



Lessons from the Raspberry Patch: Poetry and Art Come Alive

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Abstract

This qualitative inquiry is the account of one academic who used poetry and art as reflective mediums while applying for tenure and promotion in a university environment. The autobiographical framework guiding this work adds a rich layer of understanding to the lived experience of applying for tenure as an academic in a tenure-track role. This paper suggests that using arts-based mediums as reflective tools can ease the journey to tenure. Through thematic analysis of the poetry and art created, three findings emerged: first, the importance of considering the creation of poetry and art as mediums to express and explore the reflective practitioner's role in the academy; second, the importance of creating writing spaces and protecting time needed to engage and critically analyze our works; finally, for each of us as practitioners to engage in self-care activities while inquiring into tensions within our work practices.

Keywords: reflective practice, creation of poetry and art

APA citation: Kuhnke, J. L. (2023). Lessons from the raspberry patch: Poetry and art come alive. *LIRIC Journal*, 3(1), 28–50.

Introduction

This inquiry explores one academic's experience of creating and analyzing poetry and art. Greene (1995) states art can be on the margins of our life, or we can live within art and allow it to 'fill the intimations of freedom and presence' (p. 134). I yearned to live within art to find voice and joy while on the journey to apply for tenure and promotion in a Canadian university (Larson et al., 2019; Phinney, 2009; Tremblay, 2017). This reflexive inquiry (Etherington, 2004) shares a story (Coles, 2004) through the creation of poetry and art. Poetry can be a creative form of writing that reflects a narrative, tale, or a situation from which one seeks to share and learn (Ely, 2007; Finley, 2011), and may be used to communicate and display outcomes of research inquiries (Ndlovu, 2018). Art created is a form of responsive expression using photography, objects, and painting (Dewey, 1934). In this work, art is used as an expression of 'reflexivity and the active negotiation of one's multiple biases and perspectives in meaning-making endeavors' (Rollings, 2013, p. 495).

In the university setting, reflexive practitioners can make important contributions as they seek to learn and gain insight from a self-review of activities in which they engage (Etherington, 2004; Schon, 1983). As a practitioner who values reflexive practice, I leaned into this knowledge to attend to tensions experienced while developing the documents for the tenure and promotion package. I knew from past experiences that a reflexive practice was of benefit as it often moves me to engage in self-care and to pay attention to how I think, feel, and behave when teaching and researching (Kuhnke, 2021, 2022; Kuhnke & Jack-Malik, 2021, 2022).

In relation to reflexive practice, Etherington (2004) reminds us that participating in this practice can be difficult and challenging, yet upon engagement, it can lead one to wonder and envision new possibilities, helping to identify potential changes in life. This work is important, as it promotes a growing understanding and perspective on activities within the university. However, when sharing one's reflexive process, verbally, artistically, or in writing, one may need to attend to feelings of uncertainty; in contrast, it may bring accusations of self-indulgence from readers and other researchers (Etherington, 2004). In my lived experience as a registered nurse, being a reflexive practitioner takes energy and time. As it is required as part of my professional development, I have grown in my understanding and sharing of this practice (Schon, 1983).

Frameworks Guiding This Study

The role of poetry as a narrative form of creative writing guided this work. Margot Ely's (2007) work, *In-forming Re-presentations* and descriptions of the use of poetry in research inspired my engagement. Ely (p. 569) reminds us that when we create poetry, we should respect and attend to the 'energy, commitment, courage, stick-to-itiveness, and a deep acceptance' required to attend to the processes in which we engage. Ely describes poetry as providing a space and a place to be uncertain and allow for the presentation of research findings:

Poetry allows for maximum input in and between the lines. Poems streamline, encapsulate, and define, usually with brevity but always with the intent to plumb the heart of the matter; to bring the reader to live the emotions, the tone, the physicality, the voiced and not-voiced moments. Poems spotlight particular events in ways that lift them out of the often overwhelming flood of life so that they can be understood as part of that. Complex business. (p. 575)

Duduzile Ndlovu (2018) eloquently states that the creation of poetry aids in dissemination of research outcomes:

Poetry is one way that researchers, myself included, have tried to involve participants in making sense of research outcomes; it is also seen by some as a way to foster more humane interactions between a research subject and researcher. The potential benefit of using poetry as part of research is something I continue to ponder. There are different ways poetry can humanise research: it helps to infuse otherwise technical or verbose research reports with emotion. (para. 2)

Finally, poetry may provide a creative outlet for a situation to be shared (Simecek & Rumbold, 2016). Poetry in this study was created in a safe writing place and space where tensions associated with life as an academic could be explored and eased. These reflective activities are purposeful creative acts that result in a growing understanding of self and of one's role in the academy. Poetry creation can be diverse—written online, hand-written, texted, and/or sent in an email to oneself. Poetry once analyzed can bring forth new understandings of artistic mediums and of the reflexive practice (Etherington, 2004). When one ponders how to embed new learning into one's life, more doors open, and change may occur (Greene, 1987). Ely (2007) states that poetry places an 'emphasis on transparency...that is, we are to write not as unknown, all-knowing forces but as people who share our stances, methods, feelings, biases, reasoning, successes, and failures' (p. 578).

The creation of art may include photographs, use of multiple mediums and found objects (Iverson, 2014). This was important as I sought to engage in creation of art in response to the tensions I was experiencing (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1995; Rollings, 2013). Art can become ‘a mediator...a go-between of artist and perceiver’ (p. 207). Creating art and taking photographs afforded me travel across the land, developing living documents and art from which I could read, reflect, and analyze (Dewey, 1934). These efforts provided opportunities to view my practice as an educator and researcher in new ways (Greene, 1995). The arts engage us from the ‘purely instinctual and unconscious, to the fully cognitive’ (Rollings, 2013, p. 133). Arts-based methods can be a ‘performative turn’ (Finley, 2011, p. 442) supporting us to nudge back against the dominant written and text-based academic world.

Creating art was an important part of this reflective inquiry. Photographs and art from found objects provided a much-needed tension release. Planning a photograph, filing the image, and writing reflective notes alongside was part of the study process. My art workshop provided a place and space where time pauses, and reflection could occur alongside the tenure track journey. Significantly, I was gifted a paddle—the physical motions of painting it the colour blue brought forth tension release and emotional joy (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962).

Finally, the role of a first-hand story (Coles, 1989, 2004) is threaded throughout this inquiry. Stories, sometimes in poetic format, are our way of weaving a sense of coherence in our life (Crites, 1971). Crites states that stories are part of our personal inner identity and shape how we dance, create, sing, and portray ourselves and our lives. Coles (2004) further states that the writers of stories (texts)

send words our way meant to ask or answer, to declare or refute, to push a matter further or second-guess it, all in the name of communication, exploration, discussion...giving us the food for thought we so often ache to have available. (p. xii)

Research Aim

Using a biographical (Roberts, 1982) approach, I inquired into the role of telling a story alongside creation of poetry and art while applying for and completing the mandatory processes associated with university tenure and promotion. I researched self as subject and therefore use ‘I’ throughout this work (Roberts, 1982). This approach was appropriate due to the nature of the inquiry and the inclusion of lived events and experiences. In this

inquiry, the auto-account is systematically analyzed and examined within the sociocultural context (Schwartz, 2007). Study findings are presented in poetic and visual format, each analyzed in relation to a life lived in an academic setting.

Methodology

Data Collection

Data in this inquiry were poems and art created over 15 months (April 2021 – August 2022). Creations included hand-written poetry (n=20), photographs (n=53), and a singular wooden paddle recovered from the ocean, dried, sanded, and hand painted. Each piece was created in response to and alongside tensions experienced. Poems were filed, dated, and timed. During the 15 months, I read, reread, and edited the works. I added colours and various symbols to replace hand-drawn doodles and sketches embedded throughout and to add emphasis to the content. Photographs were also dated, timed, and filed. Each image had a text file with reflexive notes on my internal experiences when taking the photo (tensions, thoughts, feelings). The image location was noted as well (raspberry patch, art workshop, and/or in the bush—see Figure 1).

Data Analysis

Findings were thematically analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and visually presented in a poetic format as used by Ndlovu (2018). Rollings (2013) discusses the importance of making sense of visual tools of inquiry. In this case, I sought to interact with the created works to describe my ‘understandings of human perception’ (p. 502) while feeling vulnerable—open to criticism and critics. First-person stories run the risk of being self-centred (Ely, 2007), yet they are also rich data from which learnings can emerge. I sought to unknow the known, predictable process that seemed evasive.

Data was analyzed after each creation and during the development and critique of the manuscript. I reflected on each creation, making field notes and asking critical questions of myself about the process of creating (Braun & Clarke, 2013) while immersed within the academy. This parallel and intertwined questioning and writing were an important part of my analysis. At times the contrast between creating and living academic rules seemed salient and tension filled. To understand potential critics of this analysis and to learn from examples of how to fashion a presentation of this study, I leaned into

Denzin's (2015) discussions on the challenges of publishing experimental works. Original poems, art created, and photographs were edited several times, and it was important to realize that time elapsed is another layer of performance that enriched the study findings.

Findings

Poem 1: Emerging, Expanding, Moving and Growing Forward

I need to move away from the *tensions*  *associated* with
Writing a tenure and promotion application package—
The academic rules are clear...though I really did
Not know what documents to include....

My colleagues and research peers guided me...
The daily writing tensions mounted, revisions, and re-writing were tiring.
My neck and shoulders ached deeply—my eyes sore—
I **urgently** need to physically move from the laptop.

My body and brain **exhausted**
The words and images taunt me as they do not yet read or appear as I
envision

And
I feel small.
I worry...
Fear of failure...and I
Feel very small, and
Of the **critical eyes** that will read my work... -
These feelings prevail...

**In response, I head out to my summer-
bearing, raspberry patch**
Standing in the patch I view the emerging
crop—
I stretch my arms high above my head - to
the heavens.
I photograph their beauty
My neck pain recedes.
Bright red and golden berries beckon
across the rows.

Figure 1
Raspberries standing tall.



Joy rises inside and I smile broadly

The bright berries glow in sharp contrast
To the gently moving dark green foliage
The stalks grow tall, WELL above my head

Dry and cool breezes embrace me—

My cheeks warmed by the rising sun—bringing
Forth a calming effect...

My fingers become quickly red and stained with juice as I
Gently and deftly pick the harvest

I hear the sound of berries dropping into the metal bowl
Winter food

I regularly bend deeply to find berries hiding under the leaves
The juicy flavors sweeten my tongue.

As I harvest the ripened berries I know
The next batch rests in the morning sun...

Green, yellow, and lightly ripened
They will be ready tomorrow...

**Yet
I
must
go
back
to
writing
at
the
desk...**

Back to the unknown...

What is a
tenure
and
promotion
track
package?

...I search for samples online

...eager to complete the application successfully!!!

Tensions prevail

Tensions rose inside me

And peers remained loyal

My shoulders and neck ache

The angst in my gut returns.

Analysis of Poem 1: Visual and Poetic Lessons

At the time I was writing my tenure and promotion application, I began to engage in reflexive writing and creation of art (Etherington, 2004). As I was not fully sure what documents were required by the university application, I read literature and sought support from my dean. As well, I joined a group of peers engaged in a similar application process. We met online weekly for several hours, due to the coronavirus pandemic. Over five months we developed our applications, and we sought to clarify the process (Strunk, 2020). In response, I created art, took photographs, and wrote poetry about the insecurities and tensions I experienced. Berg and Seeber (2016) reminded me of the ‘changes in the university climate [which] have increased the expectations of research “output” while at the same time increasing overall workloads, make it more difficult than ever to set aside time in the face of the more immediate...demands’ (p. 86).

In the poems, I used different font types, sizes (bold and italics) to add emphasis to the emotions reflected (Ely, 2007). Merleau-Ponty’s (1945/1962) phenomenology of perceptions guided my sense experiences and knowledge. Embedding shapes and colours aided in creating a palate of beauty outside the typical black font. The variation in sentence length and movement of the text across the page reflect the multiple emotions and movement of feelings experienced. It thereby adds a layer of description and adds voice to the poems. These elements aided in describing tensions experienced and demonstrated a way to express bodily movement as the poetic text moves to the left and right sides of the page. Dewey (1981) states in his reflections on the psychology of physical efforts that our response to tension (spiritual or intellectual) may present as a ‘strain...knitting of the brows and forehead...at the same time there is general contraction of the system as a whole’ (p. 150). Further, the use of symbols and hyphens aids in the flow when reading about these life events without distortion. The use of colours in the poem (e.g., red, yellow, blue, and green type) expresses heightened emotions.

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) emphasizes the importance of colour in our art and life. Throughout the analysis, I regularly returned to his descriptions of varied art mediums and use of colours in relation to bodily sense experiences. He states, ‘the colour of the visual field affects the accuracy of the subject’s reactions, whether it is a question of performing a movement of a given extent or measuring with a finer a definite length’ (pp. 242–243). The relationship of colour, text, and font size is an attempt to holistically present one’s felt experience of ‘being brought into relation

with an external being, whether it be in order to open my self to it [the reality of academia] or to shut myself off from it' (p. 248). Furthermore, the act of re-presenting the poetry (editing, reading, rereading aloud) is a performative act; it is my performative act and my expression of voice (Fels, 1998).

I also leaned into the writings of Maxine Greene. Greene (1995) states that the elements in the poetic text are in fact an artistic expression of an educative moment in an educator's life. Greene (1987) reminds us of the role of painting, music, dance, and performance acts in aesthetic education. As teachers and educators, we have a responsibility to break down barriers that exclude one from expressing experience. Personally, I believe and understand myself to be greater than grey-scale text in a document. Therefore, I wanted to capture the diversity of my mind and ways of expressing experience. Yes, I am fascinated by words, yet the presentation or re-presentation (Ely, 2007) is an additional responsibility. Greene (1987) encourages us to take up that effort and to keep in mind when doing so, that

we can never exhaust or use up any work of art—that every time you see a Monet or hear a Mozart quartet or watch a Balanchine dance performance, there is always more than could have been predicted, more to explore. (p. 78)

Poem 2: The Application is Submitted and The System Will Not Take My Application

The tension builds as I prepare the application package.
Precious moments drain away....
Time dominates...



The 24-hour clock moves quickly
My peers remain loyal.
Daily, I read and re-write as the pending application date looms
I carefully plan and
consider art created
for
an appendix.

Finally
I am ready—
Ready to submit—
I am early—
No,
I am a week early!
That is me and
It pleases me, reassures me...
Yet,
the technology system
will not upload my application.
I called the support line.
'Yes, it is a "giant" pdf file' I say
I try again, and again, and again.
I cried in response.
Five days left.
I went outside to the bush to walk taking deep breaths.
It will be okay I tell myself.
I tried again to no avail.
I drove to the university
the technology access better, I hoped...
Four days left.
The submission will still not upload.
I download emotionally...
Three days left.
Finally, the technician explains steps to be taken.
Two days left.
Later
in
the
 Same
 day,
the
application
uploads!
I am grateful for the technicians.
I am emotionally drained...
Exhausted.
Relieved.
I cried a different cry—
One of relief
One of questioning myself,
'It is now uploaded.'

Now,
I wait for the review team to
respond.
My mind whirls
response
responsive
re
resps
respiratory
breathe
breath
breathing
 This process
 is
 too
 great
 a
 task.

Analysis of Poem 2: Identifying and Protecting a Writing Space and Place

Greene (1994), states that understanding the role of creative, aesthetic practices in our lives helps educators to ‘communicate to those you teach the wonder, the challenge, the surprises waiting for them in the domain of the arts’ (p. 141). In the seven days leading up to the application deadline, I regularly read and rewrote sections of the application. I readied the evidence, articles, and letters of support. My peers and I debated as to whether artistic creations were permitted to be embedded in the application package. We asked and ‘yes’ was the answer. I was relieved as I had included my art (oil paintings, photographs) throughout many of my education and academic publications. Samples of each were carefully chosen and added to the appendices of the tenure track and promotion package. I was fearful I would be told to remove them due to the size of the submission: they were part of me.

During this time, the days seemed insufficient to manage my sense of pressure and timelessness (Berg & Seeber, 2016). Sixty-hour weeks were the norm. Each moment nudging up against time with my family, friends, and my creative space. I kept tissue by my desk. I asked myself, 'What were the tears about?' (Figure 2). The application process seemed to be a far cry from my ambition of being a skilled nursing educator, instructor, researcher, and one who enjoys working alongside learners and patients as they grow in their skills and knowledge (Brookfield, 2015; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014).

Figure 2

A different kind of cry.



I had envisioned moving through the tenure track application process with some grace—it was lacking. In time, I came to know the university review team's timelines. After submitting my application, I then awaited the response letters from the review team: approved—or not approved. Berg and Seeber (2016) state 'academic work is by its nature never done; while flexibility of hours is one of the privileges of our work, it can easily translate into working all the time or feeling that one should' (p. 17). This was my experience while engaged in the process of preparing my application. What I was not prepared for was the five- to six-month waiting period after the submission was complete.

During these months of waiting, I often returned to Berg and Seeber's (2016) study of the academy. They reminded me to continue to engage in self-care activities and that it was highly necessary as part of pushing back against the dominant university narrative and of my questioning whether I was doing enough. Was I publishing enough? Did I have enough grants, research students, and projects? In response, I continued to journal poetry, create art, and distract myself. I purposefully tried to not hover in negative thinking and instead focused on teaching and research activities. In time, I began to receive decision letters. I was successful. During these times of reflection Greene (1994), reminds us to

Look back again on your experiences...even the casual and unfinished ones, and you may recognize what Arendt had in mind. Think of the dance movements in which you participated, the myths you have enacted, the scripts you have written, the texts and subtexts you have explored, the visual shapes you have made, the perspectives you have looked through (even when examining a cut-out of your own silhouette upon the floor), the boxes you have emptied and filled and foraged in, the voices that have taken you by surprise. As a teacher, I want to find out more and more about creating occasions for such experiences—and, I must say, not in the arts alone. (p. 142)

Heeding Greene's recommendation, I reflected in a poem:

What I Came to Respect: Time

Time and place,
this is what I came
to respect.
I came to **respect**
the time it takes me to
think,
write, re-write,
read aloud, to
read books and
articles, and to
draft, re-write,
share with a
trusted
peer.

Of these writing and creative efforts, within the university environment, Berg and Seeber (2016) state 'these self-expectations are escalated by the additional external pressures of the changing academic culture' (p. 3). One of my protective factors, self-care activities, was to clearly identify a safe and comfortable physical space in which to write and create using colour, multiple mediums (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962), and to heed the emotions while creating. Again, a reflective poem emerged:

Protecting My Writing Time

It takes thoughtful
preparation and time
to write and
create...
I often hand-write

while
outside
in the fresh air and in
the bush where I have
benches and chairs
positioned at the ready.
It also takes me concerted
effort to protect the time I
need to write,
create responsive art,
read, and reflect.
I now prebook, writing blocks in my calendar.

Berg and Seeber (2016) remind us ‘writing is a complex activity, and quite a lot happens along the way, including discovering what we really think’ (p. ix). Greene (1995) says ‘the arts in particular can bring to curriculum inquiry visions of perspectives and untapped possibilities’ and ‘the languages of imaginative literature disclosed alternative ways of being in and thinking about the world’ (p. 90). My coming to name and describe the need to respect and protect my writing time was a significant learning. Writing is part of our becoming, and this ‘emergence never happens all at once. It is a slow stepping into the expanded capacity of your next self’ (Turner, 2017, p. 174). I also experienced a sense of agency. Moore (2016) states this agency is a ‘feeling of control over actions and their consequences...of being in the driving seat’ (p. 1). Greene (1995), also describes the following:

To have a feeling of agency is to recognize that the living being—the perceiver, the reader, the listener—has an active part in achieving a work of art as meaningful. When school reformers talk, as they do, of active learning and of people telling their stories and of the sense of agency, I want to remind them of the ways in which the experiences we have here, the kind we want to make possible in our classrooms, may well be paradigmatic for the new schools we want to build. (p. 144)

I shared these learnings in our co-learning, research meetings. New academics often wonder how to schedule their time throughout a week. Managing time, respecting the time to read, create, and write is often foremost in my verbal and aesthetic sharing with others, including the angst and tension-filled times. This is especially important as my peers prepare their application packages for the university review team in the future.

Poem 3: Paddling a Year Later

I am paddling,
metaphorically,
a
year
later.
Moving quietly
with
less tension
and
a
sense of
agency,
and with
reduced stress.
Colour, art, and
creativity envelopes me.
My friend gifted
me, an old paddle.
Yet, I wonder,
what
I am continuing along to.
Along what, I ask?
What
is
this
new
path
I
am paddling?
I am
grateful
for the
review
team
letters.
My peers say
'You are through! '
Through what,
I ask?
I continue to
plod along
the academic

Figure 3

Paddling along a year later.



journey.
In response
The pandemic
is easing, I
wonder, can
Research
continue,
and
restart?
Yet, the world has changed.
I breathe
a bit more
confidently,
just a bit,
not too much.
In the
process,
I think
create...and think more...and
I wonder,
What are the next steps of the
tenured and promoted person?

Analysis of Poem 3: Next Steps in the Academic Community

In this final poem, I am reminded that engaging in self-care is not an indulgence; it is a necessity while practicing within the university community (Berg & Seeber, 2016). I was slowly and persistently able to carve out time in a place and space in which I could create, write, and reflect, and for that I am truly grateful. The last two years of practicing nursing immersed within the coronavirus pandemic demands was daunting. In applying for tenure and promotion, I doubted that any multitasking was possible, and now I know it is a myth. Yet, through arts-based inquiry we have opportunity to share our creative poems, first-hand stories, and art in efforts to recognize other ways of being that are not prescribed, but ways that are new and growing (Greene, 1995).

This was evident as I began the task of reclaiming the old paddle. I slowly began to clean and sand an old boat paddle gifted to me by a friend (Figure 3). The efforts of physically hand-sanding the paddle released tension from long hours at the computer. The wood recovered easily, and the beautiful grain emerged, clear, the growth lines close together—its

enduring strength evident. I too felt resilient, quiet, and renewed. With a coat of white primer and bright blue paint, the paddle appeared refreshed from the harsh elements of the ocean.

A year later, I again returned to stand in the raspberry patch, harvesting fruit for the winter just as I had done the year before. As I stood among the raspberries, I was reminded of the Earth's seasons and cycles of life. It sounded like a cliché, yet it was a season. A season of applying for tenure and promotion and awaiting the university team's decisions. It was part of a cycle within the university community of which I am part, and which needs more exploration and supports (Berg & Seeber, 2016). As I looked to the moist earth past the tall raspberries, I saw a plethora of self-seeded violas around my rubber boots. Each mauve and purple face, brilliant, resilient, and refreshing in the sunlight, propagated from a seed pollinated by insects (Figure 4). Again, I was reminded of cycles and of more academics coming along side. I wondered,

- Who will guide them into and through the tenure and promotion process?
- Who will provide a shoulder to rest on when the days seem short?
- Who will help them when loneliness prevails?
- What literature will be available to offer guidance and support?

Communication and peer collegiality for me were fundamental in writing a successful tenure and promotion application. Of this Berg and Seeber (2016) state that within the university there is self-responsibility to increase collegiality and mutual kindness during these times. It is important to encourage academics to come to recognize that wellbeing and the health of a unit or team or organization is 'an ongoing social accomplishment...rather than something fixed and final' (p. 81).

In this inquiry, I was grateful for the commitment to purposefully journal and develop creative poetry over the last year. These efforts were in

Figure 4

Violas bring joy in colour and in their presence beside my feet.



response to my personal goal to creatively live out and engage in self-care as an academic. I reflected on those before me, those who inspired me to grow. I was often reminded of my grade three to six public school teacher, M. Jack, whose words still bring great joy. I remember when she reviewed a short poetry assignment. As I was nervously stood by her desk, she said, 'This is a pretty good poem, Janet, I hope you continue to try.' Her simple, kind words were with me years later when nudging back against the dominant narrative of success in academia.

I regularly returned to the words of Berg and Seeber (2016) in the *Slow Professor*. They remind us 'self-care is not an indulgence, it is an essential component of prevention of distress, burnout, and impairment. It should not be...something "extra" or "nice to do if you have time" but as an essential part of our professional identities' (p. 71). And I know going into my sixth year at the university, this care requirement will prevail. Rockquemore (2017) discusses next steps for academics successful in the tenure process. She emphasizes ongoing engagement in the team and actively writing about future career options such as: seeking out administrative roles, working toward full professorship, engaging in advocacy activities, and/or specializing in teaching or research interests (list not inclusive). I am at the beginning stages of this process.

I believe that in sharing this journey, I could potentially offer hope to another. For me, the offering of hope is a brave statement, a statement of powerlessness explored (Greene, 1995). As well, as 'I prepare this work I have a deep sense urgency as more academics move into the institution, and I worry about being in support of their journey' (Research note, December 2021). Sharing the journey in kindness is important. Viktor Frankl (1946/1982) states that searching for meaning can be challenging in the modern world. This is especially relevant today:

today's society is characterized by achievement orientation, and consequently it adores people who are successful and happy, and in particular, it adores the young. [And] it virtually ignores the value of all those who are otherwise, and in doing so blurs the decisive difference between being valuable in the sense of dignity and being valuable in the sense of usefulness. (p. 176)

Discussion

This qualitative inquiry is an account of one academic who used poetry and art as part of a reflexive practice (Etherington, 2004) while applying for tenure and promotion in a university environment. The biographical and self-inquiry approach was appropriate as it demonstrates the role of self-study and offers other writers' ideas of how to express and explore a similar situation. Living out the life of a reflexive practitioner can include poetry and art created as a medium to express, wonder, and organize inquiry findings (Ely, 2007; Finley, 2011). As I ponder the above poems and art, I see these as mediums that can be used to express or share an issue in which one is immersed (British Academy, 2020). These tools alongside reflexive frameworks can provide a venue where one can express how to 'paddle forward' in an academic career. I also believe sharing the experience of using poetry and art can support academics entering the university setting. This is especially important as the pressures of teaching, researching, and service work can be unspoken and challenging, and self-care is not regularly discussed (Berg & Seeber, 2016).

Simecek and Rumbold (2016), want us to consider the multiple roles of poetry 'in different stages of lifelong learning by those working in different disciplines in order to provide clearer evidence about poetry's educational value, and its roles at different stages of personal development' (p. 310). They also emphasize poetry, and the action of writing and editing, can play a healing role in our lives. Alexander (2013), states that the act of creating poetry can offer encouragement and hope:

Poetry's task is to reconcile us to the world—not to accept it at face value or to assent to things that are wrong, but to reconcile one in a larger sense, to return us in love, the province of the imagination, to the scope of our mortal lives. (para. 1)

How I/you story our lives as academics will shift and change from the beginning to the middle and to the present (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Brookfield, 2015). Stories of this journey, especially first-hand (Ely, 2007), provide a glimpse into social issues related to university life that may benefit from inquiry. In an academic's story, some elements may be clearer, such as teaching classes, being in meetings, and planning and operationalizing research inquiries. Yet, in this story, the processes, including time to prepare a tenure and promotion package, were unclear. It was as though the story of applying for tenure was itself a 'private life' (Coles, 1989, p. 136), one not discussed. I felt like I was 'straddle[ing] different worlds' (p. 136), all the while learning about the public and

private elements of academia! I am truly grateful for my peers who came alongside in collegiality and supported each other (Berg & Seeber, 2016).

This inquiry was limited to the experiences of one academic. Yet I believe a first-hand account, analyzed and critiqued, can offer support to others in academia. Roberts (2002) reminds us that creating biographical texts is a social process, not separate from the person, but a way of providing a multi-perspectival account of life. I believe this work adds a richness and understanding to human experience. Therefore, I encourage others to develop, maintain, and grow their reflexivity practice (Etherington, 2004) alongside arts-based activities—journals, poetry, dance, music, and art (Finley, 2011). Each alone or together can bring forth meaning from social narratives within academia (Frankl, 1946/1982).

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