

Writing Courageously

Chantelle E. Caissie

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Faculty of Education, Yorkville University
Fredericton, New Brunswick



Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Ellyn Lyle

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Abstract

While “education is a profoundly human endeavour” (Lyle, 2018, p. 257), the unique and deeply intimate aspects of self are pressured to conform to the conventional limits of academic writing (Badley, 2020b). Drawing support from scholars like St. Pierre (2017), Badley (2019, 2020a, 2020b), and Yoo (2019), I hope to challenge the dominant academic discourse that favours objectivity and advocate post-academic or *dangerous writing* as a pathway to transformative education. Being critically awake to the inescapable tendency to teach who we are, I take up writing as a way of knowing (Richardson, 2002; St. Pierre, 2018) to explore academic resistance towards non-conventional (accessible) writing styles. As a learner and educator, I am also interested in understanding how writing from this place of exploratory freedom might promote human solidarity and community (Badley, 2020a). Resisting the pressure to write academically, I access poetry as an entry point to experiment with new ways of reflecting on the human experience (Wiebe, 2015). I hope that, through this research, I can become an academic ally, advocating for meaningful and relevant learning that does not do violence to learners by denying their lived experiences and creative voice. Because “our humanness is integral to teaching and learning,” (Lyle, 2020, p. 121) I hope to add my voice to the growing scholarship that seeks to re/humanise the landscape of education.

Keywords: post-qualitative inquiry; post-academic writing; writing as a way of knowing; and poetic inquiry.

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Writing Courageously

In education, we are too often cajoled or bullied into denying unique and deeply intimate aspects of self that offer important context and credibility to human *being*. Marginalizing the critical aspects of our personal humanity prevents us from exploring deep and relational understandings not hemmed in by academic conventions that bracket self, subject, and other (Badley, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Lyle, 2016; Palmer, 2017). In traditional academic writing, we fail to write our humanity, often fearful that exploring beyond conventional practices will risk academic status, credibility, and publishing opportunities. As a result, academics often adopt a needlessly complex, impersonal, and sterile writing style that perpetuates a narrative of privilege and exclusion (Badley, 2017, 2020a). However, writing can be adventurous, exploratory, even bold. Yoo (2019) and Badley (2020b) referred to this kind of writing as unapologetic or *dangerous*. Taking heart from their assurance that more is possible, I call on educators to resist the temptation of producing what Badley (2020a) referred to as, “academic bullshit” (p. 248). We must resist the temptation to write conditionally, refusing the neoliberal and corporate gatekeeper that measures our academic worth by our academic output (Latremouille, 2018; Badley, 2020a).

Situating myself in post qualitative inquiry (PQI), I resist methodological bracketing in favour of honouring and attending to the strange and deeply intimate ontological aspects of living in real time (Lyle, 2018; St. Pierre, 2018). Being critically awake to the inescapable tendency to teach who we are, I draw on writing as a way of knowing (Richardson, 2002; St. Pierre, 2005). I consciously and willfully resist the pressure to write academically; instead, I access poetry as an entry point to experiment with new ways of understanding and reflecting on the human experience (Wiebe, 2015). Through poetry, I invite scholarly writers to push

academic boundaries, creating space for non-conventional writing styles that honour the inclusion of self. It is my hope, through creating a brave space for lived experiences, educators are inspired to draw upon the deeply personal, unpredictable, and often forgotten experiences that have shaped or altered our perceptions of who we are and who we are yet to become.

Context of Study

Before entering graduate school, my experiences in formal learning encouraged me to aim low. I was 13 years old when my Grade 8 teacher shared the unsolicited *academic advice* that, according to the Canadian grading system where my academic worth and performance was based on a numerical value, I was below average. Convinced that I was intellectually flawed, I became a chameleon, adapting to the educational climate in hopes of appeasing the majority, despite my internal discomfort. As I progressed through formal schooling, I began to wrestle with feeling *othered*, a discomfort that followed me to university.

As an undergraduate student, eager to reassemble the pieces of my fragmented self, my disappointment grew as I encountered a lifeless curriculum that measured academic worth and intellect based on repetition and recall. The feeling of being othered began to overpower my creative and playful side, rendering me voiceless. Exhausted in my efforts to renegotiate the dead language of academia, I found myself exchanging personal scholarship for theoretical and author-vacant text (Badley, 2019).

By the time I entered my graduate program, I had become an expert at hiding my humanity. From this sterile place, though, I was introduced to the work of Palmer. Palmer (2017) argued that teaching and learning, for better or worse, is a human endeavour and that acknowledging the self that comes to these contexts is neither selfish nor narcissistic. Gathering cast aside courage, I began to write without fear of judgement. At first, writing was an emotional

release and an opportunity to re/claim my voice. But, soon, Palmer's work ignited something long forgotten in me, and I began to wonder more broadly how we might engage in learning that does not deny our lived experiences.

As a health professional transitioning into the education sector, I also found resonance in the work of St. Pierre (2018) who challenged the very concept of conventional qualitative inquiry. In her refusal to subscribe to a systematized method of quantifying how we come to know, she developed the living theory of PQI (2018, 2019, 2020). Embracing an unstructured relationship of inquiry pushes us towards the *too strange*, or *too much* of experimentation. PQI invites the researcher to walk along the brink of the unimaginable and reinfuses humanity as an entry point for creative uncertainty (St. Pierre, 2018).

As a result of PQI's non-adherence to methodological bracketing, I draw support from Richardson (1988, 2002) and St. Pierre (2018, 2019, 2020) as I engage in writing as a way of knowing. Advocating that this work—work that Yoo (2019) and Badley (2020b) referred to as *writing dangerously*—contains essential messages that wake us from our slumber, drawing us toward a deeper understanding and reflective practice that can [re]affirm our humanity.

Aims of Inquiry

Through entering into an exploratory conversation with the literature, I hope to challenge dominant academic discourse that favours objectivity and to advocate for exploring the tender and vulnerable spaces of our interior lives. This aim is supported through post-academic, or dangerous writing, and is regarded as potentially transformative. A comprehensive review of the literature will provide me with a greater depth and understanding of the academic resistance toward non-conventional writing styles. Drawing on the fear fostered within academic culture, I hope to explore ways to bridge the personal and professional through writing that deliberately

creates space for all aspects of the human self to exist together (Lyle, 2020; Palmer, 2017).

Moreover, through our capacity to write vulnerably, we become more attuned to hear and see the comedic, joyful, and harrowing experiences that occupy the *in-between* spaces of our lives (Snowber & Wiebe, 2009).

My goal is to explore how teaching and writing at the site of the *in-between* breaks open critical dialogue that supports the possibilities of engaging in a more humanistic praxis that champions a pedagogy of re/humanisation. I anticipate this conversation will draw attention to writing as relational, advocating that the stories that resonate inspire connection and contribute to transformative learning (Briscoe, 2017). I hope to further strengthen this point, exploring writing as a space of creative freedom, supporting human solidarity and community (Badley, 2020a). It is my hope to lend my voice to those who contribute to the growing scholarship that seeks to re/humanise the landscape of education.

Significance of the Inquiry

The prevailing culture of education often fails to acknowledge our humanity, operating from a reductionist lens that remains preoccupied with compartmentalising knowledge and relying on tokenized checklists to measure academic success (MacKenzie, 2019; Miller, 2019). As educators, we have become lost; our focus has been narrowed to meet the hegemonic standards of a system that draws power from division, contributing to a culture of alienation (MacKenzie, 2019; Palmer, 2017).

Prioritizing and attending to the stories of our lives flavours our writing and learning with warmth and authenticity (Badley, 2019). I began my graduate program feeling broken, consumed by narratives that denied my worth as both student and educator. However, through experimenting with writing inquiries, I was able to explore the critical and vulnerable pieces that

make me human. This liberating experience has led me to aspire towards academic allyship—advocating for meaningful and relevant learning that does not do violence to learners by denying their lived experiences and creative voice.

Epistemological and Ontological Undergirding (~~Theoretical Framework~~)

In finding resonance with St. Pierre's (2018) work, specifically that which challenges conventional qualitative inquiry, I eagerly engage writing as a way of knowing and becoming. In her refusal to subscribe to a systematized method of quantifying how we come to know, St. Pierre (2018, 2019, 2020) developed the living theory of post-qualitative inquiry (PQI). PQI resists methodological enclosure. In its refusal to subscribe to the "big three" of empirical social science research (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods), PQI emerges attending to the strange and deeply intimate ontological aspects of living in real time (St. Pierre, 2018, 2019).

PQI is always becoming. It does not arrive with step-by-step instructions or guidelines, and it cannot be measured (St. Pierre, 2018, 2019). The experimental inquiry evades the structured and conceptual order of conventional research, enabling the inquirer to follow a changing pathway toward a world of living that draws focus "not on things already made, but on things in the making" (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 604). During her dissertation, St. Pierre (2018) shared her exploration of the "aside," defining the writing space as her field of play, a poetic and spirited release, free from academic jargon and parenthetical references. Shifting between the landscapes of conventional academic writing and *the aside*, she learned to trust the unpredictable and seemingly organic spirit of writing, advocating that writing was, undeniably, thinking (St. Pierre, 2018).

Drawing on the unpredictable encounters with the real and strange forces of PQI, St. Pierre's (2019) advocacy for the unapologetic movement of writing as a method of inquiry led

me to the scholarship of Badley (2017, 2019, 2020a, 2020b), who champions post-academic writing. Badley (2017) maintained, “people write well when they have something to say” (p. 181). Often, as academic writers, we fail to extend ourselves beyond objectivity and, as a result, we litter our pages with academic jargon that no one understands, pulled from a place that no one can relate to, and where the author has simply disappeared (Badley, 2019). As self-expressive beings, writing carves a new pathway that dares us to take a risk, to welcome a new adventure in thought (Badley, 2020a).

During the 18th century, exploring an adventurous style of writing, such as poetry, assaulted the pure and singular voice of science (Richardson, 1988). Nonetheless, Richardson (1988) argued that the fabric of our lives and the sociological categories designed to oppress and silence our inquiries *is* our jumping off point, where our stories begin. Resisting the voice of our lived experiences separates our humanity and contributes to a self-constructed condition of alienation (Richardson, 1988). However, operating beyond linguistic borders creates a space to playfully [re]negotiate with text, extending our voices to the ears of the majority, demanding they listen to what we have to say (Thomas, 2018).

As a framework, PQI begins wherever we find ourselves to be, free from methodology, and the conditions of its emergence enable the opportunity to re-connect and re-construct a new pathway of knowing (St. Pierre, 2019). The fluid and evolving nature of PQI provides a strong foundation to explore the raw and vulnerable spaces of what it means to be human. Writing as a method of inquiry invites experimentation, encouraging us to drive aimlessly down an open road without a road map or destination. It is through experimentation where we encounter the authentic voice. Our capacity to engage in difficult writing, creating meaning out of chaos, challenges the complex and dead language of academia (Badley, 2020a).

An Experimental Encounter (~~Methods~~)

The academic guidelines for the exit research component require a methods section. The purpose of this section guides the researcher, offering an objective lens, to review and critique the information gathered. My previous academic background in research has provided me with the academic writing tools to complete this section with ease. However, as I progress in my writing, I find myself resisting the methods section, painfully lulled into a state of boredom by author-vacant text, claiming instead that formalizing and predicting lived experiences is central to understanding (St. Pierre, 2018).

The post qualitative inquirer does not begin at Step 1, and there is no recipe to follow. PQI resists the methodological trap, asking the inquirer to engage in a process of trust that cannot be repeated or predicted. A person simply cannot measure or duplicate a model that emerges anew, created from different worlds of living and becoming (St. Pierre, 2018, 2019). Therefore, cognizant that the steps I take to meaningfully engage with the literature cannot serve as a model for others, I engage here instead in *an experimental encounter*.

In my experimentation with the literature, I will create what has been described as a major academic report as per the guidelines of the University. I will engage with the literature, exploring alternate avenues of knowing and lived experiences that challenge traditional academic practices. I will refrain from attempting to control or formalize the text, allowing it to exist free from structure and scientific labels (St. Pierre, 2019). Resisting the pressure to write academically, I will access poetry as an entry point to experiment with new ways of understanding and reflecting on the human experience (Wiebe, 2015).

An Encounter with the Literature

In this experimental encounter with the literature, I will include both foundational and emerging scholarship. Exploring a wide range of published literature will support my understanding and appreciation of how concepts began and evolved throughout the periods of academic writing (St. Pierre, 2020). As a result of the always becoming nature of PQI, my creative window will be limited as a result of word count. Therefore, I will offer an appendix section where additional writing can exist free from academic penalty. I have identified the following key words to search scholarly literature, “post-qualitative inquiry,” “academic writing,” “writing as a way of knowing,” “poetry,” and “narrative”. I recognize that others may emerge as I, too, am in the process of becoming (Lyle, 2009).

A Poetic Approach

Poetic writing offers an avenue that invites uncertainty and allows for creative exploration that fosters conscious awareness of how we come into being (MacKenzie, 2019). Poetry honours the individual by examining our humanity from a holistic and fluid lens. Through poetic writing, we become more resilient when bullied by traditional methodologies that perpetuate division and order. In living and learning, we crave connection; poetry creates a space that permits multiple meanings to surface through language and fosters a sense of hope through uncertainty and vulnerability (MacKenzie, 2019).

Embracing a poetic approach allows the individual to be seen and heard as a whole. Words such as love, honesty, and trust are not often used when describing education and academic writing. However, the human experience of living and loving should be embraced in education as our vulnerability shapes our identity and transforms praxis by permitting authenticity and uncertainty within the space of learning (Finn, 2015). Poetry invites intimacy

and honours our bravery, recognizing that the shared encounters with our (im)perfect selves cultivates space for new ways of knowing (MacKenzie, 2019).

Researcher's Role & Ethical Considerations

In this inquiry, no consent form or ethics review was completed as I am the sole participant and writer. I am cognizant, though, that personal bias will be present as I engage with the text. I also acknowledge that actively examining past experiences will inevitably evoke emotion (Yoo, 2019) and, committed to self-care, I take reflective breaks throughout my inquiry process. Supporting the timing of unscheduled breaks creates a space to consciously attend to the inner landscape of my life, informing the conditions of where I live and learn (Snowber & Wiebe, 2009). I intend to work collaboratively with my supervisor, ensuring that I remain accountable and present in my writing, resisting the urge to write academically.

I am also mindful of the relationality implicated in being human and that my words may be received differently by different readers. I draw on the support of Yoo (2019), who has advocated that writing dangerously should motivate and terrify the reader. Accessing words coated in emotion and rooted in our experiences invites a new pathway of knowing that we may have never recognized, or felt, without writing (Yoo, 2019). Therefore, my intention is not to do harm to the reader but, rather, evoke emotion that requires the reader to engage in active reflection and pushes towards an inquiry that begins with the too much, and the too strange (St. Pierre, 2018).

Emerging Conversations with the Text (~~Preliminary Literature Review~~)

My first immersion in the literature reveals two major themes: vulnerability in academic writing; and writing as relational for individual and collective learning.

Vulnerability in Academic Writing

Vulnerability is an emotional risk that leaves us exposed and travelling beyond our comfort zone. Brown (2012) explained that one of the most widely accepted myths is that vulnerability correlates with weakness. Society has weaved together a dangerous and collective denial of vulnerability, associating it with a dark emotion characterized by shame and disappointment (Brown, 2012; Finn, 2015). Teaching is an act of vulnerability; we project the condition of our soul onto our students as the complexities of who we are becomes entangled in our subject and way of being together (Palmer, 2017). MacKenzie (2012) maintained that learning is autobiographical, situated in our experiences and central to shaping our perspective of self, others, and the world. Our experiences, though, are often regarded as unreliable and hopelessly subjective within the sphere of academia. Palmer (2017) stated that, as educators hoping to minimize our vulnerability, we often conform to an objective way of knowing as a form of self-protection. Writing dangerously, challenging academic giants who have prioritized cognitive ways of knowing and conventional writing methods is often academic suicide (Yoo, 2019). Academia's incessant need to categorize and quantify our experiences separates our humanity from our work, conditioning us to unconsciously contribute to our own fragmentation (Richardson, 1988).

Our lived experiences, when critically examined, contribute to connection and mutual recognition of one another (Brookfield, 2017). However, conditioned to separate the personal and professional, we drag the roots of our failures and traumas to the depths of our unconscious mind. The failure to explore our own humanity alienates us from ourselves and misinforms our praxis. Vulnerability enables us to write what matter, attending to the constant and courageous emergence of who we are. Writing poetically creates room to find magic in the hurt, and

compassion in the chaos (Finn, 2015). Education does not need more standardized tools or assessments—we need to learn how to be hospitable to the fragility and beauty of our vulnerability (Finn, 2015).

I've missed you.

*I am so sorry,
I know I have been gone for a very long time.*

*I didn't know where to find you,
I was scared,
scared that maybe, maybe you didn't want to be found.*

Do you remember me?

*Do you need me,
Want me?*

*I know you're hurt,
I know you've been hurt.*

I'm hurting too.

*But maybe,
maybe we could hurt together?*

- *My inner child, I am so deeply sorry for your wounds.*

I do not identify as a poet, and I often air on the side of caution as I approach learning from a creative lens. However, in the midst of my own internal chaos and fear, words find me, easing my mind and slowly lulling me into a poetic understanding of how and who my beliefs and assumptions serve. Poetry offers a space to examine our experiences through words, creating a window into our thoughts that identifies the source of our attachments and fears (Faulkner, 2012; MacKenzie, 2019). The challenge of exposing our vulnerability is often the fear that accompanies it (Kenyon, 2019).

The failure to acknowledge our own ambivalence and fear further alienates our sense of being with the world and contributes to shame and disconnectedness (Kenyon, 2019; MacKenzie, 2019). As educators, we often enter the classroom with prescriptive assumptions of how we think teachers and learners should behave. However, in the words of Brookfield (2017), “teaching is never innocent” (p. 2) as the complexities of culture, politics, and consciousness intersect the space of learning and blurs our perception of the effect we have on our students. Poetic inquiry has allowed me to gaze upon the inner critic and offer a landscape for the creative voice to expose my [im]perfect and[un]certain self with love and compassion.

Writing as Relational

Snowber and Wiebe (2009) referred to the body as home to living and breathing text, suggesting that the body offers authentic insight into who we are and how we teach. So much of what we encounter through life—experiences that touch us or scar us—we do not talk about (Snowber & Wiebe, 2009). As educators, our teaching is prescribed, opposed to lived (Snowber & Wiebe, 2009). The adventurous style of *writing dangerously* may appear provocative and reckless upon first glance; however, it enables the reader to inhabit its space, helping us see and hear the text, not from our minds, but from our hearts (Badley, 2020b; Yoo, 2019). Exploring the restricted section of self breaks open the page and invites our vulnerability to exist in the company of others, connecting and commanding a communal transformation in learning and living (MacKenzie, 2019).

Discomfort is inevitable in writing, and often in the wake of our vulnerability we may feel distant from others, alone in our unveiling. However, writing communicates, resonating with the rich complexities of life (Yoo, 2019). Writing, regardless of its creative vessel, ushers us towards real encounters with life, such as illness, violence, and death—encounters we may have

never explored without writing (Yoo, 2019). Through *writing dangerously*, we awaken our fears but, more importantly, we awaken our humanity. In her writing, Yoo (2019) offered reassurance as she echoed the words of her colleague, maintaining that the writer is already within us, prepared and willing to connect, if only, we create the space. Freire (2005) argued, “only dialogue truly communicates” (p. 40); writing poetically creates space for uncertainty and utilizes words as a platform to foster connection and hope. It is through our authenticity and vulnerability that we inspire and [re]instill hope in our learners (MacKenzie, 2019).

Poetry does not reflect, it is a reflexive language that revives the empathetic heart, redirecting the onus of responsibility from *i* to *we* with the intention of fostering deeper debate and critical questioning (Brookfield, 2017; Cunliffe, 2016). As educators, creating a brave space to invite the intimate details of our lives does not alienate, but rather, connects the student and educator, enabling a communal and deeply vulnerable interchange that breathes life back into curriculum (Snowber & Wiebe, 2009). Behar (2009) explained that writing from a place of vulnerability attracts vulnerable readers who seek shelter from the intellectual world. Dangerous writers become our companions—together, we grow collectively, learning and re-constructing our lives from each other’s words (Yoo, 2009).

In/Conclusion

As educators, we are not solely responsible for creating a safe space for our learners; we are also responsible for creating a safe space for self. I believe, as we continue to age, we continue to evolve. Our experiences, but more specifically our failures, provide a window of opportunity to become re-acquainted with the new and changing seasons of our lives. Poetic writing has provided a safe and creative space for me to begin unraveling the critical and fragile aspects of my humanity. As an emerging educator, if I continue to resist and build a wall

between my personal experience and academic praxis, I am more susceptible to teach from a place of discomfort and division (Bochner, 1997). I believe that nurturing a trusting relationship between the student and educator does not begin until we have come to learn how to trust ourselves fully. It is my hope to lend my voice to those who contribute to the growing scholarship that seeks to re/humanise the landscape of education. Advocating that our darkness is just as valuable as our light.

write the story.
push
your hands
into the dirtiest parts of yourself.

take the
rot & decay
& turn it into
nourishment & life.
water it
& sing to it
& show it
sunlight.

grow a beautiful garden
from your aching
& teach yourself how to thrive from it
write your story.

—*the sign you've been waiting for.*

(Lovelace, 2017, p. 162)

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Appendix A: Proposed Timeline

Schedule	Date	Description
Pre-Capstone	July 12 – July 18	Connect with capstone supervisor via ZOOM teleconference/meeting to review timelines and process of working in collaboration with one another
Pre-Capstone	July 19 – July 25	Submit proposal to supervisor for review and feedback; make necessary revisions as needed
Week 1	September 07 – September 13	Schedule ZOOM meeting, discuss proposal and revisions made – final edits as needed
Week 2	September 14 – September 20	Submit proposal – begin organizing necessary material for literature review once approval has been granted
Week 3	September 21 – September 27	Await feedback; begin enhanced critical literature review (pending approval)
Week 4	September 28 – October 04	Critical literature review
Week 5	October 05 – October 11	Critical literature review – ZOOM schedule check-in/discussion
Week 6	October 12 – October 18	Method for reviewing result
Week 7	October 19 – October 25	Complete ethical considerations and additional steps as required
Week 8	October 26 – November 01	Schedule ZOOM to discuss progress/support with Supervisor
Week 10	November 02 – November 08	Review suggestions from peer review and make any necessary changes to paper
Week 11	November 09 – November 15	Necessary final revisions to be made to paper; receive sign-off from supervisor prior to submitting paper to the Capstone office for 2 nd reader
Week 12	November 16 – November 22	Wait patiently
Week 13	November 23 – November 29	Wait patiently
Week 14	November 30 – December 06	Once feedback has been received from 2 nd reader, review and edit paper for grammar and APA errors – in addition to any necessary changes as requested by 2 nd reader; re-submit Upon receiving additional feedback from 2 nd reader, make any necessary changes as requested Finish revisions from the 2 nd reader
Week 15	December 07 – December 13	Finish revisions for 2 nd reader; review and edit paper for grammar and APA errors; submit final paper and await final evaluation

Appendix B: Unrestricted Writing

*Words are like musical notes,
each word represents a pitch and duration of sound.*

Words, when played together, create harmony and depth.

Our words can be happy, upbeat, and playful to the soul

Or

*Romantic and gentle,
as they tuck us in closer to their warmth on a chill September night.*

Or

*Our words can be tragic, shattering our perception of the world and scaring the inner landscape
of our innocence.*

Our words, correspond to the song playing in our hearts.

I want to explode.

*I feel lost,
yet found.*

*Crippled,
yet mobile.*

*My words are on the tip of my tongue,
but I remain guarded,
refusing to allow an ounce of creativity
to come out.*

What if they find out?

*What if they know that I am no one,
no one worth betting on*

and certainly,

no one worth taking seriously.