetry can make us “feel we’ve been there.” I want to help my listeners and readers feel they’ve been there.

POEM

A tripod of theories (arts informed research, autoethnography, and queer theory) forms the base which supports this research. Arts-informed research enables us “to ‘think’ in...the imaginative realms of the poet and the artist” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2002, p. 210). Knowles and Cole (2002) make the claim “that arts-informed research has the transformative potential to reach out from the academy, beyond its sacred halls to communities beyond” (pp. 199-200). My work is intended to reach both ways, into the halls of the academy to push further at what it means to do research and out from those halls to share the results with others.

Poetry is an art form. As a method poetry is located within arts-informed research. “Just as the microscope and camera have allowed different ways for us to see what would otherwise be invisible, so too poetry and prose are different mediums that give rise to ways of saying that might not otherwise be expressed” (Cahnmann, 2003, p. 31). The language of poems, according to James Longenbach (2004) “is the language of self-questioning” (p. xi). Hoogland (1996) writes that “[p]oems and stories depend upon emotions and contrasts to develop their themes. Through storytelling,” she tells us, “our experiences are re-contextualized and made comprehensible in new ways” (p. 16). Poetry is also at the margins of culture, and of research. “But the marginality of poetry,” as Longenbach (2004) says, “is in many ways the source of its power, a power contingent

on poetry's capacity to resist itself more strenuously than it is resisted by the culture [and the research community] at large" (p. 1). Writing a book of poetry has helped me bring into focus the subject of my research, i.e. the emotional landscape of a gay person's identities within/without community.

"Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). One of the concerns raised about autoethnography, by scholars and by organizations that fund scholarly work, particularly when it is suggested that such work could be therapeutic for the researcher / writer, is the potential for self-absorption. Carolyn Ellis (1997) addresses this concern. "I want to reclaim self-absorption, not explain it away, or cop out by saying all of us are self-absorbed. Autoethnography should be self-absorbed. If you're not absorbed with the topic of your research, how can you write well about it? Of course, a person writing autoethnography also needs to be absorbed with the world...and... processes...which also work their way into one's identity" (pp. 122-123).

Queer theory challenges established, accepted as given, understandings. Annamarie Jagose (1996) reminds us that "'queer' is not simply the latest example in a series of words that describe and constitute same-sex desire transhistorically but rather a consequence of constructionist problematising of any allegedly universal term" (p. 74). 'Identity' and 'community' are two such terms. "As presently constituted, queer seeks to disrupt the discrete fixed locations of identity by understanding sexuality and its meanings not as a priori or given but as constructed, contingent, fashioned and refashioned, and relational" (Talbut, 2000, p. 3). Community is where relations happen.

Queer theory allows me to think outside fixed boundaries, to see the queer points-of-interest as I travel across the emotional landscape of a gay person's identities within/without communities, and how both identities and communities are involved in the construction of each other. "Thinking and queer, like communities and identities, are temporal rather than spatial, related rather than autonomous" (Talburt, 2000, p. 11).

While queer theorists, arts-informed researchers, and autoethnographers have borrowed from each others' fields, I believe that my work will make a contribution because it simultaneously poetically, autobiographically, and queerly explores the emotional aspects of a gay person's experience of identity in community. While this research is messy in that the researched is the researcher, the researcher has created, generated, the data for the research, and the researcher is doing the exegesis of that data, the potential of such writing has many benefits. Lived experiences told and lived experiences examined and reflected upon can serve as both a mirror and a window for the reader / listener. The particulars of one life, evocatively communicated, can be used by others, including educators, to reflect on emotional landscapes, those of others and even their own.

Poem

Citations

- Abbs, P. (2003). *Against the flow: Education, the arts and postmodern culture*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Cahnmann, M. (2003). The Craft, Practice, and Possibility of Poetry in Educational Research. *Educational Researcher*(April), 29-36.
- Ellis, C. (1997). Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Emotionally About Our Lives. In W. G. Tierney & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Representation and the text: Re-framing the narrative voice* (pp. 115-139). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2 ed., pp. 733-768). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Guiney, J. J. (2002). *School Life for Gays: A Critical Study through Story*. Unpublished Master of Education, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario.
- Guiney Yallop, J. J. (2005). Exploring an emotional landscape: Becoming a researcher by reawakening the poet. *Brock Education* 14(2).
- Guiney Yallop, J. (2004, July 16 - 17). *Exploring An Emotional Landscape Through Poetry: Searching for the Researcher's Poetic Voice, and the Poet's Research Methodology*. Paper presented at the Innovative and Alternative Research Paradigms in Education, Brock University in St. Catharines, ON, Canada.
- Hoogland, C. (1996). The Geography of Consciousness: The Dutch immigrants' daughter as artist. *Journal of The Canadian Society for Education Through Art*, 27(2), 14-21.

- Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory: An introduction*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Knowles, J. G., & Cole, A. L. (2002). Transforming Research: Possibilities for Arts-Informed Scholarship? In E. O'Sullivan, A. Morrell & M. A. O'Connor (Eds.), *Expanding the Boundaries of Transformative Learning: Essays on Theory and Praxis* (pp. 199-213). New York: Palgrave.
- Leggo, C. (1994). *Growing Up Perpendicular On The Side Of A Hill*. St. John's, Newfoundland: Killick Press.
- Longenbach, J. (2004). *The Resistance To Poetry*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Miller, J. L. (1998). Autobiography as a Queer Curriculum Practice. In W. F. Pinar (Ed.), *Queer Theory in Education* (pp. 365-373). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Pelias, R. J. (2004). *A Methodology of the Heart: Evoking Academic and Daily Life*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Pinar, W. F., Reynolds, W. M., Slattery, P., & Taubman, P. M. (2002). *Understanding Curriculum: An Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Curriculum Discourses* (Vol. 17). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Talburt, S. (2000). Introduction: Some Contradictions and Possibilities of *Thinking Queer*. In S. Talburt & S. R. Steinberg (Eds.), *Thinking Queer: Sexuality, Culture, and Education* (pp. 235). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.