This study grew out of our friendship, our commitment to young people and their literature, and our desire to join other scholars who advocate for innovative practices, challenging hegemonic assumptions about legitimate and legitimized research methodologies. We explore the possibilities of representing findings in both prose and poetry as an experimental research method, to “put into question the very nature of what it means to do academic research and representation” (Lahman et al., 2019: 218). Artistic methodologies inform work with data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation, and they can be taken up at any point in the research process (Lafrenière and Cox, 2012). These “innovative methods of creating and translating research knowledge” (Boydell et al., 2016: 682) inspire interest in arts-informed social science research as they challenge assumptions about the nature of such research.

Arts-based research encompasses a range of artistic methods, including performative methodologies (Douglas and Carless, 2013; Shah and Greer, 2018), storytelling methodologies (Lewis Patrick, 2011; Valentine, 2016) and visual methodologies (Bartlett, 2015; Sidorenko, 2019). We seek to join the company of qualitative researchers who employ poetic methodologies, such as Lahman and De Oliveira (2021), who create dimensional research poetry using narrative lines from interview transcripts or Inckle (2020), who writes I-poems directly from research transcripts as a method for promoting reflexive analysis. Our work expands the implementation of research poetry from human subjects to literary content analysis. Our choice of poetry is intentional, both for its capacity to “undo power dynamics” (Inckle, 2020: 3) and its ability to present “a window into the heart of human experience” (McCulliss, 2013: 83). We come alongside other qualitative researchers whose work explores creative methodologies, positioning our inquiry at the intersection of poetic and prose representation.

We situate our current study in the borderland between traditional scientific and nontraditional artistic methodologies. Researchers who inhabit this liminal space trouble the dichotomy between art and science. In the academy, prose is...
the normed and privileged written form. Norms become invisible; indeed, they are accepted as naturalized truths rather than socially constructed conventions. Scholars who experiment with written forms resist limitations imposed by the hegemony of scientific research (Faulkner, 2019). Poetry offers the arts-based researcher an alternative form to traditional prose, one that is both artistic and unconventional. Research poets work against the academy’s dominant discourse, challenging prose as “the sole legitimate carrier of knowledge” (Richardson, 2002: 877). Prose is so deeply ingrained in the academy that poetic inquiry becomes “a socio-political and critical act of resistance . . . and an effective way to talk back to power” (Predergast, 2009: xxxvii). Thus, integrating the poetic arts in qualitative research confronts conventionally accepted modes of scientific writing.

Although Richardson and St. Pierre (2018) wrote that we inhabit “a time when a multitude of approaches to knowing and telling exist side-by-side,” (820) we recognize the lingering “sacrosanctity” (821) of privileged, conventional writing styles. As two researchers, one committed to academic prose and one committed to academic poetry, we seek to challenge that lingering sacrosanctity. We seek to legitimize “poetic inquiry as a culturally relevant methodology” (Davis, 2021: 114). In our current work, we employ the innovative practice of representing our findings in both prose and poetry as an act of exploration and resistance. We do not eschew traditional representations of research findings; rather, we occupy a space where both written forms co-exist.

**Endeavoring to expand methodological legitimacy**

We have a history of joint conference presentations wherein Linda reports on an analysis of literature, and Lisa then engages participants in writing found poetry based on the analysis. Over time, we noticed the power and impact of engaging participants in work involving both prose and poetry. We started to wonder what might happen if we did the same in our scholarship; we wondered what transmediating a textual content analysis might engender. What if our methodological decision were not either/or but both/and (Lather, 1991)? What might happen if we positioned prose and poetic representations of research findings together? This study is the result of our wonderings.

The data for our collaboration comes from Linda’s qualitative content analysis of trafficked child soldiers in young adult literature. We were both intimately familiar with this analysis because we presented it together at a national conference. We want to acknowledge that the analysis highlights the horrific treatment and traumatization of young children who have been trafficked as soldiers, and readers of this article may find these portrayals disturbing. For this study, we reviewed the analysis at length and selected themes to write about. We separately turned to prose and poetry to represent and communicate our findings. We did not interact with each other about the ways the two forms of writing might align and/or diverge. We did share our representations with each other before moving to the next theme. Our sharing sparked lively and passionate conversations, which we documented in memos that tracked “our ideas, themes, and hunches” and became the “thought pieces” that informed our reflection on the impact of our hybrid representations (Gay and Airasian, 2000: 214). In the following section, we describe two methodological components of this study: Linda’s process of content analysis and Lisa’s process of poetic inquiry. Lisa explains her writing process, because if one makes an “excursion to the edges of what is legitimized in the academy,” one must substantiate that journey (Eisener, 1997: 6).

**Content analysis methods: Linda**

Three primary beliefs ground the approach I used to conduct this content analysis of young adult literature. First, texts always have multiple meanings; meaning does not reside in the text for readers to uncover (Krippendorff, 2004). Second, content analysis of literature involves a reader-response-oriented stance reflecting a transaction between the reader, text, and context, so the researcher’s identities and the study’s focus foster the construction of idiosyncratic meanings (Rosenblatt, 2004). Third, content analysis is necessarily a subjective, interpretive endeavor that necessitates systematic procedures (Cohen et al., 2011). Below, I detail the process that resulted in my interpretation, my *story*, about these novels.

I sought out contemporary realistic fiction intended for readers in grades 5–9 that featured abducted child soldiers to address my foreshadowing research question (White and Marsh, 2006): How are the experiences of trafficked child soldiers portrayed in young adult literature? This resulted in a purposefully selected set of six novels. I began my analysis with an aesthetic reading of each book (Rosenblatt, 2004) to experience “immersion as a reader, rather than as a researcher . . . to experience the whole before . . . analyzing the parts” (Short, 2017: 8). I noticed a five-phase trajectory across the experiences of these child soldiers that became my initial codes: abduction, dehumanization/indoctrination, unspeakable acts/trauma, escape/rescue, and healing body/soul. I read the novels again, this time from an efferent stance (Rosenblatt, 2004), to locate specific excerpts that addressed the characters’ experiences within these phases; these excerpts constituted my units of analysis and comprised the raw data for the first phase of coding (Krippendorff, 2004; White and Marsh, 2006).

During iterative passes through the data, I was unsure about the meaning of the initial codes but had a sense of “something emerging but not yet there” (Simovska et al., 2019: 120). I intuitively moved from asking, “What’s happening here?” to asking, “What does this accomplish?” With
this subtle shift, the data took on new meaning. I initiated a second phase of coding during which I considered the initial codes in relation to my new question while remaining flexible, tolerant, patient, and open to the story that was evolving (Cohen et al., 2011; Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Short, 2017).

Three themes emerged: (1) breaking a child’s spirit, (2) crossing the line, and (3) reintegrating into society. Asking “How is this accomplished?” enabled me to formulate categories within each theme. Categories in “breaking a child’s spirit” are isolation, abuse, and false protection. “Crossing the line” also has three categories: immediate traumatic acts, capitulation, and resistance. Two categories constitute “reintegrating into society”: desolation and restoration. Although these themes and categories represent my interpretation of what was significant in the data, rather than empirical reality, I could now envision the story the data and I could tell (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). This is not an easy story to tell, nor is it an easy story to read.

**Poetic inquiry methods: Lisa**

The field of social science research has seen a blossoming of arts-based researchers who utilize poetry throughout the research process (Prendergast, 2009). Faulkner (2019) positions poetry as a legitimate research method, viewing poetic inquiry as a valuable research tool, one that acts as both research method and outcome. In general terms, research poetry provides academic poets with alternative means for working with qualitative data. More specifically, poetry offers the arts-based researcher an alternative to traditional prose representations of data. Lahman et al. (2019) note that such research representations “blend the aesthetics of poetry and science of research” (p. 215) to “express meaning in powerful and profound ways” (p. 217). Academic poets utilize a variety of poetic forms in their scholarly writing, one of which is found poetry. “Found poems take existing texts and refashion them, reorder them, and present them as poems” (Poets.org, 2004: para. 1). This historical art form maintains a long and established practice in literature, yet found poetry is not restricted to the literary sphere. Indeed, academic poets write research-based found poetry using words taken directly from study data and participant interviews (Prendergast, 2009).

Unlike traditional academic researchers, arts-based researchers must explicate their process of poetic representation, rendering their creative methodology accessible to readers accustomed to the dominant mode of prose (Lahman et al., 2019). To create the found data poems, I began by reading through the coded data to revisit the themes and the categories within each theme. Next, I mined representative book quotes in search of words and phrases that communicated and illustrated the key thematic patterns in the analysis, which I then copied into a Microsoft Word document. In a process that was “creative and intuitive not prescriptive” (Davis, 2021: 116), I located each direct quote in the original book and then read widely around the quote, seeking additional words and phrases that might complement those identified as data.

Just like literary poets, research poets make use of aural, visual, and conceptual poetic elements (Finch, 2005). They lean on poetic structures such as stanzas, line breaks, and white space to meaningfully arrange data and communicate essential themes. Thus, I began the creative process of writing each poem: collecting and selecting words and phrases from the sea of prose, moving and joining, shifting and separating, paying close attention to alliterative and figurative language. Writing research poems requires, as Davis (2021) noted, “several re-readings and revisions of arranging quotes and phrases” (p. 116). I read each version of the poem aloud to listen for and hone its rhythm and sound. Finally, I stepped away between cycles of revision to create space between myself and the poem, returning with fresh eyes and ears, committed to conveying meaning using the fewest, most precise words possible.

**Representing our findings**

Our goal is to argue for dislodging and transcending hegemonic conventions and expanding the boundaries of academic legitimacy (Boydell et al., 2016). In presenting our findings from the content analysis, we tell the story of our research using “techniques of crafting” (James, 2012: 563) that value alternative ways of knowing data and communicating findings. Since this content analysis is the vehicle through which we advocate for the simultaneous use of two written forms, we chose not to report the complete findings. Rather, we include one category from each theme, telling a particular story of isolation, resistance, and reintegration: a story of hope in the midst of extreme trauma. This decision embodies the notion that all phases of the research process are “open to acts of imagination” (James, 2012: 563).

**Breaking a child’s spirit: Isolation**

In this set of novels, armed groups break the abducted children’s spirits to create pliable child soldiers. They isolate the abductees by brutally severing ties with the children’s trusted adults, so the children believe there is no one left to protect them or come to their aid. They also abuse the children physically and emotionally, and they offer false protection as the only provider for the children’s physical and emotional needs. In this section, I focus on the ways rebels isolate newly abducted child soldiers and contextualize the tactics with prevailing sociocultural discourses about child soldiers.

In global contexts, killing family members during the child’s abduction is a tactic rebels employ to narcotize and traumatize youth (Brownell and Praetorius, 2017). For children who have lost their families, indeed who may have seen them slaughtered, military groups offer spurious security...
amidst horror and chaos leading abductees to develop “traumatic bonding” (O’Callaghan et al., 2012: 92). Reflecting this reality, children witness the torture or murder of trusted adults during their abduction in *Soldier Boy* (Hutton, 2017), *Gorilla Dawn* (Lewis, 2015), *War Brothers* (McKay, 2014), and *Chanda’s War* (Stratton, 2008). Conradi (2013) and Kimmel and Roby (2007) report that rebel soldiers often abduct children from their homes, village streets, or strategic targets such as secondary schools and orphanages. Soldiers target homes in *Soldier Boy* (Hutton, 2017) and *Chanda’s War* (Stratton, 2008), village streets in *Gorilla Dawn* (Lewis, 2015), and schools in *Son of a Gun* (de Graaf, 2012) and *War Brothers* (McKay, 2014).

In *Chanda’s War* (Stratton, 2008), Mandiki’s rebels attack the homestead late at night. They bind the family members together and throw a burning torch on the thatched roof, leaving bedridden Grampa to be burned alive inside his home. They lead the abductees single file up a trail, but Mandiki brutally cuts Mr. Bakwanga’s hands from the line and leaves him to bleed to death. Later, the rebels form a circle around Aunti Lizbet (who has a club foot) and tell her to dance as they stone and then kick her to death. These atrocities confirm that the adults in the children’s lives cannot protect them. Later, Mandiki further isolates the abducted children when he forces them to their knees in front of a stone altar and tells them:

Don’t think you can escape. . . . Don’t think you can run home to your mama and papa.

You have no home. I am your home. If you ever try to leave my protection, you will be caught. And do you know what will happen then? You’ll be held to the ground and chopped into bits. Your families, too. (197)

After performing an elaborate ritual, Mandiki burns a brand on each child’s chest saying, “With this brand, the world will know you are mine. No one – not even your mama or papa— will ever take you back. If they try to, they will die” (Stratton, 2008: 199). Thus, the children are isolated with no hope of escape or outside help.

Forbidden loyalties or friendships is another tactic rebels use to isolate abducted children and break their spirits in *Son of a Gun* (de Graaf, 2012), *Soldier Boy* (Hutton, 2017), *Gorilla Dawn* (Lewis, 2015), *War Brothers* (McKay, 2014), and *Bamboo People* (Perkins, 2010). As the rebels force-march the boys through the night in *War Brothers*, a rebel soldier kicks Jacob in the belly and tells him he must walk on his own or be killed. He tells the other boys, “Do not help him. He is not your friend. No one is your friend. . . . Soon you will learn” (60). A previously abducted boy, Oteka, advises Jacob, “Do not stay too close to your friends. The rebels do not like you to have loyalties” (79). The rebels also force the abductees to punish each other as another isolation tactic. They force the children to kill those who struggle, who become too weak to continue, or who are caught attempting to escape. Thus, friendships are fraught with danger and risk; isolation is safer.

Shadows on the Moon

Abducted by the devil, we are flanked by a band of rebels who form a border of fire and death between jungle and home.

Forced to our knees in front of the flames, we build an altar of blazing stones, burning the stolen spirits of our families. . . .

. . . burying their silent silhouettes in the black ash beneath fire-eating skulls.

Don’t think you can escape. Don’t think you can run home. You have no home. I am your home.

As with all revelations, the truth, carved in blood, arrives in a flash: No one is coming to save us.

We march into the dead land, where demons rule the earth, our memories of home lost in a cloud of smoke.

Crossing the line: Resistance

Although abducted children are initially terrified and isolated, many gradually “cross the line” to become participants. Brownell and Praetorius (2017) and Denov (2010) interviewed child soldiers who were simultaneously the victims and perpetrators of violence, and the characters in these novels also experience this dual positioning. In *Chanda’s War* (Stratton, 2008), Pako is immediately plunged into the horror of violence as he is forced to kill his own brother. For the abducted children in *Son of a Gun* (de Graaf, 2012), *Soldier Boy* (Hutton, 2017), and *War Brothers* (McKay, 2014), there is a point at which they cross the line after their spirits have been broken. Not all child soldiers’ spirits are completely broken, however; they resist. In the section that follows, I elaborate on two forms of their resistance.

Despite the dangers of doing so, abducted children in these novels forge and maintain friendships as one form of resistance. This is consistent with Spellings’ (2008) findings that female soldiers in Sierra Leone created community through clandestine friendships. Such friendships are particularly evident in *Gorilla Dawn* (Lewis, 2015), *Bamboo People* (Perkins, 2010), and *War Brothers* (McKay, 2014). In *Bamboo People*, Chiko and Tai’s friendship ensures their mutual survival. Tai, who has “taken plenty of kicks and punches” (p. 57), teaches Chiko how to survive their training, and Chiko teaches Tai how to read and write. One day,
the captain uses their friendship against them and forces Chiko to give Tai a beating. As Tai feints and dodges the blows, Chiko is “grateful for the remaining boys who circle [them] and block the captain’s view” (p. 103). These boys find brotherhood in this most unlikely of places.

In all of the novels except Chanda’s War (Stratton, 2008), the child soldiers eventually enact the ultimate resistance and escape despite proof of what will happen to them if they are caught. They see those whose ears or arms were cut off (de Graaf, 2012; McKay, 2014) and, in one instance, a young boy who was recaptured and beaten with an iron lock and chain (Hutton, 2017). When this boy’s sister begs that he not be killed, she is ordered to kill him herself. Despite these horrors, the abducted child soldiers escape along with friends from whom they refused to be isolated. These escapes reflect the lived reality of abducted children who, far from being passive victims, resist authority and sometimes orchestrate their escape (Denov, 2010).

Jacob, abducted along with his classmates in War Brothers (McKay, 2014), hears a radio-broadcast message directed to them, “our prayers are with you” (100), confirming his suspicions: “No one was coming to save them” (p. 101). Additionally, Oteka warns him that the rebels are about to kill them because they are no longer a bargaining chip. The boys decide to escape together; they had become not only friends but family. As they prepare to escape, Jacob tells Norman, “You are my war brother. . . . you will be my peace brother” (p. 130). When they emerge from the jungle after a daring and dangerous trek, they discard their weapons as they are surrounded by government soldiers who see them only as rebel soldiers—not as abducted children. As they are surrounded, Norman declares, “We are students from the George Jones Seminary for Boys. . . We want to come home” (p. 158).

Mothers in the Moon

We dream about running away. . .

every single night.

But we are told this story:
Abandon hope.
No one will save you.

So we hide our dreams,
keep the tears inside,
bury our hopes beneath the ashes of the dead.

But somewhere,
far away,
mothers are waiting.

So we tell ourselves a new story:
Hold on to hope.
Save yourself.

H.O.P.E.
We know the shape of the letters by heart:

A tiny white starflower,
glowing bright in the moonlight,
it’s fragile petals pointing the way toward home.

The jungle waits,
holding its breath,
our shadows
swallowed by the night.

The moon had almost died, and the sun had yet to be born.

Danger at every turn,
we are hunted by
rebel crocodiles
under a brittle moon.

Reintegrating into society: Restoration

While the majority of these novels have hopeful endings, they also show the long-term effects of trauma. Like abducted child soldiers in the lived world, the characters in these novels experience recurring nightmares, flashbacks, panic attacks, social withdrawal, distrust, and guilt (Brownell and Praetorius, 2017; O’Callaghan et al., 2012). Some of them are ultimately lost: James in Son of a Gun (de Graaf, 2012), Tony in War Brothers (McKay, 2014), and Pako in Chanda’s War (Stratton, 2008). Nearly all of the abducted child characters initially feel self-loathing and shame, but the majority eventually heal and are restored to their families and communities.

Like actual child soldiers, some of these characters are initially ostracized by their communities, communities like those Vindevogel et al. (2011) studied in Northern Uganda that feared rebel reprisals for harboring former child soldiers and hesitated to take back children who perpetrated atrocities against them. Yet many family members and professionals do support the children and provide safe spaces for their stories; the arts often play a vital role in the healing process. We see this reality reflected in Son of a Gun (de Graaf, 2012), Soldier Boy (Hutton, 2017), Gorilla Dawn (Lewis, 2015), and Chanda’s War (Stratton, 2008).

Samuel heals physically and spiritually at Friends of Orphans after his escape in Soldier Boy (Hutton, 2017). He observes a young girl as she tells children gathered around her that music, dance, and art can convey what is in their hearts when their “voices cannot speak what is hurting” (p. 87). She asks them to let their hands tell the story of their abduction. Samuel cannot tell his story and believes he can never be understood, forgiven, or loved. However, during a community gathering, Samuel recognizes an elderly man who was beaten and whose wife was killed in Samuel’s presence. The man also recognizes him and says:

. . . when the world looks at the former abductees and child soldiers of the LRA, . . . they must look past the crimes they
were forced to commit and see them for who they truly are. . . . Our children. (p. 238)

The man’s words help Samuel consider his life before the unspeakable things he did and endured:

Before he was a prisoner of war. . . . Before he was a killer and a thief. A rebel and soldier. A weapon and shield. A victim and orphan. Before. . . . Before. He was a student and classmate. A cousin and friend. A brother and son. A child. (p. 287)

Remembering who he was before his abduction allows Samuel to move forward.

Upon their return home, Iris and Soly become increasingly distrustful and volatile in Chanda’s War (Stratton, 2008). One day, the children ceremonially stone each other, and Chanda fears for them, believing something unimaginable happened in the bush. She turns to her former teacher and mentor, who gives her colored pencils and chalk for the children. They begin to draw pictures that they refuse to show anyone, but when Soly finally lets Chanda see a drawing, “it’s a mass of scribbled color. Red, orange, and black” (p. 355). Soly eventually puts his terror into words; Mandiki trapped a family in their home and set it on fire, and as they came out of the window, his soldiers shot them. Iris adds, the night people “burned to death. They hurt so bad. We killed them” (p. 356).

Esther, whose face was slashed as she was raped, is a member of Chanda’s chosen family. Iris asks Esther if her scar hurts and if she minds being ugly. She tells the children that although she used to be ashamed, her scar shows that she is a survivor. As Esther guides Soly and Iris’s hands over her scar, there is a “silence as holy as the moon” (p. 362). The children ask Esther and Chanda to touch their bush brands, whereupon they kiss their fingers and gently touch them to the children’s brands. After this moment of healing, Chanda feels herself “start to breathe. To dream of a time, sometime, when they’ll be well” (p. 368). Soly, Iris, and the other abducted children across these novels let go of their past deeds, forgive themselves, and move forward into a future that includes hope.

**Colors of the Moon**

We are not the children our mothers remember.

Words fail us, stripped bare, like the fire-scorched earth.

Our voices shattered, broken like glass.

The war rages on deep inside, our stories trapped in the trailing mists of the jungle.

Our silence, as holy as the moon.

And so, cradled against our mothers, we begin to draw.

We color furiously, long into the night.

A mass of scribbled color: Red for blood. Orange for fire. Black for death.

Our papers stained, the color of nightmares.

Drawn by the hands of soldiers, every picture tells a story, a story our words cannot.

We spin constellations of hope, of healing.

The soft humming of the mothers fills the silence, pressing kisses to the hurting places.

And so, we begin again.

Picking one long green bean at a time, filling our baskets with heavy, heart-shaped mangoes under a yellow sun.

We dream ourselves into the future.

Breathing the air, drinking the rain, as the moon traces its bright arc across the sky, and the whole world turns toward a new tomorrow.

**Reflecting on our collaboration**

We envision our work as hybridity, making “productive use of being left to work within, against and across traditions that are all positioned within a crisis of authority and legitimation” (Lather, 1998: 52). Reflecting on our separate, yet collaborative, processes of representing the findings of this content analysis helped us articulate what happened when we positioned academic prose and poetry together. We worked iteratively, moving back and forth between our ongoing writing and our memos about that writing. We asked what each mode did, how it did it, and how it enabled us to know differently. We believe our representations, taken together, did more than either could have done on its own. We focus our reflection on four realizations: the possible emotional impact of poetic representations, the differing scope of our representations, the alignment of the quotes we selected, and the ways in which we used words differently.
Even before we began writing, our decision to employ both prose and poetry led us to tell a particular story of hope; yet this story of hope is also heartbreaking. As previously noted, we chose to share only one category from each theme. We anticipated the impact writing in different forms might have on us as researchers and on the readers of our work. Writing in academic prose creates distance by sanitizing the data, whereas writing in poetry creates intimacy. We decided to tell a story of hope, rather than one of despair, because Lisa was concerned about the personal toll of creating found poetry focused solely on the abuse of child soldiers, as well as the potential emotional impact on readers. When she considered writing found poems using the books’ actual words, she worried about the raw brutality the poems might convey, as poetry asks readers to interact “intimately with language” (Keil, 2005: 1010). Poetry communicates the essence of emotional experience in the fewest possible words, making the horror more visceral and removing the protection provided by the verbiage of academic prose. If our sole purpose had been to communicate the findings of the content analysis, we would have told the complete story. However, because our purpose was to investigate an innovative methodology, we felt free to choose which thematic categories to represent.

The difference in scope between the prose and poetic representations also caught our attention. Linda felt compelled to introduce each category within the themes and then focus comprehensively on one and document its prevalence across the text set. She also felt the weight of validating her qualitative content analysis; she felt the academy looking over her shoulder. However, Lisa knew that attempting to do the same in a single poem would dilute the poem’s impact. Indeed, poetic inquiry is a tool which assists academic poets in uncovering relevant themes within a mass of data (Prendergast, 2009). Lahman et al. (2019) observed that “research poets have some sort of goal in mind when they set out to express research findings in poetic form” (p. 216), and in choosing to write a single poem for one category within the theme, Lisa purposefully sought to create a unifying metaphor for the experiences of the child soldiers. She felt that multiple poems would obscure the thread of their journey through isolation to resistance, and finally, to restoration. While aware of her choice to focus on a single category, she trusted that the prose representation would address all of them. Utilizing the two forms in tandem allowed the research poet to magnify and intensify the metaphoric essence of her representation.

To our overwhelming surprise and delight, we also noted that even though we wrote separately, we pulled many of the same quotes from the data. An example of this is located in the first theme, “breaking a child’s spirit,” where we drew from the same passage to convey the child soldiers’ isolation. The prose excerpt reads:

Don’t think you can escape. . . . Don’t think you can run home to your mama and papa.

You have no home. I am your home. If you ever try to leave my protection, you will be caught. And do you know what will happen then? You’ll be held to the ground and chopped into bits. Your families, too. (Stratton, 2008: 197)

The poetry excerpt reads:

Don’t think you can escape.
Don’t think you can run home.
You have no home.
I am your home.

When we read each other’s representations, we were struck with a sense of awe. We felt “saturated with sensations and feelings” (Simovska et al., 2019: 114); it was a moment infused with magic and mystery. On a more mundane level, we believe the fact that we used the same quotes validated the qualitative content analysis. Poindexter (2002) corroborates this, asserting that poetically representing data can add rigor to narrative analysis. Although we pulled many of the same quotes, we did very different things with the same words. This reflects Denzin’s (2014) observation that poets make “the world visible in new and different ways, in ways ordinary social science writing does not allow” (p. 86). Linda used the words to illustrate the category within each theme and justify her analysis, whereas Lisa used the words to distil the emotional essence of the category. The two forms created “a different lens through which to view the same scenery” (Sparkes et al., 2003: 155). The prose functioned on a concrete level as Linda stayed close to the data quotes to represent the findings, while Lisa worked on a more visceral level, embodying the poet’s “sustained and contemplative love of language” (Guiney Yallop et al., 2014: 6). Returning to the theme of “breaking a child’s spirit” as an example, Linda focused on literal actions that isolated the children: trusted adults being killed or tortured in front of them and friendships between the child soldiers being forbidden. Lisa, on the other hand, saw the imagery of isolation in unlikely places. She drew from the quote:

Samuel stared just above the silhouetted trees of the jungle, where a sliver of curved light softened the darkening sky. He squinted, trying to make out the mother in the moon, but if she was there, she was hidden in the shadows. (Hutton, 2017: 319–320)

While this is not an example of isolation perpetrated by the abductors, it does evoke existential isolation. We believe presenting academic prose and poetry together affords a powerful way of knowing differently through cognitive and emotional engagement.

**Continuing to expand methodological legitimacy**

So, what does happen when two researchers come together to represent findings in both prose and poetry? Several
overarching insights about the process of working together and approaching the data from different perspectives emerged from this work, and we hope our realizations will ring true for others dedicated to innovative methodologies. We discovered the significance of the differences in scope, impact, and use of words when we represented findings in the two forms. We also discovered that pulling many of the same quotes to create our representations contributed to the validity of the analysis.

In addition to these realizations, we experienced the affordances of honoring our preferred writing styles, the synergy fostered through our collaborative inquiry, and the borderland where traditional and nontraditional scholarship meet. As we worked to challenge hegemonic assumptions about privileged academic writing, we revealed the opportunity to write to our strengths. Collaborating to present our findings together enhanced our individual agency and enabled us to discover more than we could have discovered on our own. We saw very concretely that what one knows in one form one might know differently in another, generating a synergy of knowing.

Lafrenière and Cox (2012) resist siloing art and science in favor of hybridity, the position our work occupies. Read in tandem, the prose and poetic representations work together, creating a space for revelation. This revelatory space is a borderland of sorts, a borderland that troubles the distinction between science and art.

Pushing against the hegemony of traditional writing in the academy is slippery. Even those of us committed to transcending academic legitimacy, who advocate for change, are enmeshed in the system. Despite the fact that we intentionally placed the word “poetry” first in our title to validate the form, it was not until we began the final edits on this manuscript that we noticed we consistently placed the word “prose” first throughout the manuscript. This reflects our own pervasive, unconscious bias. Even in a study designed to explore innovative research methodologies, the privileging of academic prose influenced us. We are again reminded of the lingering “sacrosanctity” of conventional writing (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2018: 821). There remains much work to be done in the borderland where traditional and nontraditional scholarship meet.

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