"Imaginative, embodied scholarly assemblages": A poetic analysis of the Self-Reflexive Methodologies Special Interest Group scholarship

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Abstract

The Self-Reflexive Methodologies Special Interest Group (SIG) of the South African Education Research Association (SAERA) has been active since 2014, with over 100 academics from more than 20 higher education institutions participating. The 10th Anniversary SAERA special issue of *Journal of Education* prompted an analysis of the SIG's educational scholarship presented in five journal special issues that have served as platforms for SIG research over the years. This study comprises a multilayered poetic analysis, combining pantoum poetry clusters, tanka poems, and a lantern poem. By revisiting and examining the special issues using increasingly concise poetic forms, the study highlights the contributions and variety of local and international scholarship arising from the explorations and conversations of the SIG since its inception. This wide-ranging scholarship addresses challenges in South African education, promotes educational development and justice, advances conceptual and theoretical understanding, and broadens research methodology.

Introduction

The Self-Reflexive Methodologies Special Interest Group (SIG) of the South African Education Research Association (SAERA) has been active since 2014 (https://www.saera.co.za/self-reflexive-methodologies/). More than 100 academics in various academic disciplines and educational contexts from over 20 higher education institutions have participated in the SIG activities since its inception. Every year at the SAERA annual conference, the SIG hosts a research symposium to delve into, question, and theorise researchers' lived experiences, practices, and identities to promote educational and societal change. These symposia and the scholarly publications accompanying them have explored a variety of paths for and interpretations of self-reflexivity.

The term reflexive comes from the Latin *reflexivus*, which means "reflective, capable of bending or turning back" (Harper, 2021, para. 1). Self-reflexivity in educational research can be thought of as the researcher bending or turning back to face a sense of uncertainty or questioning about the person behind the pursuit of knowledge and its impact on education (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2020). Educational researchers grappling with self-reflexivity have different ideas on examining the self and, more generally, what the *self* is, or if it even exists. There is a wide variety of perspectives on and approaches to self-reflexivity in educational research; for example, some emphasise a focus on self more than others, and some stress self-*questioning* more than others do. The researcher's sense of self in connection to other selves and larger social, political, and historical contexts and contests can also be explored and understood in multiple ways (Kirk, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2020; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2017). Whatever the stance, self-reflexivity in educational research raises the ethical responsibility of considering and responding to the ways in which the researcher's self is embedded in and shapes the research and the lives of those who take part in, and are influenced, by it.

The authors are four educational scholars from South Africa with diverse backgrounds who have been working collaboratively for over a decade on a range of self-reflexive research projects. We examine, question, and theorise lived educational experiences using self-reflexive and arts-inspired approaches. Kathleen's academic work focuses on professional learning, Inbanathan's on educational leadership and management, Daisy's on teacher identities, and Linda's on mathematics education and its integration with HIV and AIDS education. Kathleen's research entails recognising and supporting teachers and other professionals in their roles as inspired, creative learners who lead contextually relevant change coactively with others. Daisy's scholarship seeks to create a fruitful place for people to engage with the aesthetic-ethical entanglements of the self and its moral imperative. Inbanathan is involved in developing self-reflexive and arts-based scholarship in educational leadership, which has previously relied on more traditional approaches and methodologies. Linda explores HIV and AIDS education integration using self-study research methodology and arts-based methods. Self-reflexive research learning communities are at the heart of our efforts to open new horizons for research that make a difference in the qualitative experience of education. Consequently, since the Self-Reflexive Methodologies SIG's inception, we

have participated as mentors, facilitators, editors, and contributors in various SIG activities. Over time, our engagement with the SIG's work has been a journey of exploring our motivations for participation, and uncovering its intellectual and emotional value to us. This involvement has profoundly shaped and stretched the parameters of our academic leadership, identity, and learning, enhancing our understanding and practice. Moreover, it has facilitated unexpected connections with numerous others, consistently reinvigorating our pursuit of scholarly paths that feed our academic spirits.

The call for submissions for the 10th Anniversary SAERA special issue of *Journal of Education* inspired us to pause and look back on the SIG's scholarly endeavours and contributions and ask: "What can we learn from consciously pausing to analyse the Self-Reflexive Methodologies SIG's educational scholarship?" We focused our analysis on five journal special issues that have served as platforms for SIG research over the years (Pillay et al., 2021, 2015, 2019; Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2020; Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2022). These special issues, edited by some of our team members in partnership with colleagues locally and internationally, have connected with the themes of the SIG symposia at the SAERA conferences. Some special issues were motivated by the research presented at SIG symposia, and others were inspired by broader international research movements that fed into SIG symposia. Each issue began with an open call for submissions intended to evoke scholarly discussions, debates, and discursive practices that would push methodological, theoretical, disciplinary, and contextual boundaries. Postgraduate students, early-career academics, and senior scholars from various settings and fields of knowledge in South Africa and beyond responded to those calls. In each issue, the Self-Reflexive Methodologies SIG's members' contributions were brought into conversation with scholarship from other research communities, including the Qualitative Research SIG of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the AERA Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices SIG.

This article begins with a synopsis of the five special issues. Next, we explain our poetic inquiry research design. That is followed by the presentation of our multilayered poetic analysis comprising the first layer (pantoum poetry clusters), the second layer (tanka poems), and the third layer (a lantern poem). Finally, we synthesise what we learned from a poetic rereading and analysis of the scholarship of the Self-Reflexive Methodologies SIG as presented in the five special issues.

The special issues

The first special issue, published in *Journal of Education* (Pillay et al., 2015), illustrated how autoethnography—or the study of culture through the lens of the self—can provide sociocultural insights into how higher education teachers, academics, and researchers negotiate their roles. Autoethnographic accounts from Canada, South Africa, and the United States engaged with how academics might employ self-reflexivity to counter depersonalising and disconnecting higher education discourses.

Next, a themed issue of *Educational Research for Social Change* (Pillay et al., 2019) highlighted how imaginative interactions with everyday objects can lead to new ways of knowing and practising education. South African and United States contributions demonstrated how self-reflexive thinking with things could inspire change in oneself and others, contributing to a larger social change agenda and educational transformation.

Scholars from South Africa and the United States studied the generative nexus of self-reflexive research and methodological inventiveness in a second *Journal of Education* special issue (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2020). These studies exemplified what can be made possible and visible through imaginative, self-reflexive research by drawing on different creative research practices and resources such as embroidery, fiction, narrative, painting, performance, photo-elicitation, poetry, storytelling, and visual mapping.

The special issue of *Alternation* (Pillay et al., 2021) centred on academics' self-reflexive ways of describing, reviewing, and theorising their lived experiences in response to social cohesion-related contestations in higher education. Academics from many knowledge domains in South Africa and the United States wrote about the experiences, interactions, and contexts that shape academic identities and social cohesion or fragmentation in higher education.

The most recent special issue, of *Studying Teacher Education* (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2022), showcased methodological and epistemological advances for integrating poetry into self-study research. Authors from Australia, Brazil, Iceland, Japan, South Africa, and the United States explored topical themes in unique ways through poetic, self-reflexive inquiry. Self-study researchers study their professional selves and practice to better serve the public good. A recurring theme of this special issue was how poetic self-study can enable educators to navigate their professional and societal responsibilities.

Our poetic inquiry design

As those special issues illustrated, self-reflexive researchers frequently design novel, boundary-crossing approaches to further their studies. Each of the five issues is noteworthy for the contributors' use of inventive methods inspired by developments in literature, theatre, and the visual arts, among others. In keeping with the scholarly nature of the special issues and drawing on our research expertise, we chose poetic inquiry as a creative analytical approach (Richardson, 2000) to study the Self-Reflexive Methodologies SIG's educational scholarship. Qualitative researchers in the human and social sciences have used poetry and poetic components for decades to generate and communicate new knowledge (Prendergast, 2009; Richardson, 1993). These poetic inquiries often explore complex and nuanced aspects of experiences, emotions, and perceptions that may be difficult to elicit or capture through conventional research methods. By employing poetic language and imagery, poetic inquiry engages audiences by inviting them to connect with the subject matter in a more personal and introspective way (Leggo, 2008). Poetic inquiry can take many forms and be utilised in

different phases of qualitative research, from developing a guiding question to generating data, interpreting data, and representing discoveries and conclusions (Prendergast, 2009).

Just as there are numerous approaches to poetic inquiry, there are many ways to appraise its value and relevance (Faulkner, 2016; Freeman, 2017). We show credibility by thoroughly and vigorously articulating and presenting our poetic inquiry influences, decisions, techniques, and discoveries (Faulkner, 2016). This allows us to strengthen the relationships between our work and others who have utilised comparable qualitative research methodologies. It also enables us to share the processes and outcomes of our inquiries in enough detail for others to build on and explore in different situations.

To analyse the SIG's scholarly endeavours and contributions through poetic inquiry, we aimed to devise "poetical thinking strategies [for] entering into an aesthetic, experiential relationship with [our] research topic" (Freeman, 2017, p. 72). We sought to portray, develop, and express our encounters and insights using poetic brevity, rhythm, form, and symbolism. Our intention was not to produce poems of aesthetic excellence but rather to let readers imagine and engage with the experiences, conversations, and insights we had in our research. Our multilayered poetic analysis method evolved through collaborative decision-making rooted in our collective knowledge and understanding of poetic inquiry. Each successive layer was built on the one before it and unfolded organically.

The first layer of analysis: Pantoum poetry clusters

To focus our poetical thinking, we constructed four subquestions inspired by the 10th anniversary SAERA special issue call:

- How has self-reflexive scholarship addressed South African education's distinct challenges?
- How has self-reflexive scholarship illuminated issues of educational development and justice?
- How is self-reflexive scholarship advancing conceptual and theoretical learning in educational research?
- How is self-reflexive scholarship expanding educational research methodology?

We assigned a subquestion to each one of us and agreed to respond to our subquestion in the form of one poem per special issue. After rereading the articles, we each created a "poetry cluster" (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009, p. 4) of five poems to answer one of the four guiding subquestions. A poetry cluster comprised five poems, each inspired by a special issue in order to capture its scholarly endeavours and contributions. We used words from the issues and rearranged them poetically to generate "found poetry" (Butler-Kisber, 2005, p. 96). These clusters of found poems served as "research poems," which allowed us to gain insight into the breadth and complexities of the special issues, and provided concise and evocative representations of our re-readings of the articles in the issues (Langer & Furman, 2004, para. 6).

We chose the French Malaysian pantoum poetry form. This format comprises a series of four-line stanzas, known as quatrains, with certain lines from each quatrain repeated in the subsequent quatrains (Furman et al., 2006). We anticipated that the recurring lines would allow the repetition of the most salient or striking ideas in a special issue (Furman et al., 2006). To illustrate, the pantoum below, "A Rhizomatic Spark," was inspired by the 2020 special issue on methodological inventiveness in response to the subquestion, "How is self-reflexive scholarship advancing conceptual and theoretical learning in educational research?"

A Rhizomatic Spark

Human experiences, relationships, and emotions
Igniting, conceptualising, practising research
Reimagining the self of the researcher
Explore both *why* and *how* we come to know

Igniting, conceptualising, practising research
Creative productive, imaginative space
Explore both *why* and *how* we come to know
Ethical practice for re-knowing the embodied self

Creative productive, imaginative space
Reimagining the self of the researcher
Ethical practice for re-knowing the embodied self
Human experiences, relationships, and emotions

Sharing our pantoum clusters in a video-recorded online meeting allowed us to see and hear how each team member had responded poetically to their subquestion, utilising ideas and evidence from the special issues. Although we had employed the same source material (the five special issues), our individual poetic reviews of the material were directed by a different question. Collaborative reading of the pantoums allowed us to discuss each subquestion in-depth, circling back through the self-reflexive studies offered in the special issues. We drew multiple strands from the self-reflexive studies and braided them together in various configurations while examining the poetry clusters.

The second layer of analysis: Tanka poems

As a second layer of analysis, we agreed to each create an "interpretive poem" to capture and articulate the insights generated by the team's discussion of our pantoum cluster (Langer & Furman, 2004, para. 16). For this step, we opted for the concise Japanese five-line tanka poetry arrangement with its pattern of five, seven, five, seven, seven syllables per line. We also followed the customary tanka content structure (Poets.org, n.d.), which develops from viewing an image in the first two lines to contemplating a personal response in the last two lines, with the third line signifying this shift in perspective. We chose the tanka's streamlined formation to distil the most significant insights into just a few words in response to our guiding question. The tanka's compact design required us to work carefully with the recording of our two-hour conversation and the text of the pantoums. We had to think deeply

about which ideas to foreground, and which to set aside (Furman & Dill, 2015). The subquestions, creative analytical responses (tankas), and a summary of each tanka discussion (with citations and examples from the special issue articles) are presented below.

How has self-reflexive scholarship addressed South African education's distinct challenges?

Protests Intensifying

Access resources
Protests intensifying
    Outputs quantified
        Business-ship than scholar-ship
        Decolonise curricula

The tanka's opening two lines, "access resources" and "protests intensifying," speak to how much of the research depicted in the special issues was situated in the volatile, uncertain, and complex setting within which South African higher education is embedded, and to the vulnerabilities of South African higher education institutions. The resourcing of higher education in South Africa, especially concerning funding, has historically been a contentious issue that has led to nationwide student protests. Protests against reduced government financial support and exorbitant university fees began in 2009 and peaked in 2015/2016. As Mudaly et al. (2021, p. 151) observed, "Poor funding ha[s] a negative impact on the availability of resources, the ability of historically black institutions to attract high-calibre academics, and the quality of education offered." The self-reflexive research done in South African higher education contexts made visible the personal, human costs of lack of access to resources and the accompanying volatility via accounts by those working in and studying that landscape. Personal, evocative accounts (Campbell & Mhlongo, 2019; Mudaly et al., 2021) shed light on the struggles faced by individuals who cannot access necessary resources such as educational materials and facilities. Moreover, they highlighted the unpredictable nature of this environment, which further exacerbates the challenges students and educators face.

The turn in the tanka, "outputs quantified," highlights the output-counting culture that has become a pervasive part of institutional accountability measures in higher education. Stemming from the neoliberal corporate managerial reculturing of universities in South Africa (and internationally), a tendency has been to disconnect human beings from academia's intellectual activities and to see academics as units that produce sets of numerical outputs (Bamberg et al., 2021; Maistry, 2015; Mudaly, 2015). This reporting practice trivialises authentic academic work and marginalises scholarly attributes that cannot be quantified "such as curiosity, passion, generativity and collegiality" (Pillay et al., 2015, p. 1).

The closing two lines of the tanka, linked to the corporate managerial ideology above, "business-ship than scholar-ship" and "decolonise curricula," focus attention on higher education institutions in South Africa becoming business-like in their operations at the expense of recognising and rewarding scholarly values. As a result, "quantitative performance indicators become the standard against which academics are judged" (Pillay et al., 2015, p. 1). Increasingly, higher education institutions have adopted a business sector

discourse in their leadership and governance practices. This business model undermines the academic project of knowledge production by reducing it to a market commodity that needs to be (micro)managed. And it devalues scholarly epistemological and ontological debates on, for example, contestations about knowledge—how knowledge is produced, whose knowledge is prioritised, why some forms of knowledge are marginalised, and how we can know, unknow, and reknow in a rapidly transforming world. Such deep questions have raised concerns about higher education curricula and their relevance for South Africa, precipitating calls for the decolonisation of higher education. To illustrate the legitimacy of calls for a decolonised curriculum, South African scholars Mudaly et al. (2021), writing about curricula in mathematics and science, flagged the dominance of Euro-Western paradigms, and advocated for the inclusion of African epistemologies.

The businessification model of higher education reconceptualises what constitutes academic work. These conditions may well run counter to the production of high-quality knowledge, yet scholarship in the special issues points to academics productively resisting neoliberal corporate managerialist ways of being and becoming in the academy. To illustrate, Maistry (2015) demonstrated how being self-reflexive created within him the consciousness to design a postgraduate supervision climate conducive to the intellectual development of his students—rather than focusing on a narrow, technical end product valued by corporatised institutions. Similarly, Bamberg et al. (2021) showed how engagement with self-reflexive participatory methodologies could foster a community of practice that challenged corporate managerial discourse that seeks to undermine the contribution of women in South African higher education teaching, research, and leadership.

How has self-reflexive scholarship illuminated issues of educational development and justice?

Evoking Reflexivity

Equal social rights
Authentic, honest searching
        Looking back insights
                Fount of arts-inspired methods
                To further equality

"Equal social rights" and "authentic, honest searching" connect with articles published in the special issues highlighting social in/justice. For example, deficit assumptions about the capabilities and fortitude of those on the margins of society were challenged by Mayaba (2015). And Baker (2020) highlighted the importance of breaking down barriers of silence and the need to have lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ+) educators serve as role models to promote social change. Similarly, Andrews and Nichols (2021) argued that critical reflection approaches are essential for reducing prejudice and fostering justice in higher education institutions. Müller and Kruger (2022) showed how poetry can be used to facilitate socially equitable futures in teacher education by connecting with complex past experiences of disadvantage. To this end, self-reflexive scholarship makes

a call for personally authentic (Baker, 2020) and introspective (Kortjass, 2019) methods of inquiry, resulting in unique first-person studies that shed new light on broader narratives that resonate with many people's lives to facilitate social justice through education.

The first two lines of the tanka draw attention to research featured in the special issues on social rights disparities across diverse communities. Young urban students in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms (Martin, 2019), LGBTIQ+ secondary school students (Baker, 2020), sexual and gender minorities in higher education institutions (Andrews & Nichols, 2021), and underprivileged university students (Müller & Kruger, 2022) are all examples of the marginalised communities self-reflexive researchers work with. The studies cover a broad spectrum of marginalised groups, and all the researchers are committed to presenting and challenging real-world, evocative accounts of discrimination, exclusion, prejudice, and stigma. Additionally, self-reflexive research brings to light, and questions, social taboos and avoidance tactics.

The third, pivotal line of the tanka, "looking back insights," signifies a shift in point of view. This statement emphasises the value of looking back at prior experiences through self-reflexive study to make a difference in the future of education. The articles in the special issues demonstrate various approaches for looking back in productive ways, utilising imaginative practices such as poetic inquiry (Baker, 2020; Mbatha et al., 2021; Woitek, 2020) and visual methods (Ashu et al., 2021; Müller, 2020; Woitek, 2020) that provide self-reflexive researchers with many tools to obtain critical insights into past experiences in the interests of future change.

According to Bernauer (2020), scholarly research that seeks to improve real-world educational experiences must take advantage of the subjective insights supplied by self-reflexivity. Bernauer (2020) argued that "subjectivity and self-reflexivity are important for changing practice" (p. 16) and that "self-reflexivity not only accepts subjectivity as an integral part of research, but embraces it as part and parcel of how we as human beings actually go about learning and living" (p. 15). Studies in these special issues examined how self-reflexive research's subjective experiences and understandings could inform educational practices and insights that promote social justice (Martin, 2019; Mayaba, 2015; Mbatha et al., 2021). These exemplars show how educational researchers can better understand how people learn and live by welcoming subjectivity and embracing self-reflexivity. This approach encourages the critical and creative investigation of many viewpoints and experiences to develop educational practices that promote social justice. Each special issue demonstrates the transforming power of self-reflexive research for supporting inclusive and equitable education.

"Fount of arts-inspired methods" and "to further equality" comprise the tanka's final two lines. Many challenging yet necessary dialogues are required to address the myriad inequalities in the South African and global education systems. Studies in the special issues show how self-reflexive approaches with arts-inspired methods, such as embroidery (Hancock, 2020), drama (Meskin & van der Walt, 2022), and painting (Müller, 2020), can open dialogue opportunities for educational researchers who see the need to make a

difference with and for others. These creative approaches allow researchers to make visible and challenge existing power dynamics within the education system in order to build a more inclusive and fair learning environment. By engaging in these dialogues utilising creative methods, self-reflexive researchers can contribute to ongoing efforts to create a just education system in South Africa and worldwide.

How is self-reflexive scholarship advancing conceptual and theoretical learning in educational research?

Imaginative, Embodied Scholarly Assemblages

Blurring boundaries
A rhizomatic spark
  Reflexive uncovering
    How we learn, cope and make way
    Inspire repositioning

"Blurring boundaries" and "a rhizomatic spark" generate the image of self-reflexive scholarship as moving and shifting forms, entangling as vital materiality, and igniting sparks at interconnecting theoretical nodes. The affirmative ethics associated with the creative, playful methods and modes of thinking, writing, and doing the self-reflexive research featured in the special issues afforded embodied and affective support for the researchers to recognise their vulnerability and their opportunities for lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) or fluid processes of becoming.

Rhizome and rhizomatic are concepts coined by Deleuze and Guattari (1980/2013) to characterise research and theory that welcomes many, non-hierarchical entry and exit points. In this way, the conceptual and theoretical learning of self-reflexive scholarship can be understood as rhizomatic. The methodological inventiveness in each issue enabled the researchers to draw on different artistic and linguistic repertoires to collectively, creatively, and playfully negotiate a crossing-over of normative borders with ethical care and trusting relationships.

To illustrate, the poetic account by Müller and Kruger (2022, p. 288) invited readers into playful, artful creations that "started with very different points of departure, a flower and a stone, and the clay [that] became a language that enabled these two objects to dialogue with one another." Müller and Kruger (2022) could share, reflect, and reflexively process a non-unitary self's human and non-human connections through the materiality of producing, moulding, and enfleshing feelings as clay objects to be analysed. They described how these objects could "give birth to something new, if yet unknown," in the evolving co-creative momentary experience (Müller & Kruger, 2022, p. 288).

Martin (2019) expanded the idea of using a new materialist lens for seeing the classroom surroundings and "honing in on object entanglements" to disrupt the limiting emphases on teacher and students (p. 96). As Deleuze and Guattari explained,

assemblages have elements (or multiplicities) of several kinds: human, social, and technical machines. . . . We can no longer even speak of distinct machines, only of types of interpenetrating multiplicities that at any given moment form a single machinic assemblage. (1987, p. 36)

As a posthuman assemblage, the classroom modifies teaching and learning opportunities in order to foster an educational justice environment (Martin, 2019). The reflexive possibility offered by object study, according to Flint (2019, p. 121), "generate[s] dynamic and relational understandings of space and time." Flint elaborated on how object interactions while conducting walking interviews prompted a variety of "connections and combinations of assemblages that offer the possibility to intervene in, and reproduce, spaces in more socially just and equitable ways" (2019, p. 135). As a collection of work, the special issues show how self-reflexive inquiry can enable educational researchers to work inventively with concepts like academic identity (Mbatha et al., 2021), social cohesion (Ashu et al., 2021), being-becoming playfully (Müller, 2019) to activate fresh ways to think about producing knowledge and the value of rejecting linear, formulaic ways of viewing their selves and their work as educational researchers.

The central line in the tanka, "reflexive uncovering," represents a turning point that highlights the self-reflexive researchers' ethical responsiveness and capacities to act with embodied awareness of what, how, and why they needed to open up to epistemic inventiveness and new and different knowledges. An example is Mitchell's (2015) autoethnographic account of herself as a transnational teacher educator who works in a large university in a city in Canada and as a part-time teacher in universities across the world. She contemplated the potential contribution of autoethnography as offering "a place to locate and make sense of our experiences" and to ask "who we are, what we do, and why do we think the way we do?" (Mitchell, 2015, p. 10) when teaching in diverse higher education settings. Similarly, Berry and Hodges (2015) drew on autoethnography to recognise and enhance the experience of a vulnerable pedagogy for enabling a "dynamic uncovering of [teacher educator] selves" and for sparking a new pathway to study "teaching as a site for inquiry" (p. 60).

The final lines of the tanka, "how we learn, cope, and make way" and "inspire repositioning," highlight hope and desire for building spaces for many types of learning and research with relational and rippling repercussions for social change and action. Across the special issues, self-reflexive researchers constructed rhizomatic assemblages that used poetic inquiry, autoethnography, narrative inquiry, object inquiry, and methodologically innovative research to generate conceptual and theoretical learning. Self-reflexive scholarship can allow emerging and experienced educational researchers to create knowledge differently and produce creative scholarship with affectivity and relationality—as an alternative to individualist autonomy by productively resisting dominant education discourses.

How is self-reflexive scholarship expanding educational research methodology?

Opening to Re(Learning)

Scattering echoes
Slowly unwrapping layers
      Ruptures, entry points
           Shared (re)imagining
           Vulnerable hopefulness

"Scattering echoes" and "slowly unwrapping layers" conjure images of self-reflexive scholars purposefully designing imaginative, complex approaches for exploring multiple views and examining their preconceptions about who they are, how they know, and what they know. As they scatter and unwrap, they ask questions about themselves within and in response to evolving relationships and experiences as well as contingent, changing social and individual conditions and situations such as, "Where do I come from, how did I get here, and indeed, where is here?" (Mitchell, 2015, p. 7).

"Scattering echoes" implies a willingness to confront uncertainty and preconceived notions, as seen in the self-reflexive studies across the issues (Mbatha et al., 2021; Mitchell, 2015; Woitek, 2020). "Slowly unwrapping layers" suggests a thoughtful and thorough approach to challenging assumptions by seeking new ways to see and hear different points of view (Mayaba, 2015; Meskin & van der Walt, 2022; van Laren & Masinga, 2022). The unwrapping is done to better understand the circumstances, histories, and interpretations that shape one's ways of knowing and doing—as well as the possibilities for change. The self-reflexive scholars unwrapped layers of remembered experience,

> not . . . as a representation of a past reality but, rather, as an occurrence that is constructed in the present and entangled with identity and subjectivity . . . to explore . . . affective possibilities and entangled relationships. (Müller, 2019, p. 55)

This depiction of a reflexive researcher (or researchers) represents an iterative process of introspection and critical examination of the self "in the space in between" (Müller, 2019, p. 56). Self-reflexive researchers accept the responsibility of actively shaking out layers of perspectives and broadening their horizons beyond their own experiences and contexts.

"Ruptures, entry points" represents a turning point that disrupts and deconstructs known, opening methodological portals to travel further into the unknown—and indicates the possibility and necessity for imaginative ways of investigating and modifying what is already known and understood. Self-reflexive research is well suited to developing new methods and creatively combining existing methods due to its flexibility, adaptability, and openness to growth and change (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2022). A culture of intellectual curiosity and creativity can flourish when researchers are encouraged to act and look critically and resourcefully through innovative research methods in self-reflexive studies (Hancock, 2020; Meskin & van der Walt, 2022; Müller & Kruger, 2022). By using unconventional

approaches, scholars can uncover previously unknown relationships and open new avenues for further research.

"Shared (re)imagining" and "vulnerable hopefulness" are responses to the scattering, unravelling, and rupturing effect. Self-reflexive research can be conducted by an individual or group of researchers. Nonetheless, researchers who engage in self-reflexivity, whether independently or in collaboration, do not exist in isolation. When they actively seek out and consider alternative viewpoints, they learn more about the environments, stories, and understandings that shape their work—and the possibilities for change (Ashu et al., 2021; Kortjass, 2019; Mbatha et al., 2021).

Being part of a community of compassionate, curious people who understand the risks and benefits of self-reflexive research can be beneficial because feedback and diverse perspectives, while useful for personal growth, can "[reveal] more questions and [generate] more uncertainties" (Woitek, 2020, p. 71) "in both the past and the present," (2020, p. 61), leaving one feeling exposed and vulnerable. Self-reflexive study encourages people to connect with others to confront their preconceptions and assumptions and embrace the discomfort of uncertainty (Bernauer, 2020; Berry & Hodges, 2015; Mbatha et al., 2021). Engaging in meaningful dialogue with others requires courage and openness, allowing for exploring new ideas and perspectives. Finally, being willing to be vulnerable can lead to significant personal growth and a better understanding of oneself and the world. The subjective nature of self-reflexive methodologies implies a willingness to put oneself out there to bring about the transformation that can only come from within—with the support of others who share an awareness of the value and risk of vulnerability, as well as an optimistic commitment to "(re)imagining."

The third layer of analysis: A lantern poem

The third phase of our poetic analysis began with reading and discussing the tankas in an online meeting. Each of us shared our tanka and offered a content analysis related to the SIG scholarship included in the special issues. We addressed the significance of each line and the tanka as a whole, drawing on ideas and illustrations from the issues. After listening to the tankas and discussing the content analyses, we collaboratively composed a lantern poem to clarify our thinking and to answer our overarching research question: "What can we learn from consciously pausing to analyse the SIG's educational scholarship?" Composing the lantern poem added a third analytical, creative dimension. The five lines of Japanese lantern poetry have a syllable pattern of one, two, three, four, and one, visually resembling the shape of a Japanese lantern (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2019). Lantern comes from the Latin *lumen*, which means "to shine," "to give light," and "to be brilliant" (Harper, 2016, para.1). Using this even more concise poetic form, we aimed to illuminate the most significant ideas in our tanka conversation. Our lantern poem is below, followed by a synopsis of its content analysis.

Imaginative, Embodied Scholarly Assemblages

Spark
Ruptures
Boundaries
Repositioning
Sight

Our poetic analysis of the SIG scholarship highlighted how embodied and imaginative self-reflexivity in research could *spark* a *repositioning* of academic selves, *rupturing* taken-for-granted notions of what it means to research and be researched, and providing new lines of *sight* for action and change. Crossing disciplinary, national, and methodological *boundaries*, the special issues drew on multiple fields, including science, mathematics, language, visual and theatre arts, early childhood education and gender studies, as well as diverse approaches such as critical autoethnography, arts-based personal narrative inquiry, and poetic self-study. By pausing to reflect and creatively analysing the special issue contributions as a whole, we discovered how this imaginative, interwoven academic research, employing a wide range of stances and styles, could bring to light multiple narratives and perspectives in an international research learning community. We saw how incorporating creative ways and methods to learn with and through other educational researchers can encourage the repositioning of how we understand, know, and do research—opening up opportunities for others to take part. The lantern also symbolises hope for educational and societal growth and movement in South Africa and beyond.

Learning from the poetic analysis of the Self-Reflexive Methodologies SIG Scholarship

By revisiting and examining the five special issues through increasingly concise poetic forms, we were able to shed light on the variety and contributions of scholarship inspired by the explorations and conversations of the Self-Reflexive Methodologies SIG since 2014. Using poetic inquiry, we illustrated and distilled what this wide-ranging scholarship offers for facing challenges in South African education, speaking up about educational development and justice, advancing conceptual and theoretical understanding, and broadening research methodology.

The multilayered poetic analysis highlighted how self-reflexive researchers have evocatively portrayed and grappled with challenges South African education faces, such as resource disparities, environmental instability, and the need for comprehensive reforms. Self-reflexive scholarship has also pushed back against the culture of quantifying outputs driven by neoliberal corporate managerialism, which marginalises scholarly attributes and hinders the production of high-quality knowledge. The research has confronted discrimination, exclusion, and prejudice through authentic inquiry, introspection, and creative dialogue—illuminating the shadows and questioning taboos. And the special issues have advanced conceptual and theoretical learning in educational research by blurring boundaries and sparking rhizomatic

connections. This work has fostered conceptual and theoretical growth that defies normative constraints and flourishes in ethical care and trust. It has offered opportunities for epistemic inventiveness, illuminating the interplay of perspectives, histories, and interpretations that shape educational research understandings, and revealing the fluidity of identity and subjectivity. Self-reflexive scholarship has also expanded educational research methodology by embracing creativity, vulnerability, and shared reimagining. In these distinctive ways, the Self-Reflexive Methodologies community contributes to the broader research movement for generative educational transformation in South Africa and beyond.

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