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Creative Alchemy: Wildness, Beauty, and Imagination (WBI) as Theoretical and Methodological Framework

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Abstract

The faintest wisps of light steeped the edge of the horizon in color to embroider its outline against a star-sprinkled black sky. *It is always darkest before the dawn*, I thought. My breath steamed out into the cold air. I ran in the high desert winter cold of Santa Fe, New Mexico. People assume that since we are in the southwestern United States, our climate is hot, but we are in the mountains at 7,000 feet above sea level, as reflected in our winter temperatures. I stopped to watch the panorama of color unfold upon the horizon. A slow ebb of pale light grew until a sharp, rounded pinpoint of brightness blossomed into a spherical bump resting on the skyline. The sun rose, pulling a drape of light and color in its wake. Chroma refers to the intensity or saturation of a color. The chroma colors remained soft in this emergent sunrise. Color soaked upward and caught in rafts of low-hanging clouds. Pale yellow ushered in faint orange, then muted pink, then violet, and then bloomed into deep purple. Coral etched the underbellies of scattered clouds. Seconds later, as if someone had played with the color filter, the sky burst into rich, vibrant shades. There is a moment in every sunrise and sunset where the colors reach their zenith, their full chroma peak. This moment lasts a brief time before the colors soften into pastels and slowly dissolve into daylight. The most beautiful sunrises and sunsets are those in which each color maintains its unique shade while simultaneously infusing the surrounding colors with its hue. Effervescent combinations glow with a unique radiance all their own. The alchemy of liminal spaces creates possibilities of new realities. Alchemy refers to a power or process that changes or transforms something in a mysterious or impressive way. Creative research reflects these spaces of distinct colors blooming into one another, creating a new shade.

Keywords: Beauty, Wilderness, Alchemy, Landscape, Culture, Space

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Introduction

The creation of the Wildness, Beauty, and Imagination (WBI) framework emerged within the alchemy of liminal spaces. Much like the shifting colors of a sunrise or sunset, this framework draws from the colors of other works and fuses together to create a shade of its own. This article describes the process, procedural details, and how this new framework fits within the greater creative research literature. Lawrence (2024) refers to “the alchemy of transdisciplinary inquiry” (p. 6), a phrase that resonates deeply with my own experiences as a researcher and writer. Alchemy refers to a power or process that transforms in a mysterious way. This framework embodies the creative research journey. Elements revealed during the journey will be shared here, including greater creative research and landscape literatures, geohumanities (an interdisciplinary field that explores the relationship between geographical thought (space, place, landscape) and the humanities (literature, history, art, philosophy), data analysis, and imaginative research. Authenticity, creativity, harmony, and action were found in WBI. This process occurred in two stages. First, I *applied* the steps of the framework to *create* the framework. Next, I provide an example of how this framework can be implemented in other research studies. Now, the journey of the process.

Research Journey

My journey with wildness, beauty, and imagination began years ago, long before I had language to express these ideas. The kernel may have been deep within me all along, but it took life events for the ideas to take root and grow. Emergent roots happened in the Sonoran Desert of the southwestern United States, where rainfall averages only between 3 to 15 inches per year. Plants must resilient, adaptable, and resourceful to survive—much like creative researchers. I grew up on a remote cattle ranch in southeastern Arizona, within this landscape, the Sonoran Desert, in an area known as Cascabel, Spanish for the rattles of a rattlesnake. The closest small, rural town was an hour away on a dirt road. I still feel the thrum of the tires over washboard gravel when I close my eyes. Too isolated for phone lines, and with parents who limited television and encouraged reading. I grew up horseback and reading, years of books and braids. When I search my memory for when my relationship with wildness, beauty, and imagination began, my mind always returns here, the intense heat prickling my skin and spaciousness, physical and emotional. The world was mine to explore, and I did. Never did I imagine these experiences would lie dormant for years and ultimately sprout and mature into a transdisciplinary and creative research ecosystem. Creative research through wildness, beauty, and imagination lands as creative geoartistry (Madge, 2014), an artistic expression within creative methodologies.

It took me many years to embrace my authentic leanings and lenses within the academic realm. For most of my academic life, I felt that I didn’t quite fit. I experienced research and writing through a different lens than traditionally encouraged within a positivist academic realm. I later learned there was a word for how I experienced the world, a word accepted in academic communities— transdisciplinary (Jantsch, 1972).

Learning of transdisciplinarity provided the language to follow some of my natural passions that I did not feel fit into traditional academia. A creative writer, I felt the need to separate my academic world from my fiction and non-fiction creative work. Encounters with Scholarly Personal Narrative (Nash & Bradley, 2011) and Lilyology (Blair, 2015, 2019) opened possibilities to weave the worlds and works

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together. I explored language and landscape through the lenses of wildness, beauty, and imagination. I applied the framework structure and steps to its creation.

From antiquity through the Middle Ages, creativity was believed to come from the divine and from otherworldly elements (Glăveanu & Kaufman, 2019). Elizabeth Gilbert refers to this in her fabulous TED Talk, “Your Elusive Creative Genius” (2009). She goes back to the times of the ancient Greeks and Romans, who believed creativity did not come from human beings but rather from divine spirits. Greeks called these spirits daemons. Socrates believed that he had a daemon who spoke to him from afar. Romans referred to these creative spirits as a genius, who literally lived in the walls of the artist’s studio to provide wisdom and guidance. Gilbert tells the story of poet Ruth Stone sharing her childhood experience of feeling a poem coming thundering towards her across the landscape, and she had to run as fast as she could to the house for a pencil, ready to receive and write it when it arrived. If she wasn’t fast enough, the poem thundered by, off to find another poet to receive it.

My experiences with creative ideas certainly include these experiences of listening, and ideas coming unbidden, an experience of the alchemy of transdisciplinary inquiry. These sparks are integral to my creative journeys and are the source of some of my best work and ideas. Lawrence (2024) refers to “the alchemy of transdisciplinary inquiry” (p. 6), a phrase that resonates deeply with my own experiences as a researcher and writer. Merriam-Webster defines ‘alchemy’ as: “1) medieval chemical science and speculative philosophy aiming to achieve the transmutation of the base metals into gold, the discovery of a universal cure for disease, and the discovery of a means of indefinitely prolonging life, 2) a power or process that changes or transforms something in a mysterious or impressive way.” It is this second definition that is especially applicable to creative research, *a power or process that changes or transforms something in a mysterious or impressive way*.

Creative research embodies structure, transformations, and connections that appear in mysterious ways. I experienced this while developing this framework and writing this chapter. I knew I wanted to implement this framework in a research project to ground the chapter and apply its concepts to discoveries or kinks. I considered several areas I am currently working on. I initially focused on applying WBI to research on translanguaging (Cummins, 2021; Garcia & Wei, 2016; Ibarra Johnson, Armijo Romero & Jurado, 2024; Kleyn, 2022). The more that I thought about it, the more I realized that the piece merited an independent research project and another article or chapter. I mused during my early morning magic hours, a time of solitude and sanctuary integral to my writing, academic, and creative life. A time of coffee, candles, and little white lights strung around the window and bookshelves. The early morning magic hours are a time to *create space* for those tendrils of thought to come through the business of life, a time to follow those ephemeral will-o'-the-wisp ideas wherever they may lead. Developing this framework was a journey of discovery.

With notes, books, and journals spread before me, I searched for the sparks that would compose the whole, a journey that reflected E.L. Doctorow’s thoughts on writing, “Writing a novel is like driving a car at night. You can see only as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way.” When I began, I didn’t know the destination, but I trusted that if I kept focused on the headlights in front of me, I could make it the whole way. It was during that time one morning, once this knowing came to me, the ground grew firmer under my feet.

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My experiences with creation reflect the dance between intuition and applied intention. WBI honors and integrates both. This framework embraces and creates space for the intuitive, as well as the structure of what to do with them and the creative research process itself. Life is a perpetual process of creation. The question is whether we engage actively with this process or not. Do we engage, guide, listen, sculpt and craft? Or do we withdraw, view as if from afar, and let the time slide by? Julia Cameron (1998) discusses creatives who wait for envisioned huge swaths of time. I am now in the years that I earlier envisioned as composed with vast open canvases upon which to create. What life has taught me — and teaches me every day — is that to live with a caring heart, to love people and projects, to do our best to take care of those we love never ceases and takes up extraordinary amounts of time. WBI honors the ebb and flow that of energy that spans the narrative arc of life.

Where did that research journey lead, once my courage was kindled and I stepped onto new ground? Where did I arrive after following the headlights, though the destination was unclear? I am now at home in this new rhythm, much to my surprise and delight. That road led to the development of the Wildness, Beauty, and Imagination framework.

A desire for wildness, beauty, and imagination to contribute to the field of creative research engendered this new framework. In applying these qualities to language and landscape, I pondered their potential to enhance creative research methods. This inspired the development of the framework's details. This framework augments the rich field of creative methods and allows researchers to conduct inquiries and collect data through an additional innovative approach. Through creating and applying WBI to this project, the desired goal was achieved—the contribution of a framework within creative research to provide researchers with an additional option that may best suit their unique inquiries and projects. Where can WBI take us, toward what kinds of ideas and ways of working? WBI embeds within creative research and geohumanities, all forms of creative academic expression. Next, a review of the literature to position WBI within the greater field, and then how researchers can apply it to their own research studies.

Creative Research and Geohumanities

WBI positions itself within the greater body of creative research methods literature. Of the five key areas of creative research methods: arts-based research, embodied research, research using technology, multi-modal research, and transformative research frameworks, WBI falls within transformative research frameworks (Kara, 2020).

Creative Research

Kara (2020) highlights the 21st century as a dynamic and exciting time for research methods and demonstrates that creative methods are “available for use at all stages of the research process” (p. 6). Creative research methods encompass imaginative, non- traditional, and positivist ways of exploring questions, especially useful when a researcher seeks deeper insight into experiences, emotions, culture, or complex social issues—elements that don’t show up well in surveys or statistics. Creative research methods usually go beyond questionnaires and experiments; involve visual, artistic, or participatory tools; include participants expressing themselves authentically; focus on meaning, stories, and lived experience; and are more common in social, cultural, and design research.

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Kara (2024) addresses the essential question, “Why bother with creative methods?” Kara responds with four primary reasons: 1) Better quality data. Studies report authors conviction in gathering richer, more useful data than would have obtained through conventional methods, 2) Funders appreciate creative approaches and can help work stand out from the crowd, 3) After initial set-up, some creative methods can save you time, especially when participants have a high level of control, and 4) Creative methods can be more ethical, note, not *are* more ethical. For example, creative methods of data collection can involve participants more fully, including in the initial stages.

In recent years, there has been exponential growth and development in imaginative research, expressed through a multitude of creative projects. Creative research frameworks within the arts weave together the creative and scholarly (Krauth & Nash, 283). Most arts-based research includes elements of creative writing and the visual arts: painting, collage, drawing, photography, and sculpture. It may also include drama, music, sculpture, or textile arts (Watson 2011: 398). Creative research includes technology and the online environment. Beneito-Montagut argues that online interpersonal communication aligns with offline exchanges (Beneito-Montagut, 2011:717). Creative research is often presented through performative, visual, and other arts-based expressions (Gergen and Gergen 2012: 12, 25-6).

The WBI framework draws from this rich body of work and incorporates, as self-defined, *wildness*, *beauty*, and *imagination* into the field of creative research. The terms, structure, and procedure are defined and offer researchers another method option. WBI provides a structure suitable for application across the spectrum of creative research projects, which fall under the generous emphases on arts-based methods, performance and expression, technology-driven approaches, and creative data analysis.

Kara, Mannay, and Roy (2024) present a rich abundance of projects and methods within *The Handbook of Creative Data Analysis*. This text moves beyond the mystery and magic of data analysis (p. 1) and details projects in creative data analysis of quantitative data, as well as creative, embodied, performative, visual, and written arts-based projects, and some that push boundaries.

Barratt (2024) reveals new ways of thinking through her project, working with people from different heritages learning English, and how drawing can be used to alleviate research bias and Westernized thinking. Several projects dispel the myth that creative analysis is only for qualitative research, including Carruthers Thomas’ (2024) revisualization of survey data as a graphic novella and Morgan, Davies, and Milton’s (2024) use of discourse analysis to inform content analysis. Both projects challenged strict epistemological limitations and boundaries about how data should be analyzed. Gray and Lazenly (2024) demonstrate how analysis can be a playful process through storyboarding, creating dynamic, collaborative engagement with research data via the analog journey method.

Geohumanities

Within creative research dwell the often-enchanted spaces of geohumanities. Geohumanities explores relationships between humans and natural environments, rife with the complexities of historical, cultural, and social elements of place-based relationships.

As a concept adapted two decades go, “geohumanities” is a compelling field that brings together scholarship that converses with the humanities and social sciences or is grounded in artistic practices where explorations come to light of how individuals and collectivities create, experience,

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sense, and feel places. Dimensions of embodied, affective, creative, and critical explorations are often interconnected with socio-ecological experiences, cultural landscapes, and physical environments frequently challenged by historical and contemporary societal power imbalances (Christou, 2024, p. 246).

Geohumanities provide a dynamic theoretical and conceptional avenues bridging between literary and artistic expressions of nation/states, landscapes, environments, and spaces where imaginative interlacings unfold. These bridges create the possibilities of new realities that embody the spirit of Anzaldúa's ideas about connective arches and *Nepantla*: "Whenever I glimpse the arch of this bridge my breath catches. Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives" (Keating, 2009, p. 24). *Nepantla*, "a Náhuatl word meaning *tierra entre medio*. Transformations occur in this in-between space" (p. 242).

Nested within creative research, geohumanities often flourish in the spaces between. Cresswell (2014) immerses himself in the spaces between academic geography and poetry to create new forms of expression, the embodiment of a creative geoartist (Madge, 2014). Cresswell writes, "Writing poetry and writing academic geography are very different and my belief that the poetry would help with my prose was a little naïve. Nevertheless, new terrain has opened for me. I have been invited to write more in the space between academic prose and poetry" (p. 21). Geohumanities ushered in an abundant array of innovative and creative projects. Sarah de Leeuw's *Geographies of a Lover* (2012) melds land and love through poetry. Throughout this eco-erotic text of love poems, de Leeuw blends landscapes and desire through intense, rhythmic prose, evocative of the blending of the land and love affair. This book delves into emotional and physical landscape through an unapologetic approach and innovative style. De Leeuw transgresses the traditional boundaries of poetry and academic geography to create a unique and impactful work within the geohumanities sphere.

Madge (2014) connects academic and creative spaces through poetry as research methodology within a creative (re) turn (Hawkins, 2012). Hawkins proposes there are two key streams of work within geohumanities: those of 'dialogue', in which geographers interpret and analyze artworks to make geographical arguments about landscape. The second stream grounds in 'doing', in which geographers carry out research. The first stream reflects 'geographies of creativity', while the second expresses creativity of geography. Madge proposes a third stream, that of a 'creative geoartist', creating geographically oriented aesthetic work through artistic expressions, such as creative writing (Cook, 2014; Lorimer 2013), theater (Pratt and Johnston 2013), photography (Lombard 2013; Oh 2012), and film-making videos (Mistry and Berardi 2012).

Madge poses the question, "Which people, places, sub-disciplines of geography and which creative practices might be excluded in this move towards creativity" (p. 183). The WBI framework responds to this question through the integration of a creative research methodology that embodies the tenants of geohumanities. Cresswell, de Leeuw, and Madge explore and express this terrain through poetry. One way that I delve into these spaces between through the creative research methodology of WBI. Meinig (1983) suggests that as we organize our thoughts, select our data, choose our words, and make our statements, we are actively engaged in the art of geography. The creative research framework of Wildness, Beauty, and

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Imagination contributes to creative research literatures and geohumanities by bridging these two fields through a methodological and theoretical tool.

This article responds to Madge's (2014) question, "Who will evaluate the 'success' of creative work, in what terms, and do we have the necessary skills to do so?" Madge responds with poetry. I respond with this research framework. Madge explores this question through the lens of poetry. I explore the question through the lenses of wildness, beauty, and imagination as applied to creative research. Madge highlights the relational value of a poem. Creative research through wildness, beauty, and imagination is grounded in authentic relations: relation with self, relation with research, relation with the world.

Wildness, Beauty, Imagination (WBI) Methodology

Wildness, Beauty, and Imagination (WBI) methods fall within narrative inquiry (Anfara, Jr. & Metz, 2015; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004; Kim, 2016) and transdisciplinary scholarship (Morin, 1992; Montuori, 2013; Nicolescu, 2008; Wells, 2013), and creative research literatures (Kara, 2020). Wells (2013) emphasizes why transdisciplinarity research addresses the complexities of our contemporary world, sustainability, and is integral to creative research. Isolated disciplines alone do not address the interrelated complexities of current social, ecological, ethical, political, and scientific realities and challenges. Remaining within each of these disciplines or arenas does not account for the full range of dynamics, factors, and implications. Economic, political, cultural systems, social, and psychological systems are interrelated, and research done with them teased apart does not reflect full research potential.

Wildness, beauty, and imagination provide additional perspectives to creative research. Influential landscape authors convey expressions of wildness, beauty, and imagination toward the physical, geographic, and emotional elements of landscape (Ackerman, 1991; Childs, 2001; Davis, 1998; Griffiths, 2006; Irvine, 2009; Kingsolver, 1999, 2002; Kimmerer, 2013; Macfarlane, 2015; Meloy, 2003; Nabhan, 2002; Tempest Williams, 1991, 2015; Wink, 2009, 2013, 2015; Wink & Tweit, 2016). While there are rich and ample literary traditions of wildness, beauty, and imagination these focuses have primarily remained in the arena of creative non-fiction and fiction, rather than integrated specifically within creative research. Wildness, beauty, and imagination hold the potential to serve as connective strands within creative and creative research.

Wildness

Wildness conveys a fluid, inherent expression of nature. Wildness acknowledges that research emerges from natural cultural, historical, and geographic landscapes, sculpted through time through human interaction with the environment. Griffiths describes: "All that is wild is winged—life, mind, and language" (2006, p. 1). This quote embodies the underpinnings of wildness within creative research and highlights the encouragement for authentic wildness of creative research. Wildness is undiluted authenticity. When we are wild, we are our pure selves. Authenticity expresses wildness. Wildness expresses authenticity.

Wildness connotes a deep sense authentic connection. WBI sinks deeply into transdisciplinary and creative connections. Tempest Williams (2019) expresses connection by experiencing wildness as "akin to love, flush with chemical reactions, hormonal and pheromonal, a firing of synapses in our brain that is

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integral to our survival. We are propelled by the currents of connection” (p. 42). She describes how, “isolation is quelled. Fear is replaced by awe. We recognize wildness as creativity in the extreme” (p. 42).

Wildness as authenticity and creativity invites engaged awareness and active participation. The sense of losing oneself in the moment exemplifies wildness in a visceral, fluid form, experienced with a sense of timelessness and peace. Creative research reflects extreme creativity and timelessness. Wildness is essential in these endeavors in recognition of how the outer reflects the inner. A literary exploration of the research landscape through the lens of wildness expands on a traditional academic lens. WBI integrates the intuitive sense of wildness inherent in the human spirit with the depth of emotion and connection with the wild into the academic realm. Wildness encompasses the wholeness of creative research.

Beauty

Beauty holds an integral space within WBI. Beauty is understood in this inquiry as the Diné word *hózhó*, which conveys harmony, balance, wholeness, and integrity (Tapahonso, 2019; Todacheene, 2014). Beauty, as referenced throughout this inquiry, implies an integrated wholeness. To engage in research through the lens of beauty, of *hózhó*, lifts the ideas to encompass far beyond the restrictions of the aesthetic as often understood through a Western lens. As applied to creative research, beauty identifies presence and gaps in harmony and balance and finds ways to integrate these elements through research implications and actions.

Beauty integrates social justice throughout a holistic lens. The strand of social justice weaves an elemental thread. Scarry explores beauty as social justice and addresses how beauty, far from “contributing to social injustice ... or even remaining neutral to injustice as an innocent bystander, assists us in the work of addressing injustice, not only by requiring of us constant perceptual acuity” (1999, p. 62). Scarry addresses the banishment of beauty from the humanities in the last few decades. When discussing the banishment of beauty, Scarry does not refer to the physical objects, such as painting, stories, poems, sculptures, essays, stories, but rather the conversation about beauty. Scarry proposes beauty is not a distraction from social justice, but rather a powerful force that can help us attend to and even inspire a desire for fairness. She contends that beauty, by its very nature, requires attention and contemplation, which can lead us to recognize injustice and work towards a more just world.

WBI interprets beauty as representation of harmony and social justice within its methodology. WBI responds to Scarry’s question, “What precisely does one hope to bring about in oneself when one opens oneself to, or even actively pursues, beauty?” (p. 86). This question expands when applied to beauty as a research question within a creative research methodology.

Beauty is also found in our daily lives, independent of our circumstances, grounds this framework. Beauty can be found in the ordinary daily life: the gleam as sunlight touches the rim of a coffee cup, the curve of a leaf on a plant or tree, the wisp of a cloud against a crisp, blue sky. Beauty need not be found only in the grandiose, in the far away. Too often, beauty is perceived as the aesthetic, the extravagant, the distant, the rare. People assume that one needs to go on vacation to someplace exotic or foreign, attend an art exhibit of a famous artist, or spend a small fortune on travel experiences. Yes, beauty can live in all those experiences. Bits of beauty within daily life surround us when we strengthen our beauty muscles of attention.

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WBI draws on the rich body of literature focused on these concepts (Chiu, 2020; Miravalle, 2019; O'Donohue, 2005, 2017; Raine, 1967; Scarry, 1999; Scruton, 2011; Turner, 1991). What differentiates WBI from these literatures is the lenses as applied to creative research and the development of the specific stages and steps for researchers to apply to their own inquiries and investigations.

Imagination

Imagination means singing to a wide, invisible audience. It means receptivity to the creative unconscious, the macrocosmic mind, the artistic mind. It makes erotic philosophers of us, as we imagine the world in images that make whole. To imagine is to give birth to—to embody the spirit in word and picture and behavior. The world will change when we can imagine it differently, and, like artists, do the work of creating new social forms. (M.C. Richards, 1996, p. 119)

The energy of imagination lies in its potential for action, for enacting change, for envisioning what has not yet taken place. Sanders invites us to consider imagination as “breaking the shell of the status quo, summoning up objects that do not yet exist, actions that no one has yet performed, and wiser ways of living that have yet to be realized” (2020, p. 6). Imagination holds the possibilities around (Hopkins, 2019; Lachman, 2017; Miller Jr, 1972; Sanders, 2020). Imagination plays a vital role in this transdisciplinary research, as researchers give “rise to stories that have never been told before ... In scientists, imagination generates hunches about how some portion of nature might work ... In all of us, imagination can give rise to compassion, by providing insight into the feelings and thoughts of other people” (Sanders, 2020, p. 26).

Ruha (2024) brings a social justice lens to imagination. She refuses to police the parameters of imagination and encourages the reader to let their imagination run wild. Ruha describes her use of the word as “undisciplined, promiscuous, and porous” (Introduction). She scrutinizes how our collective imagination has been arrested and confined. Ruha shines a light on those who may feel crushed under social structures and encourages all to unleash their imaginations. “We can rob unjust systems of their power *and make a way outta no way*—imagining different possibilities for how to connect and care for one another as we also remake the world (p. 76).

Coleman (2024) elicits imagination in creative research through role-based rewriting. Rewriting in role is a creative analytical tool in which researchers rewrite existing data using fiction and fictional characters. This process invites imagination as an opportunity for liminality and resonance (Leavy, 2022). Coleman suggests rewriting rejects dominant narratives within academic discourse and encourages voices to question the authority of privileged perspectives. Not only does rewriting integrate imagination, but Coleman also found it enjoyable and academically vigorous.

Conducting creative research through the lens of imagination provides additional paradigmatic potential for understanding for researchers and readers within and beyond academia. Imagination assumes action to bring the imagined idea into reality. WBI embraces and integrates the entirety of research complexities, possibilities, and potential. The powerful and potential-filled essence may bring disparate and/or absent discussions together, as Sanders (2020) poses:

This is a healing power, manifest in the way scattered elements gather into stars, debris from supernovas gathers into organisms, organisms form communities, and in the way our two-legged

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kind shapes Earth's materials into art. What we call *imagination* is a human expression of the shaping force at work in the universe. (p. 33)

The imaginative phase draws the research findings and implications out of the theoretical and structures how to bring these visions to life, the call to action for the researcher, for the implementation of transformative research and education.



Wildness: *Authenticity/Creativity* — Orange is a color often associated with authenticity and creativity. Combines yellow's optimism and red's energy and can represent a desire for change. Orange is a vibrant, energetic color linked to enthusiasm and adventure. A great color for adding excitement and energy to creative projects.

Beauty: *Harmony, Wholeness, Balance* — Green is often associated with beauty, reflecting nature's abundance. An often-soothing shade, green symbolizes nature, balance, and growth.

Imagination: *Action* — The color most strongly associated with imagination is purple. It evokes a sense of mystery and connection. In the context of psychology, red is frequently considered the color of action, for its association with energy, urgency, and excitement. It is highly visible, making it effective at drawing attention.

1. Wildness: *Authentic Creativity*—What am I authentically passionate about?
2. Beauty: *Harmony*—How might my research contribute to harmony, wholeness, and balance in the research field?

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3. Imagination: *Action*—How can I apply research findings through specific actions that will contribute to the research field?

Procedure (Part 1): Application of WBI Steps to Create WBI

1) **Wildness:** *what am I passionate about? When do I experience timelessness and creativity in the extreme? What research questions stem from this? What does the literature yield about this topic?*

First, I began with my authentic passions, “What am I passionate about? Where does the creative energy flow? Where is fear replaced by awe, and I sink into timelessness when I am engaged? Where do I lose all track of time and am amazed when I look at the clock to see how much time has passed, as I was in the world of my passions?” The answers for me are wildness, beauty, and imagination. I initially searched the landscape and language literature through these lenses and read 25 years of journals to find threads and themes (Author’s Own, 2025). The more I sank into those ideas, the more their potential wisdom in additional arenas grew. I wondered if they could contribute to creative research methods to provide additional research findings, data, and implications.

Next, my research questions became, “Are there theoretical or methodological frameworks already in existence that draw on the ideas of wildness, beauty, and imagination? If not, how could this framework contribute to the greater body of creative research methodologies?”

2) **Beauty:** *where is there harmony and balance within my inquiry? How can I identify, organize, and document harmony and balance within this research? Where do the findings indicate a lack of balance and wholeness within the space?*

Then, the literature review of creative research methodologies and frameworks. I sank into this body of literature, took notes, outlined, and combed through references and bibliographies for any mentions of wildness, beauty, and imagination. I tracked the common themes and threads that I found within my research journal (Brown, 2021). I found many common threads but did not find creative research frameworks through the lenses of wildness, beauty, and imagination.

After reading, reviewing, and categorizing different creative research methods, I examined where WBI might contribute to the greater bodies of literature and identified geohumanities’ contributions.

Next, I correlated geohumanities’ contributions to broader bodies of academic and creative work with WBI’s geohumanistic contributions to a broader body of creative methods.

3) **Imagination:** *what do data findings reveal that needs to take place to contribute to harmony and balance in the inquiry? How can research findings contribute to the greater body of transdisciplinary and creative research methodologies? What steps will bring vision to life for transformative research?*

Finally, based on the research findings, what specific actions will contribute to creating beauty, balance, and harmony in your inquiry focus? What concrete steps need to occur to make this a reality? In this stage, with the data organized and analyzed, I gathered this data and the literature that contributed to the literature review, and this inquiry around me to review all in a comprehensive whole. Were there details that I had missed? Does the literature review reflect vigor and scholarship (Nash & Bradley, 2011)? Do the findings express universalizability? What specific steps do I need to take to bring the vision into reality?

Amid the data, piles of research articles, and books, I opened my research journal and began sketching out my initial thoughts on the WBI framework. I am a visual person. I prefer pen and paper to

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make meaning. I express academic and literary ideas through watercolor to further my own understanding, as well as for others (Author's Own, 2023).

Step by step, this framework began to take shape. I reviewed the data repeatedly, dove back into the literature, and returned to the page. The interactive process was as much about crafting the structure as about listening for the data to reveal the next step. Transformative research and education assume engagement with the world (Freire, 2000; Wink & Wink, 2005).

Procedure Details (Part 1): Application and Creation of the WBI Framework

1. Identify the focus of this inquiry through initial self-reflection “What am I passionate about? Where does the creative energy flow? Where is fear replaced by awe and I sink into timelessness when I am engaged?” and determined that it was to develop the transdisciplinary and creative research methodology of Wildness, Beauty, and Imagination. (*WBI Stage: Wildness*)
2. Develop research questions, “Are there theoretical or methodological frameworks already in existence that draw on the ideas of wildness, beauty, and imagination? If not, how could this framework contribute to the greater body of creative research literature?” (*WBI Stage: Wildness*)
3. Conduct literature review of transdisciplinary theoretical frameworks and creative research methodologies. (*WBI Stage: Wildness*)
4. Create space within the early morning magic hours in an embodiment of the “alchemy of transdisciplinary” (Lawrence, 2024), the decision to focus this inquiry on the development of the framework itself. (*WBI Stage: Wildness*)
5. Categorize within the research methodologies bodies of literature. (*WBI Stage: Beauty*)
6. Specify how the Wildness, Beauty, and Imagination framework could contribute to enrich the methodologies literature. (*WBI Stage: Beauty*)
7. Create the Wildness, Beauty, and Imagination creative research framework per method steps. (*WBI Stage: Imagination*)
8. Submit the WBI framework for publication. (*WBI Stage: Imagination*)

Procedure Details (Part 2): How to Apply WBI to Other Research Studies

I used the WBI framework to create the WBI framework. In response to the question—Where else can this WBI framework take us, towards what kinds of ideas and ways of working? The researcher will apply the steps and stages as detailed in the framework to their own area of study.

Here I provide an example of how I am applying for my current research study—How does one approach literacy and language development through an ecolinguistic lens and honor the knowledge research-based literacy methods? This research study explores how these traditionally separate approaches might mutually complement and enrich this work through transdisciplinary approaches. The stages within WBI remain the same in application.

1. *Identify the focus of this inquiry through initial self-reflection “What am I passionate about? Where does the creative energy flow? Where is fear replaced by awe and I sink into timelessness when I am engaged?”* I identified my current research interests and study how might we approach literacy

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and language development through an ecolinguistic lens and honor the knowledge research-based literacy methods in effective and engaging ways? (*WBI Stage: Wildness*)

2. *Develop research questions*, “How does one approach literacy and language development through an ecolinguistic lens and honor the knowledge research-based literacy methods? What does current literacy research recommend for literacy development? How can the tenants of ecolinguistics be applied to this body of research?” (*WBI Stage: Wildness*)
3. *Conduct literature review* of literacy development and ecolinguistics. (*WBI Stage: Wildness*)
4. *Create space* in an embodiment of the “alchemy of transdisciplinary” (Lawrence, 2024), to focus this inquiry on the comparison and intertwining of traditional methods of literacy development with an application of an ecolinguistic lens. (*WBI Stage: Wildness*)
5. *Review and compare the bodies of literature* (literacy development, ecolinguistics). (*WBI Stage: Beauty*)
6. Specify how the methods and tenants of literary development and ecolinguistics may be utilized to complement and provide an effective and rich ecosystem for literacy development.
7. Create and implement methods and strategies of findings in literacy program and data will be collected.
 - a. This will take place in a summer reading institute designed for literacy growth and development.
 - b. Elementary age students will take a reading assessment at the beginning of the institute and again upon its conclusion.
 - c. This data will be compared with data collected in a previous literacy institute. Findings will be identified, compared, and categorized. (*WBI Stage: Imagination*)
8. Submit research findings for publication to contribute to the fields of literacy development and ecolinguistics. (*WBI Stage: Imagination*)

Chifladura

The essence of open exploration and engagement with ideas and journey is reflected in a Spanish word I learned, *chifladura*. One afternoon, I sat in my writing room working on my dissertation. I received a WhatsApp text from my friend and colleague, Amanda Rossi, who was completing her PhD in Costa Rica, where she lives with her Costa Rican husband and their children. Amanda referred to her dissertation as a *chifladura*, the word used in Costa Rica for dissertation. The word caught my attention, as I had only ever heard the word *disertación* (dissertation) in Spanish. I asked her about this, and she responded:

This is a word deeply ingrained in Costa Rican culture, a *chiflón* is a strong natural power. So, if there's a strong wind, someone will say, ‘*Cuidado con el chiflón*’ (Careful with the *chiflón*). It's this idea of a natural strong power. When they explained it to me, the image that I got is that we're in a river and where the currents come together and create white caps, that's the *chifladura*. It's like all of things filtering down from a wide river into where you start to get white caps, taking who I am and what I've learned in this PhD and then going into that little mini waterfall or force of water that puts everything together and pushes it further down the river. It's an interesting vortex, if you think about it. It's a vortex of living organisms coming together in different currents, this bubbling, this

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invention of energy and time. An image to think about when you tie in all the elements of who you are and what you're learning and what's becoming of that learning.

As I heard Amanda describe a dissertation as a *chifladura*, a powerful melding of different natural forces, streams of knowledge, living organisms, and ideas into a bubbling vortex from which new waters emerge, I knew this word symbolizes the wildness, beauty, and imagination of this methodological, elemental framework. The different streams of wildness, beauty, an imagination coming together with the waters of creative research merging into a single vortex, to froth, mingle, merge, and create a new body of water, of work in the running waters of the river of these combined streams.

Creative research abounds with *chifladuras*, drawing from infinite streams of investigation ideas, cultural contexts, languages, and research theoretical and methodological foundations throughout the world. WBI expands on body of methodologies for researchers and provides a structure for imagination to become reality.

Conclusion

The sun ebbed upward into the colors of the sunrise on the horizon. I focus on the seams of transcendent colors. The alchemy of colors of a sunrise or sunset is found in those liminal spaces where differing colors mingle to create a new shade. Essences of differing colors mingle to create something new. For me, to do research, to teach, to live without wildness, beauty, and imagination feels unbearable. I've done it. I've done it many, many times, sometimes for years. I didn't have the tools then to do things any differently. Like so many of us, I put my head down and got through it. I agree with Matthew Fox (2002) reflects on how human beings have turned to creativity and imagination for survival throughout time, writes of his "realization of how *basic* our creativity is to our survival. Creativity and imagination are not frosting on a cake: They are integral to our sustainability. They are survival mechanisms. They are of the essence of who we are. They constitute our deepest empowerment" (p. 31). The Wildness, Beauty, and Imagination (WBI) methodology provides transformative framework to expand the potential and possibilities for research and enfold data, gleanings, insights, and wisdom to be acted upon within academia and beyond.

I hope this framework may provide you with tools to weave wildness, beauty, and imagination throughout your own research, your own teaching, and perhaps your own life. The world could use more wildness, beauty, and imagination!

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