

**FROM PRACTITIONER TO RESEARCHER AND BACK AGAIN:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF A RESEARCH-IN-
PRACTICE PROJECT**

by

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic case study documents the joys and challenges of a Research in Practice (RIP) project conducted by five adult literacy instructors that lead to the report *Hardwired for Hope: Effective ABE/Literacy Instructors*. (Battell, Gesser, Rose, Sawyer, & Twiss, 2004). As the practitioner-researchers were nearing retirement, they set out to conduct a research project that would put the experience of long-term instructors on record, describing the background, beliefs and strategies they bring to their work. The resulting study serves as a legacy to instructors who are committed to effective practice, student success and social justice.

I had the privilege of participating in this project over a three-year period. The experience gained as participant-observer is one source of data, along with document analysis (minutes, emails, reports and the study itself, *Hardwired for Hope*) and interviews (with project participants and two other informants).

Three sensitizing concepts influence this study: the centrality of gender (Code, 1991, 1995; Luttrell, 1996), the notion of “field” (Bourdieu, 1985, 1989, 1993), and the concept of “communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 1999; Wenger, 1998b). But more importantly, the research was shaped by the rich body of practitioner research that has blossomed in BC over the past decade, and by my own participation in the *Hardwired for Hope* project, the Research in Practice movement and the Adult Basic Education field over a 25-year period. Thus “insider research” is a key feature of the methodology.

Five themes emerged: collaboration, knowledge creation, recognizing and valuing practitioners as researchers, supporting practitioner-research and promoting a research-in-practice culture. I also found that ABE practitioners bring to their work leadership, innovation, commitment to collaboration, an adventurous spirit and a willingness to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about what research is and who has the right to create knowledge. I provide recommendations to practitioner-researchers and university-based researchers who want to contribute to the RIP movement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iii
LIST OF TABLES	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
DEDICATION	x
CHAPTER ONE: <i>HARDWIRED FOR HOPE – THEIR STORY, MY STORY</i>	1
Research Questions and Approach	4
Research in Practice in Adult Literacy	6
Significance of the Study	13
Dissertation Structure.....	16
Welcome to My Dissertation	17
CHAPTER TWO: SENSITIZING CONCEPTS	18
Gender at the Centre	18
Women Practitioners and Women Learners	20
Women Researchers.....	24
The “Field” of Adult Basic Education	29
Habitus	32
Capital	33
Communities of Practice.....	36
Concluding Comments.....	40
CHAPTER THREE: THEIR RESEARCH, MY RESEARCH –METHODOLOGY AND METHODS	42
Methodology	43
Ethnography	43
Reflexive Ethnography	45
An Ethnographic Case Study.....	47
Feminist Research.....	48
Methods.....	51
Linking Up to the Site and Participants	54
Data Collection	56
Participant Observation	56
Document Analysis.....	58
Interviews	59
Data Analysis	61
Timeline	63
Ethical Considerations	66
Confidentiality	66
Member-Checking	67
Getting Close to the Research Participants	68
Insider Research.....	70

My Critical Stance	77
Concluding Comments.....	78
CHAPTER FOUR: THE BC RESEARCH IN PRACTICE MOVEMENT	80
Practitioners and Learners: Challenges of ABE in BC.....	81
Start with a Strong Field	89
Support for RIP: People and Structures	94
The Projects and the Reports	101
Concluding Comments.....	110
CHAPTER FIVE: THE <i>HARDWIRED FOR HOPE</i> TEAM.....	115
The Practitioner-Researchers: Rich Descriptions in a Poor Field?.....	115
Evelyn Battell.....	117
Judy Rose	123
Diana Twiss	129
Leora Gesser	136
Jan Sawyer	141
The Research Friends.....	147
Marina Niks	147
Bonnie Soroke.....	152
Betsy Alkenbrack.....	154
Concluding Comments.....	158
CHAPTER SIX: THE TEAM AT WORK – COLLABORATING TO CREATE KNOWLEDGE	161
Overview of the Research Process.....	162
Analyzing the Autobiographies	164
Journals	165
Interviews.....	166
Framing the Data.....	167
Writing	167
Collaboration.....	169
Commitment to Collaboration	170
Two Innovative Approaches	173
Writing and Analyzing Autobiographies.....	174
Journals and “Conversations with Intent”	176
Magic Moments	178
Where the Collaboration Broke Down	179
Two Strategies that Did not Work.....	180
Different Styles and Speeds.....	185
Process Issues	187
Even if They Cried: A Final Thought on Collaboration.....	191
Knowledge Creation	192
Uncovering New Knowledge (And Documenting Old Wisdom).....	192
A Rigorous Process.....	195
Collecting, Analyzing and Organizing Data.....	195
Being Purposeful and Transparent.....	201
Debating the Literature Review	202
A Shared Process	208

Presentations	208
Online Conversations.....	209
The Report	212
Concluding Comments.....	213
CHAPTER SEVEN: “I’M GOING ON THIS JOURNEY WITH THEM”: CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTS TO RESEARCH IN PRACTICE	215
Recognizing or Challenging Practitioners as Researchers.....	218
Self-recognition: I am a Researcher!	219
Recognition in the Field.....	221
Recognition from Outside the Field.....	222
Funding Proposals	224
Defending the Autobiographies	230
Facing The Ethics Review Board	232
Support for Practitioners Doing Research	236
Time and Money	236
Mentoring and Education: The Research Friend	242
Teaching Research Techniques	242
Helping to Make Decisions	250
Making Us Aware of Options.....	252
Support for a Research Culture.....	252
Concluding Comments: So What?.....	257
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION	260
Conditions that lead to the Development of RIP and the HFH Project	260
Gender and “The Field”	263
Relational Aspects of Collaboration	267
Collaboration and Communities of Practice	268
Collaboration and Communities of Practice	270
Learning in Community of Practice.....	272
Relationships with Academics: Supports and Challenges	274
The Research Friend	276
Knowledge Production and Theory–Practice	277
Research in Practice: Share the Dream.....	281
Practitioners: Jump in!	283
Academics: Join in!.....	286
Final Thoughts	290
REFERENCES.....	292
APPENDIX A: ACRONYMS	303
APPENDIX B: CONSENT LETTER	304
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUEStioNS FOR THIS STUDY.....	306
APPENDIX D: LIST OF THEMES INDENTIFIED DURING THE ANALYSIS	308
APPENDIX E: THE <i>HFH</i> TEAM’S AUTHOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING	309
APPENDIX F: INTERFVIEW PROTOCOL AND FACE SHEET USED BY THE <i>HFH</i> TEAM.....	310

APPENDIX G: UBC RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL 314

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Research Methods	53
Table 3.2	Research Timelines	65
Table 4.1	RIP Timeline	113

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DEDICATION

To Wesley McKinnon Alkenbrack, 1918–2008

My father, a self-made scholar, who bequeathed me with his writing skills and an enduring fascination with other human beings.

CHAPTER ONE: *HARDWIRED FOR HOPE* – THEIR STORY, MY STORY

We are a group of five practitioners who have been involved in literacy/ABE¹ practice for between 6 and 25 years. We have designed a research project where we, as researchers, can describe, reflect, analyze and define our practice from a research perspective. Although we do not define ourselves as “Master Teachers,” through our lengthy experience we have found that we can sometimes be highly effective and sometimes we are not. We look forward to exploring the nature of this effectiveness. What is happening between the learners and ourselves that makes us feel effective? What does effective mean in the ABE/literacy context? What does effective mean to the learners? And the times when we feel ineffective, what is going on in the class, between the learners and ourselves? What does that look like? (Introduction to Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Grant Application – 2002/2003: *What makes literacy instructors successful or effective in their practice?*)

In November 2001, five women from different parts of BC (Duncan, Salmon Arm, Grand Forks, North Vancouver and Langley) met to plan a collaborative research project and to write a first draft of a funding proposal to the “cost-shared” program, co-funded by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education and the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), which was formerly a branch of the Department of Human Resources and Development Canada. The proposal was successful and a year later, Evelyn Battell, Leora Gesser, Judy Rose, Jan Sawyer and Diana Twiss began a three year collaborative project to explore the question, “What makes adult literacy instructors effective in their practice?” With them on the journey were three graduate students: Marina Niks, Bonnie Soroke and Betsy Alkenbrack—the “Research Friends.”² Through a process involving eight face-to-face meetings, twelve teleconferences and hundreds of emails and telephone discussions, they conducted their research. As promised, they reflected on their own practice (and wrote

¹ Adult Basic Education. For a list of acronyms used in this dissertation, see Appendix A.

² A term used in the BC RIP community for the academically-trained guide or helper in a research project. See Chapters 4 and 7 for more discussion about “Research Friends.”

about it in autobiographical pieces and journals) and also interviewed 17 other instructors from colleges, school districts and community literacy programs. And in the fall of 2004, *Hardwired for Hope: Effective ABE/Literacy Instructors* (Battell, et al., 2004) rolled off the presses. In their introduction, the team said,

This research comes from our hearts and we hope it speaks to yours. . . . We hope that this research document opens up a way of seeing or gives new insight into what many of you experience daily in your work lives. We would like it to serve as a testament to what many of us have seen as our life work and as a legacy for future ABE/Literacy instructors to read and ponder. (p. 1)

What happened between the proposal-writing and the final report is the topic of this dissertation. I will tell this story using an ethnographic case study approach, drawing on the women's autobiographical writing and journals, the interviews they (we) conducted, their conversations and correspondence, as well as the interviews I conducted with each of them, with my fellow research friends and with two other key players in the Research in Practice (RIP) field.

I am not the first one to write this story. Diana Twiss wrote a detailed description of the research process in the study's methods chapter entitled, "Wearing the Silver Shorts." Carrying on in the tradition of intriguing titles in RIP, the title points to one of the key challenges in practitioner research: that people come to the project with different work styles, speeds and levels of availability. Twiss (2004) explains:

When one of the practitioner-researchers was having trouble with her piece of writing and was concerned about keeping up with the group, she shared a story from her husband's soccer experience. In her husband's soccer league, the older fellows (over 70) wear silver shorts so the other players know to go easy with them. It is a sign of their earned status, age, and potential physical limits. We joked about needing a pair of silver shorts too so we could signal to each other when we needed our limits, however temporary, noted. (p. 24)

The other practitioner-researchers wrote chapters discussing the data the team collected: Judy Rose wrote, “Thinking, Feeling and Learning join Together: Characteristics of Effective Instructors,” Evelyn Battell wrote, “A Passion for the Possible: Motivations and Beliefs of Effective Instructors,” and Leora Gesser and Jan Sawyer wrote, “The Tightrope Walker: Styles, Strategies and Skills.” Their study also contains an introduction with historical information, descriptions of everyone who participated in the research and a list of recommendations. This report, too, is part of my data.³

This is their story, and it is also my story, because I was with the group almost from the beginning. Like most of the research participants, I came to the project with over 20 years of experience in the ABE field, having worked in Toronto, South Africa and Vancouver as teacher, trainer, materials developer, administrator and researcher. What I did not have was the long experience in BC colleges—experience which has put these women on the cutting edge of innovative literacy practice. Their stories about building the field and struggling against adversity was a source of great fascination to me, and I have tried to capture some of these stories in Chapters Three and Four. I first “met” many of the participants online, while I was sending letters from South Africa about my work there to the Literacy BC electronic conference system (Alkenbrack, 2000). I then met them in person at conferences and workshops I attended, which is also where I began to work with Marina Niks. She introduced me to the group and suggested I might want to collaborate with them. The research team generously allowed me to join them, first as a

³ See Chapter 5 for more discussion of the report.

research assistant and later as a participant observer, and I shaped my dissertation around their project.⁴

Research Questions and Approach

In this study I will explore three questions:

1. What are the conditions that led to the development of the RIP movement in Canada generally and the *Hardwired for Hope (HFH)* project specifically?
2. In what ways is RIP supported and challenged by university-based researchers, and in the specific case of *HFH*, what were the relationships between the practitioner-researchers and academics?
3. What would help to further support and develop the RIP movement in the field of literacy and as a respected field of inquiry by academics?

The first question was an essential starting point. I needed to understand what practitioner research is before I could look at what it is not or what it could be. To answer this question, I started by looking at the conditions that surrounded the *HFH* study, including RIP studies that came before and after it (see Chapter Three). I then looked at the practitioners who engaged in the study—the skills, knowledge and experience they brought, how they experienced the project and how it has influenced them (see Chapter Four). Finally, I explored what happened during the research project, focussing especially on the collaboration and knowledge creation (see Chapter Five).

With the second question, I wanted to look at how the practitioners reached out to the world, as researchers, and how they were supported and challenged by university-based researchers. This is described in Chapters Five and Six. In seeking answers to the

⁴ See Chapters 2 and 4 for descriptions of how my role was negotiated and how I repaid the team for allowing me to work with them.

third question, I hoped to support a practitioner research movement that would become stronger, richer (in information and resources), and respected both in the field and in academia. Those ideas are explored in Chapter Seven and in the conclusion (Chapter Eight).

Data Presentation

As noted above, I have used the women's autobiographical writing and journals, the interviews they (we) conducted, minutes from research team meetings, correspondence, and interviews with each research team member and two other informants. These will be represented in the text as follows: I will use plain text to show quotations from printed text, including published and unpublished reports, meeting minutes, autobiographical writing, journals and correspondence. I will use italicized text to indicate quotations from interviews and emails. I will refer to research participants by their first name when quoting from their interviews, emails, comments in meetings or unpublished autobiographical excerpts, and by their last name when quoting from published reports they have written, as I would with any other publication. For example, (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004) identifies an excerpt from my interview with Diana Twiss, and (Twiss, 2004) refers to the chapter she wrote in *HFH*.

I have chosen to use first names in most cases, rather than initials and last names, because I think this gives a more realistic reflection of the relationship I had with my research participants and they with each other. I also think it is in keeping with feminist research principles, which promote the use of first names in order to show exactly who is speaking (Hayes & Flannery, 2000).

Research in Practice in Adult Literacy

In some ways, the research project which resulted in *HFH* is typical of this thing that goes by many names: “practitioner research,” “practitioner inquiry,” “teacher research,” and “Research-in-Practice” to name a few. All of these refer to practitioners engaging in research with the primary goal of improving their practice. The expression “Research in Practice” first became a recognized term when Mary Norton and Jenny Horsman wrote *A Framework to Encourage and Support Practitioner Involvement in Adult Literacy Research in Practice in Canada* (Horsman & Norton, 1999). They say:

Research in practice offers avenues to build and strengthen connections between research and practice with a view to improving practice, building knowledge, extending or shifting perspectives and informing research and policy. Systematic support for research in practice is central to building that connection. (p. 6)

They also identify four ways practitioners could engage in research, only one of which was actually doing research:

- reading and responding to research
- reflecting on practice in light of research
- applying research findings to practice
- doing research about practice (p. 7)

This dissertation is primarily concerned with the fourth way (doing research about practice), but I will also discuss how the other three ways, support and benefit from practitioners’ direct engagement in research.⁵

Research in Practice is valuable because teachers can provide unique perspectives and expertise on classroom situations and a “significant contribution to both the academic research community and the school-based teachers” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 5). According to a 1998 report conducted for the NLS, practitioner-research in the context of

⁵ See Chapter 7 for a thorough discussion of “support for a research culture.”

adult literacy is often informed by one or all of the following principles: the primacy of the learner, the importance of partnerships, collaboration between researchers and practitioners, and literacy research for well-being (National Literacy Secretariat & Human Resources Development Canada, 1998, p. 8). This NLS report could have been predicting the approach that became so prevalent in BC practitioner research and the *HFH* project. As I will show throughout this dissertation, all the BC RIP reports demonstrate a deep understanding and respect for learners and a strong commitment to collaboration.

When I arrived in Vancouver in 2001, it seemed like Research in Practice (RIP) had exploded on the literacy community in Canada: a group was planning the second of three national conferences and training events (Norton & Woodrow, 2002), a journal focussing on RIP had just been launched and there were provincial networks in BC, Alberta and Ontario all focussing on RIP. In BC, practitioners were doing research collaboratively and individually and gathering in various locations to exchange ideas. According to Evelyn Battell, who coordinated the *HFH* project and had been in the field for 25 years, “This is by far the biggest development in ABE work in Canada.”⁶

I felt the same way as Evelyn, and naïvely believed that the rest of the world did too. But the national study, *Focused on Practice: A Framework for Adult Literacy Research in Canada*, (Horsman & Woodrow, 2007) which was conducted by practitioners in every Canadian province and territory, told a different story. They found that, in most provinces, RIP is still quite new and beyond the realm of possibility for many practitioners, who struggle with program survival issues. In the report, Jenny

⁶ Minutes from a presentation on RIPAL, Malaspina College, Duncan, BC, February 11, 2004.

Horsman and Helen Woodrow argue that the conditions that would support RIP are simply not in place:

This research study made it clear that the most fundamental support for RIP across the country would be a valued and well-resourced field—one where literacy workers have space for reflection, time to gather with colleagues to share and discuss their work critically, a range of possibilities to enrich their practice through professional development, a chance to influence curriculum and program structures, and the possibility of moving out of reactive crisis mode into a place of creative program development. (p. 11)

Still, the Horseman and Woodrow report itself was a testament to the potential of RIP; while it was coordinated and written by experienced researchers, the data was gathered and analyzed by provincial and territorial teams, as well as one team focussing on Aboriginal literacy, and most of the researchers were adult literacy practitioners. Jan Sawyer, fresh from her experience with *HFH*, was on the BC team. She said,

I still feel it's an emerging art—or that's what it is for me. It's becoming clearer, I'm seeing more. I know it's important and I think for funding in literacy to increase . . . we have to have research. (Horsman & Woodrow, 2007, p. 110)

And many others talk about the potential of RIP. For practitioners in Ontario, “research in practice breathes renewal and gives them new creative energy for their work” (Horsman & Woodrow, 2007, p. 66). Helen Woodrow writes that, unlike applied research,

RIP captures, from practitioner experience and knowledge, detailed evidence about what works and what does not in ways that can most effectively improve literacy practice. (p. 6)

Other scholars have written about the potential of practitioner research or teacher research. In an earlier study of RIP in Canada, Jenny Horsman and Mary Norton wrote that RIP “must be recognized for its potential to improve practice, supporting the field in developing and changing and exploring new directions and possibilities” (Horsman & Norton, 1999, p. 20). Susan Lytle describes a huge amount of practitioner research

activity in K-12, adult education, colleges and university-based teacher research, including journals, conferences and on-line chat groups. “They attest to a palpable excitement and widespread interest and to the likelihood that what is occurring is more the status of a movement than a passing fad” (Lytle, 1997, p. 1).

I agree with Lytle, and a search of practitioner-research reports from BC and Alberta reveals a diversity of topics and methods. I will describe these reports and the contribution they have made to the RIP movement in Chapter Three, but here I want to comment on the important role that these reports have played in the development of this dissertation, both as literature and data. I disagree with scholars who criticize RIP for not being “real” research (as described in Foshay, 1994; Hargreaves, 1995; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001), and feel that practitioner research fulfills all the qualifications I look for in academic literature: it helps to frame other research; it speaks to me professionally and academically; it stretches and challenges my thinking; it comes from a credible source; and it contributes to thinking in the field. For this reason, I have drawn just as heavily on practitioner research as I have on academic research to frame my data and support my conclusions.

When I say it speaks to me professionally, I am identifying as an adult literacy practitioner, and as such I align myself with those who have been critical of the role played by academic research in the past. Practitioners have argued that they do not find academic research accessible or useful. For example, the report, *Dancing in the Dark. How do Adults with Little Formal Education Learn? How do Literacy Practitioners do Collaborative Research?* (Niks, Allen, Davies, McRae, & Nonesuch, 2003), is famous for the chapter entitled, “The Literature Review We Didn’t Do,” in which the

practitioner-researchers explain that writing a literature review was not a good use of their time and that they did not feel represented in academic literature—it did not speak to their long experience in the field.⁷ For them, practitioners are a more trustworthy source than academics and research should speak to practitioners and help them to improve their practice. They looked for “concrete details about what the researchers do so they can apply it Monday morning,” and did not find it in academic research (p. 9).

The tensions described above speak to what some see as a wide chasm between theory and practice. For example, research conducted with school-based research in Sweden (Lindblad, 1995) showed that teachers were most likely to accept innovations based on their own expertise or contact with other teachers, and least likely to be influenced by educational research. Similarly, research with adult literacy practitioners in Texas (St. Clair & Chen, 2003) showed that the two criteria practitioners used most often to identify useful research were (a) source credibility (whether they knew and trusted the author or publication) and (b) relevance and applicability. For many BC practitioners in the field, academics who have never worked in an ABE classroom are simply not credible. St Clair expresses similar concerns in his review of the National Literacy Secretariat’s support of adult literacy research (St Clair, 2005). He found that, while NLS-funded research recognized the needs of the field, the impact was not far-reaching and findings were not getting out to the field. His observation about practitioner research is telling:

The archetypal example of this phenomenon is practitioner research, which has enormous potential for the professional development of those involved, but the benefits for the knowledge of the field are far less clear. (p. 72)

⁷ For more discussion of this issue, see Chapter 6.

With this comment, he reflects the attitude of many university-based researchers; that practitioners cannot be serious knowledge-creators, which in turn contributes to the divide between researchers based in universities and those in the field. This parallels the more general gulf between theorists and practitioners in adult education. Usher, Bryant and Johnson (1997) explain that all professional practices relate to a body of theory, and that it is the development of this theoretical knowledge that has made the practice into a profession. But, they say, there is distrust and misunderstanding on each side of this practice-theory fence. Practitioners can feel threatened or be suspicious of theory, which they associate with the “unworldliness of the academy”:

Theory signifies rigour, a rigour which is supposedly achieved either prospectively, through application, or retrospectively, through reflection. Rigour, the relationship to a scientifically validated body of knowledge, appears therefore to *warrant* practice [italics in the original]. Yet, it is precisely this rigour which often makes theory seem remote, irrelevant and unworldly. (p. 122)

Theorists, on the other hand, recognize that the practitioner has expertise, but see that expertise as un-systematic and of “questionable validity,” linked to the fact that they see practitioners as too easily influenced by common-sense and trial-and-error. The theorist claims their expertise is more powerful and valuable than that of the practitioner, because it is “based on systematic and scientifically-tested knowledge and therefore is naturally superior” (p. 123).

This claim to power is, unfortunately, reinforced by attitudes in the general population. However Grace Malicky (2000), an academic who worked with RIP groups, disagrees, and argues that claims of academic superiority are unrealistic and destructive:

I have come to believe that thinking in daily life is not essentially different from that in academic life. Although research is more systematic than everyday thinking, everyone who can understand or reflect on education can learn to engage in this systematic process. (p. 36)

The following two descriptions of practitioner research collaboration reflect the misunderstanding and suspicion that can arise. In the first one, Janet Miller (2001) describes her experience as an academic working with a teacher-research group. One member felt her participation in research had a negative effect on her work as an elementary school teacher and even caused her to miss out on a job. Working with the research group changed her from “an accepting, docile teacher to a questioning, challenging person” (p. 170), with the result that others feel uncomfortable with her. This influenced her decision not to attend a conference:

She had felt too great a discrepancy between the active questioning such a gathering encourages and the passive, submissive atmosphere that was mandated in the elementary school where she teaches. (p. 170)

Speaking from the other side of the fence, as a practitioner working with abused women, Jan Barnsley (1995) describes an unsuccessful partnership between her community-based group and some “academic women.” She and her co-workers hoped that the partnership would help them to validate the research grassroots women were doing “without a bunch of degrees, but with grounding in work with women who've experienced abuse” (p 192). But this project was plagued by mismatched agendas and ways of working. While practitioners hoped to produce useful research that would influence bureaucrats and bring funding to their cause, the academics aimed to bring money to their institution, gain access to difficult-to-reach groups and help their careers (or in some cases because they cared about the issue). Barnsley also argues that partnership formation diverts money from where it is really needed (for program delivery, education, lobbying and advocacy) while time is wasted searching for common ground that does not exist, and challenges the tendency to treat frontline activists' perspectives as just one among many: Because they are directly involved with abused

women, their “perspective ... must be the grounding for any successful effort to stop violence and change the conditions that perpetuate it” (p. 201).

The conflicting attitudes described above reflect different priorities, experiences and locations. For a practitioner/educator, the priority is to teach and create an effective learning environment with particular groups of learners. As the comment above in the *Dancing in the Dark* report shows, they are interested in what works, so “trial and error” can be an extremely effective way to improve their practice and to build theory. Theorists are coming from an academic perspective, where it is important to be able to generalize their findings more broadly, contribute to theory-building and policy formation, and bring money and prestige to their institution, so they have to pay more attention to methodology and rigour. And, as discussed above, they are writing for their peers in academia, while practitioners are more interested in reaching out to students and other practitioners.

Alison Tom and Tom Sork (1994) argue that the tendency (on both sides of the theory-practice divide) to de-legitimize each others’ work is in line with attitudes towards “the other” (part of our dichotomized either/or world) and misplaced: We should rather recognize that “the other’s” knowledge actually enriches ours. This dissertation is a contribution to that recognition and exchange of knowledge, and I will talk about other ways it is significant in the next section.

Significance of the Study

When I set out to do this research, the two most important goals for my dissertation project were to become an excellent researcher and to make a useful

contribution to the field of Adult Basic Education. A third goal emerged as I conducted the research and discussed it with university-based colleagues: to shed light on the experience of an “insider researcher” attempting to straddle the worlds of literacy work and academia.

To achieve the first goal, in order to build on my existing experience and expand my skills, I chose a project situated in a field that is both very familiar and very new to me. I have a lot of experience in the field of adult literacy, but I am a relative newcomer in the area of practitioner-research. I have done a lot of research in adult literacy, but this was my first ethnography. You, the reader, will have to judge the quality of the ethnography, but I can safely say I have emerged from the experience as a better—more thoughtful, sensitive, analytical and rigorous—researcher with a deeper appreciation for the researchers that have gone before me. I believe I am well-placed to meet the third goal (to shed light on the insider’s experience): During all the time that I conducted the research, and now as I think, analyze and write, I am deeply involved in the practitioner world, and indeed have participated in two other RIP projects. So I write this as a researcher, practitioner and practitioner-researcher. This perspective has had a significant influence on this dissertation and on my journey into auto-ethnography. In this, I am influenced by Ellis and Bochner (2000) who say:

We've opened a space to write between traditional social science prose and literature and to stimulate more discussion of working the spaces between subjectivity and objectivity, passion and intellect, and autobiography and culture. . . . I take that as strong evidence that more and more academics think it's possible to write from the heart, to bring the first-person voice into their work, and to merge art and science. (p. 761)

The goal of contributing to the field of Adult Literacy/ABE is the biggest challenge and the one I was at first most uncertain about. As I have already mentioned

and will discuss later in Chapter Five, many practitioners do not find academic research accessible or useful and much prefer to read and talk about the work of other practitioners. While I can claim credibility on the grounds of my many years in the ABE classroom, I have had doubts about whether this dissertation—clearly situated in the university—would be useful to the field.

As I pondered this problem, my reading and review of the data gave me an idea about another contribution I could make: to contribute to the body of work that promotes adult literacy practitioners as researchers and authoritative voices at the research table. In his description of his beginnings in adult literacy, Allan Quigley (2000) describes a lack of respect for ABE practitioners:

When I began as a literacy teacher in 1972, the notion that teachers and tutors could produce “research” was unthinkable. Our job ... was to find the best texts and use the best methods available. And, “best” meant the most authoritative. This is, we looked for recent materials and methods from the experts. The experts were those housed in universities or research centres. They thought – we taught. (p. 7)

He goes on to say that things have changed, and I would like to believe him. But have they really? In the report, “The State of Learning in Canada No Time for Complacency,” the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) observes,

Little is known about what people spend to improve or maintain their skills, the ideal qualifications for remedial teachers and the kinds of people who participate in remedial programs. (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007)

Actually a lot is known about these topics. Practitioners know about it, have reflected on it, written about it and used the knowledge to improve their practice and inform the field.

HFH examines “ideal qualifications” for instructors. But who will listen to, and value what they have to say? Clearly not the CCL. Horsman and Woodrow (2007) argue that

the current research climate does not value “the insider knowledge practitioners develop from their experience responding to learners’ lives and needs” (p. 11) and ask,

How can we structure opportunities for the magnificence of research in practice across the country? If we are unable to do this, will we only see more rarefied abstract or statistical research? (p. 11)

I hope that this study will help to bring practitioner knowledge to the table and promote their experience, voice and perspective. I am encouraged to believe this by a comment from Marina Niks, the Research Friend to the *HFH* project:

(I remember saying), “Betsy wouldn’t it be great if you were part of this group?” . . . I wanted someone that I could lean on, but also I wanted these kinds of questions to be raised and addressed. I don’t think I was thinking so much in academia, but I wouldn’t mind at all. I would like for some people in academia to hear these words. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

I would like that, too, and it is my hope that the words of practitioner-researchers will shine through in this dissertation. I will conclude this chapter by explaining how I have organized the dissertation.

Dissertation Structure

Having introduced you to the research in this chapter, I will go on, in Chapter Two, to discuss three sensitizing concepts that have influenced this research: the centrality of gender, the notions of “field” and of “communities of practice.” Following that, in Chapter Three, I will describe the methods I used and my role as an “insider researcher.” Chapter Four, “Context: The Research-in-Practice Movement in BC,” is the first of four chapters analyzing and discussing the data. It describes the context of the research, specifically the context of literacy practice and the Research in Practice in Adult Literacy (RIPAL) organization in British Columbia. Chapter Five, “The *HFH* Team,” draws on the interviews, personal writing and publications of the research

participants to craft “rich descriptions” of each of them: the five practitioner-researchers and the three “Research Friends,” including myself. Chapter Six, “The Team at Work,” describes how the team worked together, looking specifically at how they collaborated and created knowledge. Chapter Seven describes the supports and challenges to practitioner research, focussing on recognizing and valuing practitioners as researchers, supporting practitioners doing research and supporting a research culture. In Chapter Eight, the conclusion, I summarize the findings and discuss them in relation to the sensitizing concepts, as well as the implications of this research for practitioners, program decision-makers and researchers. Finally, I make suggestions for further study.

Welcome to My Dissertation

In this introductory chapter, I have given you an overview of my research and the approach I took to write about it. I have introduced you to my research participants, my research questions, the context of Research in Practice, the significance of this study and the structure of the dissertation. I conclude by thanking you, the reader, for reading this far. I hope I have inspired you to keep reading, and that when you do, you get a taste of the excitement, frustration, struggle and victory that the research participants and I experienced, and the importance of these victories and struggles. Whether you are here as an examiner, professor, fellow graduate student, literacy practitioner or supporter of Adult Literacy and Research in Practice, I am grateful for your interest and your time. I hope that one day I will be able to enter into a dialogue with you about Research in Practice, past and future, and the role we can all play to promote and support it. In the meantime, read on, and welcome to my dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO: SENSITIZING CONCEPTS

I want theory to help me understand, not help me pretend to understand or strike a pose. (McCotter, 2001a, p. 3)

This comment from Suzanne McCotter speaks to my uneasy relationship with theory. Perhaps this is because, despite 10 years in graduate school, I still identify myself as a practitioner and align myself with practitioners “theorizing from our practices rather than constructing practices from others theories” (Miller, 1992, p. 167). In this sense, I am like the practitioners who wrote *Dancing in the Dark* (Niks, et al., 2003; described in Chapter One). They found the literature simply did not speak to them. Since I am writing a PhD dissertation, there is no possibility that this can be the “literature review I didn’t write,” but I did find it difficult to fit Research in Practice into one over-arching theoretical framework. Instead, I found three “sensitizing concepts” that influenced my thinking. These are: the centrality of gender (Code, 1991, 2006; Drennon & Cervero, 2002; Lather, 1992, 2001; Luttrell, 1996; Soroke, 2004); Bourdieu’s concepts of the social field, habitus and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1993; Carrington & Luke, 1997; Maton, 2005; Reay, 2004); and the notion of Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 1999; Wenger, 1998a, 1998b; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). I will discuss these three sensitizing concepts in this chapter.

Gender at the Centre

Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu. (A person is a person because of other people.)

This is an expression that every South African knows: Written here in Zulu, it is echoed in African languages all over the continent, and everywhere it refers to the concept of “Ubuntu,” which claims that people are connected and defined by their relationship with

others. A similar concept in the feminist literature is the relational view of gender (Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberg, & Tarule, 1986; Goldner, 2002; Hayes & Flannery, 2000), and because relationships are so important in RIP and in the work and lives of my research participants, I would like to start this section with a brief discussion of a relational view of gender. Danielle Flannery (2000) describes this view as follows:

The relational view proposes that women develop and gain a sense of identity in a context of connections with others rather than through individuation and separation from others. In this model, women's sense of self is organized around building and maintaining relationships. The emphasis is positive, with women seen as proactively connecting with others rather than being dependent on them. (p. 60)

She also notes that this is a struggle for women “in a prevailing social context that promotes autonomy and separation” (p. 62). She links this to the notion of “connected knowing” as promoted by Carol Gilligan (1982) and Mary Belenkey, et al. (1986). Gilligan links connected knowing to moral decision-making and Belenkey et al. talk about connected teaching and learning. In her discussion of a relational theory of gender as it relates to psychoanalysis, Virginia Goldner says

Insofar as gender relations are power relations, contextualizing gender in this fashion can illuminate the mechanisms by which gender not only organizes mind and relationships but organizes them hierarchically (with men and masculinity in the elevated position. (Dimen & Goldner, 2002, p. 79)

The relational view is not without its critics, and Flannery points out some of the specific problems related to this position: It can be seen as essentialist, paying limited attention to politics and social forces; it downplays the fact that women can also engage in “procedural knowing” (as opposed to connected knowing) and learn in ways that are not linked to relationships or their gender. She argues that we need a more complex understanding than one that places men's ways of knowing in opposition to women's

ways of knowing. I will revisit some of these criticisms later in the chapter and explore how the relational view has influenced the *HFH* project later in the dissertation.

There are three things that make gender important in this research: First, the RIP field has been almost entirely shaped by women, and indeed all of the participants in my research, and 15 out of the 17 instructors they interviewed were women. I will discuss this, drawing on the work of Wendy Luttrell (1989, 1996). Secondly, although teaching is not a focus of this study, it is the focus of the project I am studying, so I will look briefly at the situation of women learners in ABE programs and how their situation affects my participants. Finally, I will explore the implications of the fact that it was women doing the research, drawing principally on the work of Lorraine Code (1991, 1995).

Women Practitioners and Women Learners

All the researchers who participated directly in this research are women, and the *HFH* study notes, “The ABE/Literacy field in BC, as well as in Canada, is predominantly women” (Twiss, 2004, p. 31). Horsman and Woodrow (2007) discuss the fact that, like many other types of “women’s work” the field is de-valued. Similarly, Bonnie Soroke (2004) describes how practitioners talked to her about “the marginalization of literacy programs within the university-college setting, and the marginalization of themselves as teachers, and their students as learners” (p. 2).

Wendy Luttrell (1996) describes how both women’s work as literacy teachers and learners gets devalued and discounted because it is not considered to be intellectual or political. Women tend to be in positions that require them to care for learners (as practitioners), while men care about the literacy problem (as administrators or

academics)—and that type of caring is given more value. Even literacy teachers themselves “do not count as intellectual their own empathy, intuition, or knowledge or care” (p. 356). This observation about devaluing reminds me of a comment by one of the volunteers at Carnegie Learning Centre where I work. He came to our centre, first as a tutor, then “moved on” to do political organization around poverty issues. He commented, publicly, that being a tutor was a “good start” and laid the ground for him to move on to more important community organizing work. He expressed hope that other tutors would follow him. The implication was that tutoring was not as important as political work. Of course, many argue that volunteering itself is an indication that adult literacy work is de-valued. Luttrell comments that volunteerism “helps to maintain private, elite control over literacy provision” (p. 347) and gives the example of the “literacy movie,” *Stanley and Iris*, in which Iris volunteers to help Stanley learn to read and they fall in love in the process. For Luttrell (and I agree) this helps to perpetuate messages that literacy work is a personal rather than a political project. It also underlines the “cherished assumption” that anyone who can read can teach others to read: “Good woman instincts” are sufficient for Iris. This devalues the professional nature of literacy work, and it is no coincidence that the majority of literacy volunteers are women.⁸

However, the volunteer at Carnegie was not comparing volunteer and paid work, he was comparing teaching with political organizing—and clearly believed that teaching was just a stepping stone, rather than a worthy occupation in itself.

Luttrell also writes about how teachers talk about how much they love their work—helping another person to develop, facilitating growth, et cetera. It is important to

⁸ See Chapter 3 for more discussion on the role voluntarism plays in BC literacy work.

help learners feel good about themselves and build positive self-concepts. But some did not see themselves as “professional” because they associated this label with “lack of personal involvement with students” (p. 356). They, like the *HFH* team and other ABE practitioners, understand that relationship-building is key to good teaching. Many adult literacy instructors—including the “effective” ones described in the *HFH* report—would identify to some extent with what Daniel Pratt (1998, 2002) calls a “nurturing perspective.” Teachers with this perspective tend to focus on building a learner’s self-concept. According to Pratt, instructors who teach with this perspective often face criticisms:

Its very name has feminine connotations and to some, suggests lower standards. Yet, for those who are most exemplary of this perspective, there is no lowering of standards. Quite the contrary; they make reasonable demands and set high expectations for their learners. For them, caring does not negate having high expectations. (Pratt, 2002, p. 8)

The fact that “feminine” is linked to “low standards” reinforces arguments that the ABE field and instructors are delegitimized. According to Lorraine Code (1991), women are seen to be stronger when it comes to characteristics such as care, sensitivity, responsiveness, responsibility, intuition and trust—characteristics that society should encourage. But, she warns, this can be dangerous:

It is not easy to separate their appeal from the fact that women—at least women of prosperous classes and privileged races—have been encouraged to cultivate them throughout so long a history of oppression and exploitation that they have become marks and acquiescence in powerlessness. Hence there is a persistent tension in feminist thought between a laudable wish to celebrate “feminine” values as tools for the creation of a better social order and a fear of endorsing those same values as instruments of women's continued oppression. (Code, 1991, p. 17)

Adult literacy practitioners may be aware of these “persistent tensions” but they also find a way to balance the nurturing and political aspects of their work. This is

discussed in *HFH*, and also by Bonnie Soroce, who was one of the Research Friends on the project and conducted her own study of adult literacy. Here she is referring to the report *Naming the Magic: Non-Academic Outcomes in Basic Literacy* (Battell, 2001) to which two of the *HFH* team members contributed:

Their work names both the care-giving knowledge of people working in the literacy field as well as the student outcomes of that applied knowledge. This naming and politicization works against the existing undermining of literacy practitioners' knowledge and expertise that are strongly based on relationship within education. (Soroce, 2004, p. 47)

Another reason gender is central to this research is the special consideration practitioners give to women students. Discussions about their special needs and the violence and other challenges they face infuses the research team meetings and some of their writings. This is not the first group of practitioners to pay special attention to women learners. In the 90's, the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW) coordinated and published several documents with stories and curriculum ideas for women practitioners and the women learners they teach (Atkinson, Ennis, & Lloyd, 1994; Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, 1995, 1996; Lloyd, 1991; Lloyd, Ennis, & Atkinson, 1994a, 1994b). In, "What is a Feminist Curriculum?" Kate Nonesuch (1996), describes some of the elements of a curriculum that would meet women's needs: putting women at the centre of the curriculum, a concern with issues of diversity and power, making space for women's experience, a concern with emotions, trying to tell the truth when the truth is hidden or difficult to tell, and encouraging women to speak in their own voices. She goes on to say that it is NOT telling women what to think, how to live or what to do. More recently, Jenny Horsman and colleagues have produced work focusing on violence and learning in literacy programs (for example, Horsman, 1996; Horsman, 1998, 2000; Morrish, Horsman, &

Hofer, 2002; Norton, 2004). And in BC, Lucy Alderson and Diana Twiss (2003) explored how literacy activities could stabilize the lives of women in the sex trade.⁹ Since literacy learners are not the focus of this research, I will not discuss the content of this work, except to note that the authors have both influenced and been influenced by studies such as *HFH* and the women practitioners who created them.¹⁰

I have introduced you to two things that make gender important in this research: women instructing and learning together, and women facing outside forces that both support and criticize their field because of the strong role they have played in shaping it. Gender played a strong role in shaping the *HFH* project, both in terms of the content of the final report, the way the women worked together, and the challenges they faced. I will now discuss the influence of gender on their roles as researchers.

Women Researchers

I joined this research project because I saw it as a rare opportunity to do something new and exciting, and to be in the continuous company of some amazing women, women who have helped to create the ABE/literacy field in BC. (Diana's self-description in "Who are we? Battell 2004, p. 186)

This is one of many places in the *HFH* study where the research team is described as an exciting, committed group of women who have played a leadership role in the ABE/Literacy field.¹¹ I have already noted how women have shaped ABE/Literacy in BC and throughout Canada, and how there is an ongoing focus on, and commitment to women learners—both of which make gender central to this research. Now I want to look more specifically at the team as women researchers and to explore Lorraine Code's

⁹ This and other BC RIP reports are described in Chapter 4.

¹⁰ In Chapter 4, I will discuss how the creation of *Hardwired for Hope* fits into the BC and Canadian RIP movement.

¹¹ Chapter 5 provides rich descriptions of each member of the *Hardwired for Hope* team.

(1991, 1995) argument that “the sex of the knower is epistemologically significant” (Code, 1991, p. 13). This idea runs contrary to traditional epistemology, which claims that the knowledge generated is the only thing that matters; the knower or researcher is irrelevant, just a channel for the knowledge that is generated. Code’s assertion is linked to a number of criticisms of mainstream hegemonic research: It suppresses female or feminist knowledge, excludes women from knowledge-making, denigrates women’s authority, lacks relevance and usefulness and ignores the role of community surrounding the researcher. Also, because of the high esteem paid to scientific method, “ordinary” women’s voices are not heard and/or not taken seriously. She also points out that it is difficult to keep facts and values separate (something scientific method relies on) “when some ‘facts’ . . . are so clearly the product of power-based knowledge construction processes” (Code, 1995, p. 14).

Also, Code describes feminist research as value-laden (which is criticized by mainstream epistemologists because values cannot be verified empirically and are therefore not objective). Code defines objectivity as “a perfectly detached, neutral, distanced, and disinterested approach to a subject matter that exists in a publicly observable space, separate from knowers/observers and making no personal claims on them” (1995, p. 15).

Sandra Harding (2004) argues against feminist views that objectivity should be abandoned because it is “hopelessly tainted” (p. 138) by a history of racist, sexist, imperialist and homophobic projects, and rigidly divides subject and object. For her, the problem with conventional approaches to objectivity is not that they are “too rigorous or objectifying . . . but not rigorous enough” (p. 128). A more rigorous approach would be

to use “strong objectivity,” which is linked to strong reflexivity and “requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge” (p. 136). Many traditions of research would not allow this level of scrutiny. Harding gives the example of researchers who benefit from institutionalized racism and sexism:

If the community of “qualified” researchers and critics systematically excludes, for example, all African-Americans and women of all races and if the larger culture is stratified by race and gender and lacks powerful critiques of this stratification, it is not plausible to imagine that racist and sexist interests and values would be indented within a community of scientists composed entirely of people who benefit—intentionally or not—from institutionalized racism and sexism. (p. 137)

Another feature of mainstream epistemology, described by Code and also by Wendy Luttrell (1989, 1996), is the emphasis on dualisms (qualitative-quantitative, objective-subjective, male-female, culture-nature, university-community, theory-practice, etc.) which in turn implies excluding and giving different weights to different types of practice. Code argues for an alternative “knowing-others” knowledge relationship, in which knowledge is constructed as a series of mutual and dynamic interactions. This theme came up in my research, particularly when the practitioner-researchers described the continuum between practitioner research and university-based research.

Code (1995) presents two approaches to feminist research: feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory. Feminist empiricists support rigorous, yet value-laden research informed by feminist ideology but preserving many aspects of the scientific method. It is criticized, according to Code, for not making room for “diversely located knowers, researchers and activists,” and because it does not address questions about what counts as evidence and what evidence is repressed (p. 40). Feminist standpoint theorists, on the other hand, pay more attention to the different historical and material conditions

and the positions of women as researchers. Harding's (2004) description of "strong objectivity" (described above) is a good example of this. She adds another layer to standpoint theory, describing it as "starting off thought" from the lives of marginalized communities, which are "better places from which to start asking causal and critical questions about the social order" (p. 130). In the case of women, she explains:

There is no single, ideal woman's life from which standpoint theories recommend that thought start. Instead, one must turn to all of the lives that are marginalized in different ways by the operative systems of social stratification. The different feminisms inform each other; we can learn from all of them and change our patterns of belief. (p. 131)

A feminist standpoint is different from women's standpoint because it is a "hard-won product of consciousness-raising and social-political engagement—more than just another perspective on the world" (Code, 1995, p. 41). The problem with this approach is that, because there is no one single unified feminist position, the diversities and differences in women's experiences are not highlighted or accounted for: "Its 'locatedness' produces a version of social reality that must be as limited as any other" (p. 42). Because both these approaches have their limitations, Code supports "cross-fertilization across a range of approaches" (p. 39). In her study of collaborative research projects, Marina Nix (2004) found standpoint theory to be a useful analyzing tool because it highlights the importance of experience and because knowledge is developed both through individual reflections and collective conversations. It is "not a given, but a potential to be developed" (p. 34).

For the most part, the women researchers Code discusses are "privileged, educated white women who have been simultaneously attracted to philosophy and uneasily positioned within it" (Code, 1991, p. xi). As I will show throughout the

dissertation, the practitioner-researchers are also uneasily positioned; while they are in a position of privilege as practitioners, this is not necessarily true of their role as researchers, or of the field they work in.

Code also talks about the need for external validation. No matter how sure researchers are about their knowledge or their “right to know,” there will come a time when that knowledge needs to be corroborated. In the case of RIP, this situation came up when the group needed funds, and the external validation came from friendly, supportive academics.¹² Making similar points, but looking at a group a bit closer to the *HFH* team, Cassandra Drennon (2002) discusses “the politics of being knowers” in the context of practitioner inquiry groups. She writes about the “dismay” practitioners feel about the lack of interest in their research, and how they want to “ward off the threat of trivialization as well as cooptation” (p. 69). Drawing on the work of Tisdell (1998) and Maher and Tetrault (1997), Drennon argues that it is important for teachers and learners to explore the connections between identity and social structures in learning environments, because these connections affect positionality and shape construction of knowledge. Similarly, Battell (2004) says instructors with a political perspective are “aware of our own position of privilege, whether it is privilege attached to whiteness, earning power, education, gender, class or sexual orientation” (p. 76).¹³

In this section I have argued that gender is central to this research and have discussed some of the ways that it influenced the research project. The *HFH* team does not explicitly identify their work as feminist research, but the intent and approaches they

¹² Examples and discussion of this issue are provided in Chapter 6.

¹³ The extent to which these types of explorations took place in the *Hardwired for Hope* inquiry will be discussed in Chapter 5.

used place it firmly in that camp. This project and all the other RIP research in BC has been initiated and led by women, using a democratic, supportive approach to knowledge-production. The knowledge of women instructors—the “knowers”—has been valued, promoted and interrogated. Clearly “ordinary” voices form the backbone of this research; they are not only taken seriously, but celebrated—and indeed they are shown to be far from “ordinary.” The research is useful and relevant because the researchers themselves decide what and how to do the research.

Beyond this observation, I will not analyze the project in terms of the extent to which it followed feminist principles. In this, I am guided by these words from Lorraine Code:

I am shifting the focus of my inquiry away from the normative practice of determining what an ideal knower ought to do, and towards a critical analysis of what historically and materially “situated” knowers actually do. (Code, 1995, p. 21)

This dissertation tells the story of what these “situated knowers” did, given their historical, personal, political and pedagogical positions before, during and after the research. In the next section, I will build on that by describing how Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977, 1985, 1989, 1993, 2001) ideas have influenced my thinking about the field as a whole.

The “Field” of Adult Basic Education

To employ *field* as a tool of analysis, ... is to use a concept that by definition is dynamic and ever-changing. The source of that change can lie within the *field* itself or (and) occur in response to outside influences. (Grenfell & James, 2004, p. 511)

When I read this article, which applies Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas to the field of educational research, I thought of all the changes that have happened in the field of adult

literacy—some as a result of experience, creativity and innovation inside the field and others in reaction to pressures from government, institutions and funders (outside influences). Research in Practice (RIP) is an example of one of those changes. Some argue that it was a survival strategy—a way to keep programs going when funders seemed more interested in research than on day-to-day teaching. But these same critics, and others who are not so cynical, have said RIP is an exciting and a promising form of professional development arising from within the field.

But is Research in Practice a field in its own right? Before I “met” Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1985, 1989, 1993, 2001) and those who have used his ideas, a “field” was a place where my grandfather grew tomatoes, or where I watched soccer or worked with colleagues to teach adults. Those descriptions still hold true, and in Chapter Three I describe some of the things that have made the field I work in strong and innovative. But Bourdieu’s ideas helped me think about it in a different, more analytical way. He describes a social field as “a multi-dimensional space of positions” composed of agents who have varying degrees of power based on the assets (or capital) they hold—assets which are valued by that particular field. Arching over the different social fields is a “field of forces” which he defines as “a set of objective power relations that impose themselves on all who enter the field and that are irreducible to the intentions of the individual agents or even to the direct *interactions* [italics in the original] among agents” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 724).

The struggle for resources has been an ongoing saga in the ABE field, as in many professions that work with the marginalized, and over the years, practitioners have had to deal with “objective power relationships” (p. 724) imposed on them by different players

outside the field. But Bourdieu also talks about struggles between agents within the field. In *Sociology in Question* (Bourdieu, 1993), he states that a field has its own stakes and interests, which are not of interest to those who are not part of the field, and that there have to be people prepared to “play the game” based on rules set out by that field; that agents in the field share fundamental interests—and, in fact, can only struggle against each other because they agree that something is worth fighting about. These struggles take place over the capital which has been accumulated and which is valued in the particular field (I will discuss capital in more detail below).

At first when I thought of RIP as a field, I could not separate it from Adult Literacy and Basic Education, any more than the participants in my study would think of their role as researchers separately from their role as practitioners. But reading Grenfell and James (2004) reminded me that RIP is also a form of educational research and could, in fact, straddle the two fields. It is definitely embedded in Adult Literacy, and I do not think this is a sign of weakness. I am encouraged in this belief by a comment (and then a warning) from Karl Maton:

A field's autonomy is illustrated by the way it generates its own values and markers of achievement but the relative nature of this autonomy means these values are not alone in shaping the field; economic and political power also play a role, albeit in a form specific to each field. (Maton, 2005, p. 690)

The field has indeed generated its own values and markers of achievement, and as I will describe in this dissertation, the *HFH* team and others in the RIP movement have recognized the importance of documenting those achievements. According to Bourdieu, this is a good sign:

One of the surest indices of the constitution of a field is the appearance of a corps of conservators of lives—the biographers—and of works—the philologists, the historians of arts and literature . . . These agents' interests lie in conserving what is

produced in the field, and in so doing to conserve themselves. (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 74)

The *HFH* study has taken on that biographical role, and this dissertation is a salute to the biographers.

Habitus

The term “habitus,” according to Bourdieu (1989) refers to “the mental structures through which [people] apprehend the social world” (p. 18), and he argues that they are a product of internalization:

As perceptive dispositions tend to be adjusted to position, agents, even the most disadvantaged ones, tend to perceive the world as natural and to accept it much more readily than one might imagine—especially when you look at the situation of the dominated through the social eyes of a dominant. (p. 18)

I will show throughout the dissertation that the *HFH* team and other practitioners they work with do not necessarily take these structures for granted. Some have made it part of their life’s work to question and challenge dominating structures, both on their own behalf and in solidarity with their students.

Many researchers have used the notion of habitus as it applies to participants in educational programs (whether they are adults or children). For example, in her study of advice to mothers about literacy, Suzanne Smythe observes:

It is from this attention to interplay between institutional and local uses of literacy that the concept of *habitus* comes into play as shaping the social rules surrounding whose literacy practices are considered more valuable. Habitus, a “way of being” that encompasses people’s belief systems and ways of thinking and acting in the world, is also expressed in the ways people use literacy in their everyday lives. Dominant discourses may privilege forms of habitus that “count” and “matter” (such as the ubiquitous bedtime story), but habitus can also be a force of resistance against dominant discourses and indeed a lens for highlighting the local “everyday-ness” of literacy and indeed, of mothering. (Smythe, 2006, p. 32)

But what about the educators? The habitus will vary with the field; while instructors have many things in common, the habitus is shaped by their upbringing and education, and the community they work within is also an influence. I was struck by this when I read Erin Graham's application of Bourdieu's theories to harm reduction in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver: I realized that, because a lot of my work takes place there, my habitus has changed:

Once someone finds themselves in the DTES, there are certain rules of conduct which are required and which vary according to the relation of the habitus to the field. The *habitus* is in the walk, the language, and the jargon common to a particular field. (Graham, 2007, p. 97)

The habitus is not just for individuals, but also for collective bodies. Bourdieu says: "The construction of social reality is not only an individual enterprise but may also become a collective enterprise" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 18). This is reassuring for me, as it is clear that the collective experience is important to practitioners. Diane Reay explains:

It appears that Bourdieu is conceiving of habitus as a multi-layered concept, with more general notions of habitus at the level of society and more complex, differentiated notions at the level of the individual. A person's individual history is constitutive of habitus, but so also is the whole collective history of family and class that the individual is a member of. (Reay, 2004, p. 434)

Capital

Of all the types of capital that I have encountered, the one that interests me most is what Bourdieu (1985, 1989, 1993) calls "Cultural Capital." I find it interesting because, as Carrington and Luke (1997) explain, its power lies in its ability to facilitate the uptake of other forms of capital. For example, one sub-category of Cultural Capital is Institutional Capital, which refers to academic qualifications, awards, professional certificates and credentials—clearly necessary in some circles if one wants to obtain

Social Capital—access to institutions, networks and relationships which in turn helps to facilitate the uptake of Economic Capital (money and material goods).

The practitioner-researchers who participated in this study have a range of different types of capital: their location in colleges brings them economic capital, and to some extent Institutional Capital in the form of degrees. Their strong social skills, commitment and position in their communities means they have a wealth of social capital. However, while they may have rich stores of capital, their learners are often described in terms of the capital they lack, especially by those who support a Deficit Model of literacy. For example:

It is well known that low literacy skills adversely affect employment, earnings, health, *social interaction* and *civil participation*, [italics added] to name just a few critical aspects of everyday life. (Standing Committee on HRD and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, 2003, p. 83)

Similarly, Green and Preston (2001) claim that education is a powerful predictor of things like joining voluntary associations, interest in politics and civil cooperation (p. 248). But critics of this approach (Beder, 1991; Bhola, 1998; Fingeret, 1983; Luttrell, 1996; Martin, 2001) and most practitioner-researchers, would argue that it serves to de-politicize literacy work, among other problems:

Blanket statements are made over and over about students' low self-esteem, so that we stop seeing evidence of self-confidence and self-advocacy. Furthermore, these either/or dichotomies—peasants and urban poor as fatalistic and passive or actively resistant, education as domesticating or liberating—obscure the complexity of subjectivity and processes of change. (Martin, 2001, p. 51)

Vicki Carrington and Allan Luke (1997) use Bourdieu's framework to challenge both "neoliberal claims about literacy as a pathway to individual growth . . . and past neo-Marxian claims about literacy as a pathway to social emancipation and revolutionary action" (p. 98). They identify the gaps in typical "common sense formulae," such as: If a

learner understands the code, he/she will have increased self-esteem which will lead to increased school achievement. They also draw on New Literacy Studies (Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanic, 2000; Street, 1984) which promote a social construction of literacy that takes political context and social relationships into account, rather than seeing literacy as just a cognitive activity. According to Carrington and Luke, this poses some challenges to teachers:

The practical problem lies in their inability to predict, with any consistency of outcome or vocabulary, what forms of literate practices—and hence what relevant curriculum selections of texts and discourses, events and genres—will consequentially ‘count’ in students’ subsequent life trajectories. . . . Here models of universal language function and development patterns, however useful they might appear for curriculum development, are problematic because of the institutionalized, historical character of literacy practices and of their striking variability in sequence, development and in articulation across cultures and historical periods. (Carrington & Luke, 1997, p. 99)

If capital, like habitus, can be applied to the collective, then the field of Adult Literacy is under-capitalized. Horsman and Woodrow’s (2007) research, noted above and discussed further in Chapter Three, showed that the field as a whole is not valued. Some practitioners have reached out to “more respectable” fields by, for example, lobbying at government level and reaching out to business sponsors. Others have ignored those notions of what is respected and worked effectively and with dedication to build the field. Some have proved to be extremely good at manoeuvring between fields, and sometimes playing what Nick Prior compares to a chess game:

Here, we might find the metaphor of a game of chess useful, where players possessed of specific capabilities (or in Bourdieu’s terminology, a sum of capital, composed chiefly of economic and/or cultural resources which energize the habitus) engage in strategies appropriate to their location in the game. (Prior, 2000, p. 143)

In this section, I have described how Bourdieu’s concept of “field” has helped me to think about the field of ABE and Research in Practice, as well as how the practitioner-

researchers in this project “played the game” of RIP. This concept, like that of gender, speaks mainly about who the research participants are and how they are influenced by forces around them—as women, instructors and researchers. In the next section, I will describe how the notion of “communities of practice” shaped my thinking about them as learners.

Communities of Practice

When I think of the people who work in adult literacy across BC and Canada, words like friendly, supportive, committed and innovative come to mind. It is easy to call this group a “community”: We care about each other and care deeply about the work we do and the learners we teach. But is it a community of practice? In this section, I explore this concept, drawing principally on the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger.

In their study of apprenticeships, Lave and Wenger (1991) found that the most important source of learning developed, not from the “teaching” done by masters, but by interaction between apprenticeships, with the newcomers learning from the more experienced peers. The newcomers gradually moved from situations on the periphery to more central positions as they become more competent. This type of learning they called “legitimate peripheral participation” and they argue that learning is located in social relationships (rather than just in acquisition of knowledge) and “that engaging in practice, rather than being its object, may well be a condition of the effectiveness of learning” (p. 93). This led Lave and Wenger to coin the term “communities of practice.” They point out that the term “community” does not necessarily mean a well-defined group with visible boundaries, but it does imply “participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in

their lives and for their communities” (p. 98).

In a more recent work (Wenger, et al., 2002), it is noted that once the concept was developed, they began to see communities of practice in other situations that did not have “learning” as the focus of their existence, but in which people did learn in that community. The authors offer this description:

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis. (Wenger, et al., 2002, p. 4)

According to Etienne Wenger (1998b), a community of practice has three dimensions: What it is about (its joint enterprise as understood and continually renegotiated by its members). How it functions (mutual engagement that bind members together into a social entity). What capability it has produced (the shared repertoire of communal resources—routines, sensibilities, artefacts, vocabulary, styles—that members have developed over time) (Wenger, 1998b).

The “communities of practice” concept has been used to frame many different learning situations. Probably most pertinent to this study is Ralf St Clair’s (2005) review of Canada’s National Literacy Secretariat (NLS)¹⁴ support for literacy research in which he uses the three dimensions above to describe the literacy community:

If the Canadian literacy field as a whole, including researchers, practitioners, policy makers and learners, is seen as a community, then there are three areas that research must clearly contribute to. These are joint enterprise (the shared aims of the field), mutual engagement (the degree to which researchers work with each other and others involved in the field) and shared repertoire (understanding how things can be done in the field). (p. 69)

This is a helpful way for me to think about practitioner-research, which St Clair includes

¹⁴ The NLS was formerly a branch of the Department of Human Resources and Development Canada, but has been disbanded.

in his review, but I would build on his “shared repertoire” category by including some of the “communal resources” that Wenger calls for. These would include the reports and curriculum that have been developed, the shared ways of talking about adult learning and literacy, and the many workshops, courses and networking events which have contributed to our “understanding of how things work in the field.”¹⁵

There are three features of the communities of practice approach that seem to be pertinent to my study, which I will briefly describe. First, negotiating meaning is a very important aspect of learning in community of practice, and is in fact the source of meaning itself. Wenger describes it as “the process by which we experience the world and our engagement in it as meaningful” (1998b, p. 53). Lave and Wenger (1991) describe how people either talk about or talk within a practice: Talking about involves stories and community lore, while talking within involves exchanging information about the progress of ongoing activities. They point out that

the purpose is not to learn from talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn to talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation. (p. 109)

Secondly, identity formation is crucial to learning and participating in the community of practice. In his description of the “apprenticeship” perspective on teaching, Pratt (2002) describes how teachers with this perspective see learning as “developing competence and identity in relation to other members of a community of practice” (p. 5). He also points out that, as new members join, a community can change how it defines and enacts roles, relationships and responsibilities.

Finally, learning is situated. For Lave and Wenger (1991), all activity is situated

¹⁵ These are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

and even so-called “general knowledge” only has value in certain situations. Learning involves relationships, engagement, dilemmas and is a “comprehensive understanding involving the whole person rather than ‘receiving’ a body of factual knowledge about the ‘world’” (p. 33).

After this brief discussion of how people learn in communities of practice, I now want to turn my attention to the role of the educator. In the *Encyclopaedia of Informal Education*, Smith (2003) says educators facilitate participation in communities of practice, while Jean Flynn (2004) describes how they link the community of practice to outside groups. In her study of safe injection sites as communities of practice, Flynn, drawing on Wenger (1998b) describes how educators do the “crucial” work of brokering:

Brokering entails the translation, coordination and alignment between perspectives. . . . Because edges surrounding social communities are not solid, brokering is an opportunity to find a way in to promote new rules or shape new spaces. (Flynn, 2004, p. 159)

In the five apprenticeships that Lave and Wenger (1991) studied, researchers did not observe “teaching”; instead, they found that the practices within the community created the “curriculum.” They differentiate between a “teaching curriculum,” which focuses on instruction and is “mediated by the instructor’s participation,” and the “learning curriculum, which provides “situated opportunities”: “Learning curriculum consists of situated opportunities . . . for the improvisational development of new practice” (p. 97) and is linked to social relations.

In the case of practitioner-research, the “educator” is the Research Friend, and so it seems helpful to look at how this role is described in literature on practitioner-research and action research. Greenwood and Levin (1998) write about the “Friendly Outsider” in

action research projects, who provides direct feedback, written reflections and information on comparable cases and literature, and also speaks “the locally unspeakable” from an outsider’s perspective (p. 105). Cassandra Drennon (2002) describes “research facilitators” who “develop and sustain a learning community within groups” (p. 62) by recruiting members, setting agendas, promoting collaboration and facilitating groups. She notes that they are “almost always involved in the effort to advance the status of inquiry and practitioner knowledge in programs and the profession” (p. 62) which they do by guiding report-writing, helping to get reports published and setting up presentations. As I will show, the Research Friend who worked on the *HFH* had some things in common with the “Friendly Outsider,” although she was also sometimes an insider. Unlike Drennon’s Inquiry Facilitator, she did not so much set the agenda and teach practitioners as assist practitioners to set their own agenda then respond to their needs. She provided similar expertise but in a less directive way. In all these cases, the concept of “brokering” seems to be relevant, as the educator is facilitating links between the research project, other “communities of practice” and the outside world.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I have discussed three sensitizing concepts that will help me to tell the story of the *HFH* Research-in-Practice project: Gender, the Field, and Communities of Practice. I will conclude with brief comments on how each of them is helpful.

Viewing adult literacy work and RIP through a gender lens helped me to understand how adult literacy instructors do their work and how this particular group of adult literacy practitioners came to the *HFH* project and conducted research together.

Also, as Patti Lather points out, I can use this lens to examine the power relationships that infuse adult literacy and RIP in BC:

Through the questions that feminism poses and the absences it locates, feminism argues the centrality of gender in the shaping of our consciousness, skills, and institutions as well as in the distribution of power and privilege. (Lather, 1992, p. 91)

Power and privilege are also central to the notion of “field.” Seeing Adult Literacy as a “field” in the way Bourdieu and his followers describe it has helped me to understand the forces that have worked for and against adult literacy practitioners, practitioner-researchers and the learners they work with. The third sensitizing concept, communities of practice, helped me to understand how practitioners learn together and “build the ‘knowledge base’ of the field” (Taylor, 2008, p. 183).

Early in this chapter, I mentioned the African belief—referred to as *Ubuntu*—that people are defined and find meaning in their relationships with other people. This relational view is a key element in all three sensitizing concepts: It is as central to gender as gender is to RIP, it influences the power balance within and between fields, and it is one of the forces that powers communities of practice.

I will re-visit the sensitizing concepts in the Conclusion (Chapter Eight) and explore relationships in detail throughout the dissertation. This brings me to Chapter Three, where I will describe, among other things, the relationships I formed as I did the research.

CHAPTER THREE: THEIR RESEARCH, MY RESEARCH – METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

As I type this transcript, I realize that I am in the process of creating data, but at the same time, the data is revealing itself to me as the transcript unfolds. My fingers type automatically, so I am like a channel for Jan and the others giving me the knowledge which in turn I will give back to them and eventually to the world. (Betsy, research journal, February 17, 2005)

As I read this excerpt from my research journal three years later, I feel like someone else wrote it—someone quite naïve and starry-eyed, discovering this wonderful data as it appeared on the page. Now that data is like a lover who has hung around for too long. I need to let it go—back to the practitioners who gave it to me and anyone else in the world who can use it.

My comment about channelling the knowledge is also naïve; as I have come to discover, I am not just revealing things I have discovered, but shaping it according to my own experience and feelings about the research participants, the stories they tell and my own personal and professional experience with the content of the research. My job is to tell the story the data reveals to me as researcher, practitioner and fellow traveller on the research journey. But first, I need to explain how I conducted the research.

As discussed in Chapter One, my research questions are:

1. What are the conditions that led to the development of the RIP movement in Canada generally and the *Hardwired for Hope (HFH)* project specifically?
2. In what ways is RIP supported and challenged by university-based researchers, and in the specific case of *HFH*, what were the relationships between the practitioner-researchers and academics?

3. What would help to further support and develop the RIP movement in the field of literacy and as a respected field of inquiry by academics?

Methodology

I will begin this chapter with a discussion of the research traditions that have influenced my choice of methods. I am calling this the methodology section, following Sandra Harding (1987), who distinguishes between methodology, “a theory or analysis of how research does or should proceed” (p. 3), and methods, which refer to the techniques used in the research. There have been many influences, but the traditions I will focus on are ethnography and feminist methodology.

Ethnography

The bottom line about ethnography is that it is about forming relationships: it is about the search for connection within and across borders. The text is a record of a particular set of interactions between a particular observer and her/ his particular subjects. Those interactions can never be exactly reproduced again. Ethnography is reinvented with every journey. (Behar, 1999, p. 477)

I believe that good teaching is all about forming relationships, and so as someone who has taught for twenty years, I was drawn to a research approach that is also about forming relationships. I was further encouraged in this belief when I read the description of an ethnographic evaluation of two literacy programs in Vancouver (Tom, et al., 1994). In it, Allison Tom and her colleagues describe parallels between ethnography and adult literacy. They list key beliefs in learner-centred adult literacy that are echoed in collaborative ethnographic evaluation, such as: valuing learner's experience, language and culture, partnering with learners to develop curriculum that builds on their strengths and meets their goals, and approaching literacy as an ongoing process that promotes

sharing of knowledge, rather than filling “blank slates.” All of these are principles I try to live by in my teaching and my research. I was also attracted by the notion of putting the program at the centre, as the authors describe here:

Learner centred literacy instruction quite literally puts the learner, his or her concerns, culture, background, prior experience, existing skills and current goals at the centre of attention in the curriculum. Our ethnographic evaluation practice likewise strove to put the programs, rather than outside theories or pre-existing questions, at the centre of our attention. . . . We focused on addressing goals and concerns articulated by program staff and learners rather than addressing issues which came more abstractly from “the literature” or from outside notions of accomplishment and achievement in adult literacy instruction. (p. 24)

I found that ethnographic methods were particularly well-suited to the study of this practitioner research project; document analysis and participant observation helped me see the inner workings of the project, and the interviews gave me a practitioner-eye view before, during and after *HFH*. According to Lather (2001), ethnography’s appeal is in “getting close to the practical ways people conduct their lives and a deeper understanding of how the everyday gets assumed” (p. 202). The book *Sidewalk* (Duneier & Carter, 1999), written by Mitchell Duneier with photos by Ovi Carter, is a beautiful example of this. It is a lovingly-written ethnography of street vendors, based on a lengthy period of participant observation. While there are clear differences in the participants (middle class ABE instructors in BC/Black street vendors in New York) and in the writer’s position (mine similar, Duneier’s very different), I was impressed with the careful, respectful approach, the beautiful writing, and the attention paid to member-checking. Like Duneier, “I should never publish something about an identifiable person which I cannot look him or her in the eye and read” (p. 352).

An important aspect of ethnography is the length of time spent with research participants (Tedlock, 2000; Tom, et al., 1994). Tom and colleagues explain:

Fundamentally, and simplistically, ethnography is a commitment to a way of understanding and explaining the shared meanings of a group of people. This means that ethnographers spend extended amounts of time with people they study, trying to learn as much as possible about their everyday lives in order to learn about and be able to tell other people about the shared meanings and ways of getting on with daily life that work for this group. (p. 15)

As a participant observer, I was able to get close to the practitioners learning about and doing research, and was able to participate in discussions and correspondence about beliefs, assumptions, passions and everyday activities. I was with them for the duration of their project, and also participated in follow-up workshops and presentations when their research was complete. Implications of this will be discussed in more detail below.

Reflexive Ethnography

The reader will decide the extent to which this is a reflexive ethnography, but it is definitely something I aimed for, for two reasons. First, as shown in this definition, it helps to keep the research honest:

Reflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research. (Davies, 1999, p. 4)

Charlotte Davies shows that research is more honest and transparent if it explains how the experience and perspective of the researcher may have led to particular findings or conclusions. Laurel Richardson (2000) points out that we have a responsibility to both the reader and the research participants and suggests we ask ourselves two questions to ensure “high standards of reflexivity” (p. 936). First she suggests we ask if there is enough self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the researcher’s point of view. Secondly, she suggests we ask if the researcher holds herself

accountable “to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he she has studied” (p. 936).

The second reason to strive for reflexivity is to add depth and richness, or as Caroline Ellis and Arthur Bochner say, to “illuminate the culture under study” (2000, p. 738). Michelle Fine (1994) talks about “working the hyphens,” which she says happens when “researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts and with our informants, understanding that we are multiple in those relations” (p. 72). A central idea here is that the researcher’s experience is a resource. According to Nancy Jackson (2004), this is in keeping with the interpretive philosophical tradition, within which qualitative research (including ethnography) falls. She contrasts that with the positivist approach to research in which the researcher’s experience and involvement is seen as a “contaminant”:

These [qualitative] schools of thought adopt the view that the subjectivity of the researcher is the primary tool and resource for discovery or for making sense in any form of research. Thus they don’t try to eliminate subjectivity, but to employ it fully and make transparent how this is done. (p. 12)

So in keeping with the idea that my experience is a resource, I describe my professional background in detail, along with all the other research participants.¹⁶ I have also used my experience and reflections on my own practice to help me analyze the data. Davies (1999) and Weis and Fine (2000) warn me not to become too self-absorbed or lose sight of the participants. I can see that this is a danger, but I also need to be careful that I don’t lose sight of myself. In “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” Linda Alcoff (1992) explains that “who is speaking to whom turns out to be as important for meaning and truth as what is said” (p. 12). I do not in any way claim to be speaking for

¹⁶ See Chapter 5.

practitioner-researchers (and the group did not ask me to speak for them). Also, while I have drawn on the ideas of the participants, it is my voice that will sing the loudest. Mary Brooks (2008) puts it this way:

Throughout this study, my voice and my experiences are continually present although not always acknowledged or recognized. . . . although I listened to the voices of my participants and took what they said into consideration, there is no question that this dissertation was written from my perspective and in (one of) my voice(s). (p. 131)

An Ethnographic Case Study

It seems logical to call this a case study, because it is, after all, a particular example of a RIP project, and my reading of Sharon Merriam's work (1988, 1998) confirms this choice. She defines qualitative case study research as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit" (1988, p. 21) and presents four "essential properties" of case study research, all of which are congruent with my study: It is particularistic (dealing with particular groups of people, problems or institutions), descriptive (having a rich, thick description),¹⁷ heuristic, (illuminating the reader's understanding by facilitating discovery of new meaning, extending the reader's experience, or confirming what is known), and inductive (here she includes the "discovery of new relationships, concepts and understanding" [p. 13]). She also distinguishes case study research from other research according to the kind of knowledge that it generates: It is, among other things, more concrete, contextual and open to reader interpretation.

Merriam notes case study research does not have a distinct set of methods, but

¹⁷ Merriam describes this as a term from anthropology that means "the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated." Other words used to describe it include "holistic," "lifelike," "grounded" and "exploratory" (p. 13).

borrowed from different methodological traditions, depending on the purpose of the research. So ethnographic methods such as interviews, participant observation and document review, seem to be particularly appropriate, because, like case study research, they shed light on the particular. But simply using the techniques does not make it ethnography: “Concern with the cultural context is what sets this type of study [ethnography] apart from other qualitative research” (Merriam, 1988, p. 23). I agree, and the cultural, social and political context is explored throughout this dissertation.¹⁸

Having explained the influences and choices that have led to the development of this ethnographic, reflexive case study, I will now move on to examine the influence feminist research has had on this study.

Feminist Research

In Chapter Two, I argued that gender was central to this research, and so it makes sense that the research methods I chose would also be influenced by gender, and by my position as a woman and a feminist. How to do this was not straight-forward, because, as Reinharz (1992, p. 51) points out, feminism is a perspective, not a method. She lists three common goals of feminist research:

- 1) to document the lives and activities of women;
- 2) to understand the experience of women from their own point of view, and
- 3) to conceptualize women's behaviour as an expression of social contexts.

The first two goals seem to be congruent with this study. I have documented the research, and to some extent, the teaching and personal lives of a group of women, and I have tried to make their point of view central to this study. The third goal is also relevant because

¹⁸ In particular, see Chapters 4, 7 and 8.

the project under study offers a contextualization of women's activities that occurred in relation to others on the research team and in their profession, and in a particular social context: the ABE/Literacy field.

Michelle Fine's (1992) description of three stances feminist researchers can take caused me to look carefully at the role I took as a researcher. The first stance she identifies is one I think I have avoided. "Ventriloquy" (p. 219) is described by Fine as using the third person and covering up authorship. The second one, which she names "Voices," involves appearing to let the "other" speak while hiding "unproblematical" [sic] beneath the covers (p. 215). On first reading, I thought I was off the hook on this stance too: For one thing, I have not, I hope, positioned the participants in this study as "other" and secondly, I have made every effort to make sure the voices of the participants are authentic (see "Ethical Considerations" below). However, on further reading I realized that, in describing this second stance, Fine is not criticizing the use of rich data, but of researchers not being more explicit about where they stand in relation to the voices of their participants. She claims, "Researchers mystify the way we [the researchers] select, use and exploit voices" (p. 219). Have I done this? As I write this chapter, and make edits to the rest of the dissertation, I am searching for evidence of this and checking with others to make sure I have been transparent and reflexive in all my choices

The third stance Fine describes—"Activism"—is the one she urges us to take; to be open and "engaged with but still distinct from our informants" (p. 220). However, she also says this stance involves the most disclosure and is the most dangerous. If I take the "Activist" stance, what are the dangers? The research participants and the research project that I am studying are well known in the adult literacy field in BC, and also,

nationally and internationally, so there is not much point in using pseudonyms to protect my participants' identities (and they did not request this). One danger that I have attempted to address through member-checking¹⁹ is to make sure their views about each other are presented fairly; as caring, cooperative colleagues, they want to make sure what they say is respectful of other team members.

While I cannot identify any obvious dangers now, I need to be cautious about how this research might be used when it becomes public. I will discuss this below, under "Confidentiality."

That next level of danger is to me: Will the research participants be unhappy with the way I represent them as a group, or the conclusions I come to about their work? The danger to me is that I might lose their confidence as a colleague, and, because they are very influential in the field, this could jeopardize future work I might want to do. But more important, I want to contribute to the field and present it in a way that builds on its strength. Towards this aim, I have made every effort to represent them respectfully, and asked for feedback at the draft stage.

This brings me to another danger linked to taking an activist stance as researcher. In my effort to build from strength, and being conscious of the challenges faced by RIP practitioners, I may hesitate to point out weaknesses or limitations because I want to further the field, not weaken it. As a result, censoring can occur at an unconscious level. I will return to this later in the chapter under my discussion of Insider Research.

Another way that I have been influenced by feminist approaches to research is that, as Lather (2001) says, feminists are often interested in working collaboratively,

¹⁹ See "Ethical Considerations," below.

“particularly in an area where efforts toward ‘knowing’ have often been intrusive and exploitative” (Lather, 2001, p. xvi). Like most of the participants in my study, I am interested in collaboration and working in teams. That is one of the things that attracted me to this project and inspired me to work collaboratively with the research participants while they were conducting their research. I also explore the nature of “intrusive, exploitative” ways of knowing—an issue the research participants had a lot to say about.²⁰ While I did not conduct my own research using a participatory approach, I was influenced by the philosophy (Alderson & Twiss, 2003; Cancian, 1996; Maguire, 1996; McRae, 2006; Quigley & Kuhne, 1997) and, as discussed below, I consulted the practitioners at different stages of the writing.

These are my methodological influences—the traditions, philosophies, perspectives, and scholars that have influenced my goals and approach. But the devil is in the detail, and I will now go on to describe those details: the methods I used to try to meet the high standards of ethnographers and feminist researchers who have gone before me.

Methods

In this section, I will describe how I collected, analysed and wrote about my data. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of ethical considerations and my position on the insider - outsider continuum. But first, I want to remind the reader that the topic of my research was also research that was done by the participants in this research project. As Marina Niks says, it is part of a conversation:

We are encouraging them to do research, they do research, and then we do research on that with them. You know, it's a conversation – this is what I see, this is what I think, let's engage in that. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

²⁰ See, especially, Chapter 6.

Between the fall of 2002 and the spring of 2005, the *HFH* team collected and analyzed data, wrote and published a report, and conducted workshops and presentations about their research. To facilitate this work, they had 20 meetings and teleconferences, wrote funding proposals and reports to funders and communicated online almost daily. This work and the documents and ideas that came out of it became the data for my research.

Table 3.1, below, summarizes the research questions, data sources, ethical considerations, and position of the researchers in the *HFH* project (Theirs) and in my dissertation (Mine). Their research strategies are discussed in some detail in Chapter Five, and I have also listed them in Table 3.1, below, to show how the two projects linked together. Table 3.2 (page 65) shows timelines for the two projects.

Table 3.1 Research Methods

	Theirs	Mine
Research Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What makes literacy instructors successful or effective in their practice? 2. How does a group of literacy/ABE practitioners design and carry out a Research-in-Practice (RIP) project? 3. What support does a group of literacy/ABE practitioners require to carry out a research project? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the conditions that led to the development of the RIP movement in Canada generally and the Hardwired for Hope (<i>HFH</i>) project specifically? 2. In what ways is RIP supported and challenged by university-based researchers, and in the specific case of <i>HFH</i>, what were the relationships between the practitioner-researchers and academics? 3. What would help to further support and develop the RIP movement in the field of literacy and as a respected field of inquiry by academics?
Data sources	Autobiographies Journals Interviews	Participant observation Interviews Document review
Ethical strategies	Consent letters Member checks Participants had option of pseudonyms	Same, but mediated by university structure.
Position	Insiders: Practitioners doing research about effective practice, using their own experience as a starting point, then widening the study to bring in other practitioners	Insider/Outsider: University-based for this study, but also a practitioner and a practitioner-researcher: I started by studying their experience, but found myself drawing on my own experience as I did the analysis.
Reciprocity	They agreed to let me study their project, gave me access to all meeting notes, tapes, documents, etc.	I acted as research assistant, taking notes on meetings and helping with literature review, did one interview

Linking Up to the Site and Participants

I chose this site and this project for four reasons. First, as I mentioned above, I was interested in doing an ethnography. Second, adult literacy is my life and my passion, and I wanted to do research that would be useful to my field. Third, although RIP was a relatively new field to me, I had helped to organize a conference about it in the summer of 2002 and was very enthusiastic about its potential. And finally, I had developed a good working relationship with Marina Niks, who was starting a new RIP project, and she encouraged me to think about joining the group and doing research related to their work.

I was intrigued by this suggestion, but of course she first had to get the group's permission. I sent her an email, part of which she passed on to the team:

I guess it has taken me awhile to work through questions about where I really want to be and who I want to work with. But it has just occurred to me that I can learn a hell of a lot from these women, and there are lots of other practical and professional reasons to stay in BC (rather than Ontario or South Africa). So, if it is not too late, YES, I would like to do it. The question now is, do they want to work with me? (Betsy, email, October 12, 2002)

The response from the group was interested, but guarded. Those who had met me had nice things to say. Diana described me as an “*intelligent and sensitive women with vast experiences in literacy*” (Diana, email, October 14, 2002). Judy said, “*We could learn a lot from her and I like the idea of having our practice validated by someone else*” (Judy, email, October 15, 2002). But the group was just getting started, and many felt they would need to focus all their energy on getting to know each other and deciding how they would work together. How would it be to add yet another person to the mix? As Leora put it,

We haven't been together for a year and we had only really met [as a group] once. I guess what I am saying is that yet another person (no matter how terrific) to bond, work, listen, extrapolate, understand, might be one too many. (Leora, email, October 16, 2002)

Several emails later, Judy, too, had cold feet—and questions:

What does Betsy think she would do around our research? How is what we are doing interesting to her? . . . Sorry to pull back from my clear “yes” of yesterday, but my reservations may be just my own cold feet of what we are heading into! (Judy, email, October 16, 2002)

Jan, who had been waiting and thinking before she responded, also had questions:

What role do we play? What role(s) do others have? How will more people add to or distract from our goal(s)? I don't have answers to these niggling questions, but I would like the opportunity to discuss them with the group, so I can clarify my own thoughts on the question of “members of the project.” (Jan, email, October 16, 2002)

The compromise they settled on was that I would be invited for a meeting during their first team meeting. After some discussion, they allowed me to join the team, but with some conditions. The Research Team minutes recorded the following decision:

She will take minutes. She will act as research friend, and not as a fellow practitioner on the team. This would be too many voices [italics added]. She can make suggestions about process where relevant. She can join the (online) list on the Hub. (Research Team Meeting Minutes, October 23, 2002)

This sounds very strict, but in fact, it was easy and I felt welcome from the first day. And after about a year of working together, I formally asked permission to use their project as the subject of my PhD. They granted me permission, and gave me access to their correspondence, meeting tapes, and reports.

To repay their generosity, and in the spirit of “reciprocity” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001), I contributed to the group in a number of ways: taking most of the minutes, collating data, reviewing literature and acting as an extra ear during their discussions. I also conducted 1 of the 17 interviews with other practitioners. Although my

name does not appear as an author or in the credits,²¹ my heart and soul went into the project, and I was very proud of the group when it was completed. So it is with a sense of pride and in an effort to contribute to their legacy that I offer this story of their project.

Data Collection

The data sources I used for this study were my participant observations at research team meetings, teleconferences, workshops and conference presentations, interviews with all members of the research team and with two other informants, and all the documents that were generated by the team. In selecting these data sources, I have been conscious of Lois Weis' and Michelle Fine's (2000) recommendation to use a variety of methods, not only for the sake of triangulation (Mills, 2003, p. 52) but also "to cross over, converse and tap into different kinds of data, to find contradictions between methods that would most powerfully inform policy" (Weis & Fine, 2000, p. 51). They point out that different methods reveal different kinds of identity, and this could be seen in the different data sources used for this project. For example, emails brought out the "process" people—those who paid attention to what was happening with other group members and how they were feeling, and the task-oriented people who focussed on getting things done. There was also evidence of people taking leadership at different stages in the project. This was particularly clear in the meeting tapes and minutes.

Participant Observation

While the team conducted their research, I focussed on being a participant observer. I identify with what Mills (2003, p. 54) calls an "active participant observer,"

²¹ The idea of including the Research Friends as authors was discussed but not carried out. Some of the implications of this decision are discussed in the conclusion.

who is fully engaged in the task that is being researched. While the project was underway, I was totally engrossed in the task at hand and it was not until after the meetings, or at meetings with my study group, that I was able to put on my researcher hat. That was probably more a function of my personality than the project design. (I am not a good multi-tasker.) I was interested to hear from participants how they felt about my participation, and this was a question that each of them answered in the interview.

Here are three responses that I think are quite representative:

You were just part of our team. The only time that I gave any thought to “Betsy’s doing this” was when you brought it to us, asking for our permission. Which we gave you, Betsy! [laughter] And then we talked about it again, the letter of permission, you showed us at the last meeting. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

If you’ve been using a magnifying glass the whole time, I didn’t really notice. So, like how did I feel to know I was researched, that you were researching? I didn’t feel you were researching. It never made me act a certain way or feel a certain way. So that’s, I think, very positive. You were an integral member of the team and I’m going to be super interested to see how you read everything. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

I didn’t even think about you researching the project. It was like you just disappeared, and that’s exactly what you needed to do. And I would be the one [chuckles] who’d notice it first, like I would pay attention, but you were just very skilled as a researcher. You are intuitive. Its very smooth, very smooth. Probably from working with people from other cultures, from really making an effort to not impose yourself on them. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

This level of trust can be dangerous. Davies (1999) points out that participants may not always remember that I am doing research, so “they have a right to be reminded or consulted again about the use of information gained in informal encounters” (p. 48). As described below, I provided them with a number of opportunities to check what I had written after the project was over. However, after I gained their permission to do the research, I did not mention my research again until the interviews began. This may be a

weakness in the project.

I agree with Merriam's (1988) observation that the relationship and degree of involvement is likely to change as the project progresses. At first the group needed to get to know me, but as we worked together over the years, the team included me in all their discussions and activities, and I became "*one of the team*" (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005).

And I knew that they had become important to me, but it wasn't until later in the project I understood something else: They are a significant audience for this dissertation. So, along with the academic masters I have to answer to, I always had them in mind when I chose my words and ideas.

I used a journal to document my experience of the research process and to record "ideas, hunches, definitions, items, and concepts at any point in the analysis process" (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 153). This was also the tool that made the ethnography reflexive (Davies, 1999; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000), documenting my experience of the research as practitioner who shares a history with the participants, and also as a member of the research team who actually does some of the same activities as the participants.

Document Analysis

As the group's study was drawing to a close I began to analyze the rich store of documents and correspondence they allowed me to use. I had three years worth of email messages, reports to funders, articles written about the project and minutes from meetings and teleconferences. Later, I also used information from their final report, *Hardwired for Hope (HFH)*.

After Diana Twiss had finished writing the methods chapter in *HFH*, she gave me all the tapes from the meetings, with the warning that they were very, very long and I should find something else to do while listening. I strapped on an old Walkman and listened while walking, riding on the bus, and working out at the gym. It was wonderful to listen to their voices again and re-live interesting discussions and key moments in the research. I kept a small notebook that I could shove into my pocket or fanny-pack easily, and I stopped what I was doing and made a note of things that seemed important.²² When I stopped to make a note, I often told myself to check for similar ideas in minutes, interviews or emails.

Interviews

I conducted one interview with each member of the HFH team as their research project was drawing to a close. I could have done an additional interview in the middle of their project, but decided against it for two reasons. First, I was in conversation with them in many other ways throughout the project, both at meetings and online between meetings. While I was given the task of taking notes, I was also fully engaged in their discussions during the meetings and at social events. So I managed to get a sense of the natural development of the group through my participation in these activities and later through minutes, tapes and emails. There were also logistical issues: the practitioners were too busy during our meetings to take time to do an interview, and all but two were outside the lower mainland.²³ I was able to interview the members who lived in Vancouver area at their homes or workplaces, and was fortunate to visit Evelyn Battell at her home and college in Duncan, taking advantage of a workshop that we co-facilitated

²² See my discussion of how I judged things to be “important” below, under Data Analysis.

²³ I applied to UBC for a travel grant so that I could interview all the practitioners in their homes or workplaces, but my application was denied.

with her colleagues. Jan was able to make time for an interview during a visit to Vancouver, and I interviewed Leora by telephone—a method she is extremely comfortable with.

As I read through the documents and listened to tapes of the meetings, I identified themes which I used to develop interview questions. After checking my draft questions with my supervisory committee and the research participants, it was time to start the interviews.²⁴ I interviewed all the members of the research team, including the Research Friends, as well as two individuals whom I consider to be leaders in the RIP field: Audrey Thomas, recently retired from the Ministry of Advanced Education, who provided the initial vision and ongoing material and practical support for practitioner research in BC; and Mary Norton, who has taught courses on RIP, facilitated practitioner research groups in Alberta, and provided leadership to the RIP movement across Canada.

It was interesting to hear from the participants about how it felt to do this interview and to reflect on the project after it was over. When I asked Jan about this, she started by saying she worried that she would forget details and that some emotions would intrude, emotions that she “*did not want in any way to over-ride the overall impressions and feelings*” (Jan, interview). But she did very well, and in the end she said the process was positive:

It's been interesting for me, just to see what I do remember, and also I think, you've helped me again to perhaps put things in words. Wow, I went through a lot of steps, I have grown intellectually as a result of this experience, I am richer for the people that I've met going through the process. So I think you've helped me see those areas of richness. So thank you. (B: Oh, thank you). Oh, it's been good. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

²⁴ See Appendix C for the list of Interview Questions.

Similarly, Leora and Marina said they were happy about what they were able to articulate:

It's kind of interesting because I think I did articulate some things that I hadn't really put my finger on until today. And at the moment I stand by everything I said! [laughter] There are a few disappointments, but overall, I think we did a damn good job. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

How does it feel to reflect on the research now? Oh, it's amazing because many of these things I have reflected on [informally] I've been able to articulate the ideas in a different way and know with a distance. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

By using these four data sources, I was able to triangulate (Mills, 2003, p. 52)

successfully, and I believe this has led to a more interesting story. Of all the data sources, the interviews and the tapes were the most enjoyable for me. I liked the interviews because it was such a thrill to talk to each woman individually about the project and her thoughts—I felt energized and inspired by our discussions. I liked listening to the meeting tapes because they were a more detailed version of the minutes, revealing tensions and passions to which the minutes could not do justice. While it was quite laborious to make notes by hand and then copy them into the computer, there was something lovely about incorporating the listening into my everyday life. The gym has never been the same since I stopped listening to the tapes.

Data Analysis

Schensul and LeCompte (1999) advise that data analysis should begin well before data collection is complete, and I took that advice. I began sorting information into categories and themes as I wrote my reflective journals. Also, I typed notes and excerpts

from the meeting tapes and interviews into Excel tables organized by themes, and later learned how to use Atlas.ti.²⁵

LeCompte (2000) says “tidying up” is an essential first step. This means “make copies, file, catalogue, label, index, identify gaps and collect data to fill it” (p. 148). This proved to be important for me, because I had what seemed to be an un-climbable mountain of data. Once I had a clear idea of what was there and how it all fit together, the analysis and writing seemed to snap into place.

To determine what data to focus on, I was again guided by LeCompte (2000), who identifies three ways to decide if an item is significant. The first category is “frequency,” or items that occur frequently in the data. For example, in my research, practitioners talked in meetings, emails and interviews about different strategies for collaboration. The second category is “omission,” or items that did not appear even though you might expect them to. For example, I was expecting there would be some discomfort with me being present as a researcher, but found little evidence of this. The third category is “declaration,” or items that participants say is present or significant. For example, Diana Twiss, who wrote the methods chapter of *HFH*, identified the “literature review” debate as an important issue, and all of the practitioners identified finances as important.²⁶ There were other criteria I used to judge whether or not an item in the data was important, and I asked myself questions like the following to help me decide: Does this speak to themes identified in the document analysis? Does it support or contradict

²⁵ See Appendix D for a list of these themes.

²⁶ LeCompte’s advice about deciding what was significant also proved useful in the *HFH* research. See Gesser & Sawyer, 2004, p. 146.

something that has been highlighted in other data sources? Has this come up in previous RIP projects? Does this resonate with things I have learned through regular contact, that the practitioner-researchers feel passionate or confused about?

What resulted was a long, and very cumbersome list of themes and sub-themes, and equally long and cumbersome early drafts. It wasn't until I had done several re-writes, re-checked my data, had lengthy discussions with colleagues and received critical feedback from my Study Sisters and guidance from my supervisory committee that I was able to shape the document into something that began to tell a story reflecting the practitioners, the project, my arguments and my research stance. This experience seems to be in line with what Laurel Richardson's (2000) argues: that "writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project" (p. 923).

Timeline

A timeline for the *HFH* project and my own research is provided below in Table 3.2. I have been forbidden by the members of my study group to apologize for the long gap between the publication of the *HFH* report and the completion of my dissertation. So I will not apologize—I will simply say that it was challenging to balance graduate work with a full-time job. It always seemed that work deadlines and the needs of my students and colleagues were more pressing than the need to sit down and write. No one understands this better than the practitioners who participated in my study. When I conducted the second round of member-checks (discussed below in more detail), I felt a bit sheepish to be contacting them after such a long time. But their response was friendly.

I got an immediate phone call from Leora in Calgary, bubbling over with supportive comments and news about her new life, and this email from Judy:

YEAH Betsy!!!! I am so happy to know you were not sidelined by life. (Judy, email, October 6, 2008)

The competing demands we face as teachers and researchers is described well by Kate Nonesuch when she muses on her participation in RIP. She talks about having to work within two time-frames:

In the world of pure research, I think there is more time—surely this is part of the reason that Royal Commissions and theses and final reports routinely come in late. As an instructor, there is never more time. I cannot postpone January classes, not even for one day, because I have not finished thinking about the research I did in the fall term. (Nonesuch, 2008, p. 34)

I have found balancing work, life, and the dissertation, with their conflicting time frames, interesting and frustrating. I would like to think that the dissertation, like a spicy stew, will be richer for the long, slow simmer it has had in my head.

Table 3.2 Research Timelines

Dates	<i>Hardwired for Hope</i> team Research Activities	My Research Activities	
<p>October 2002 - to October 2003</p> <p>October 2003 - June 2004</p> <p>September – October, 2004</p> <p>From beginning to Spring 2005</p>	<p>Project started</p> <p>5 meetings</p> <p>Data Collection and analysis.</p> <p>3 meetings</p> <p>Data analysis and Writing</p> <p><i>Hardwired for Hope</i> published</p> <p>Presentations and workshops</p>	<p>↑↑↑↑</p> <p>Participant</p> <p>Observation</p> <p>↓↓↓↓</p>	<p>Research assistant</p> <p>I received agreement from group for me to study their project</p> <p>Began document analysis (minutes, tape-scripts, reports, correspondence, my research journal)</p> <p><i>(Used themes from documents to develop interview questions)</i></p>
<p>December 2004 - August 2005</p> <p>2005 - 2006</p> <p>Summer 2007</p> <p>Fall 2008</p> <p>Spring 2009</p>			<p>Interviews: HFH team, including Research Friends + 2 Leaders in the RIPAL field</p> <p>Analysis and writing</p> <p>First chapters submitted</p> <p>First complete draft submitted</p> <p>Defence</p>

Ethical Considerations

According to Davies (1999), participating in research should be a positive experience for participants, giving them “a chance to express their opinion or unburden themselves to a sympathetic outsider” (p. 48). As researcher, it was my job to make this experience positive and to guard against potential dangers that could arise in the small, well-connected field of Adult Basic Education. The first step towards this was to gain group consent, followed by individual consent through the consent letter. The consent letter used in the *HFH* research, and in my research was one way to ensure that the research participants were not mis-represented or harmed in any way. I will briefly discuss other ethical issues I considered during my research.

Confidentiality

I have observed and read about three approaches to confidentiality in ethnographic research: using pseudonyms for people, places and institutions throughout the text (for example Ferguson, 2001); using real names throughout (for example Duneier & Carter, 1999); or allowing the participants to decide for themselves (Lather & Smithies, 1997). Duneier (in Duneier & Carter, 1999) claims that using real names wherever possible “holds me up to a higher standard of evidence” and encourages him, professionally, to be more accurate, unless it would embarrass the people he is writing about or they will only speak if their real name is not used. He says, “When I have asked myself whom I am protecting by refusing to disclose the names, the answer has always been me” (p. 348).

The instructors who were interviewed for the *HFH* study (the one conducted by my participants) were given the option of using pseudonyms, and one participant did ask for this. I offered this option to my participants as well, but they decided to use their own names for two reasons: As discussed above, the field is small and the project well-known, so it would be easy to deduce who had been quoted. Also, the practitioners were proud that their work was the subject of a PhD dissertation, and it makes sense to give them credit for their ideas.

Whatever approaches are used, it is important for the participants to be well-informed about the research, and have tools to “assess the likely effects of the research on them and to make an informed decision about whether or not they are willing to participate” (Davies, 1999, p. 48). For example, Davies points out that, while I may write a very supportive, positive description of their work, other researchers making use of published work may not be sympathetic. For example, in a critique of the use of storytelling, Sherene Razack (1993) relates how the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women collects and publishes the stories of immigrant women. She asks,

To what uses will these stories be put? Will someone else take them and theorise from them? Who will control how they are used? Will immigrant women tell a particular kind of story in a forum they do not control? Such dilemmas are evident wherever story-telling is used. (p. 2)

I do not know how the stories in this dissertation will be used, and I have virtually no control over this once it is published. However, if I portray the participants with sensitivity and respect, it is more likely that others will do the same.

Member-Checking

LeCompte (2000) observes that selectivity cannot be eliminated because it is a factor of any human endeavour: “humans are interested in some things and not others” (p. 146). However, it is important to be aware of what biases and preferences affect data collection and the usefulness of research. I have followed this advice as well as her advice on the importance of checking results with participants, using the process of member-checking (Duneier & Carter, 1999; Lather & Smithies, 1997; LeCompte, 2000; Mills, 2003). Participants were given the chance to read their interview transcripts and

sections of the dissertation that refer to them or to their ideas. Their responses, sent by email or telephone, were very positive and helpful.

It was lovely to talk with you yesterday and really interesting to see me in print and commented on. (Evelyn, email October 11, 2008)

When all the quotes had been approved and the first round of revisions made, participants were offered the opportunity to read the first six chapters of the dissertation. Four people offered to read the draft (in spite of an impossibly tight timeline) and gave me useful suggestions. No one asked for substantial changes.

Getting Close to the Research Participants

Leora: Because we began to rely on you, and you began to offer! I mean you offered tremendous service.

Betsy: But quite often, it tied in with what I was doing at UBC. I also felt like you guys are giving me this amazing amount of insight and access to data, and I think it should be a two-way stream.

Leora: I know that. You said it, and yet, I think you put in a lot. And I just thank you very much. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

This conversation with Leora was a typical one—all the participants, either during or after the project, told me how happy they were to have me in the project.²⁷ The help Leora is talking about consisted of taking notes at most of the meetings and teleconferences (Bonnie Soroake also did that, but was not able to attend as many meetings as I was), helping with literature searches, and sharing my views at meetings when requested. I also hosted one of the team meetings.

For me, as I said, it was a two-way stream. I was given access to an amazing research project which would eventually lead to a doctorate. My increased interest in the project was partly as a researcher, but also as a practitioner who was both fascinated by,

²⁷ I discuss this in more detail in my self-description in Chapter 4.

and familiar with, the ideas that were coming out in the group's discussion and data analysis.

So I was learning huge amounts and making a contribution, but I was finding it difficult to stay "neutral." Was this a problem, or was my close collaboration with the *HFH* team improving the quality of my research? I was reassured by some of the feminist research literature. For example, according to Colleen Reid (2003), a goal of her interviews was to build rapport and reciprocity between and with the low-income women she interviewed: "I provided feedback to the women in a maximally reciprocal way, and did not presume neutrality" (p. 81). Similarly, Ann Oakley (1981) describes how she "disobeyed" textbook instructions and formed close relationships with the women she interviewed about their experiences with childbirth. She argues that keeping a distance is morally indefensible for feminists and that

in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. (p. 41)

J. Douglas Toma (2000) supports this view based on his experience studying university football culture in the US. He argues that getting close to research participants improves the quality of research in the following ways: by improving the breadth and depth of the data, including new information and ways of looking at the phenomenon; by providing context to the interviewees, who were then able to think more deeply about their own involvement; and by "[raising] the stakes associated with the study [because] interacting with people who cared about the topic made me care even more" (p. 181). In my case, I came to the project caring deeply about both the topic the participants were investigating and the topic of my research. I emerged from the project with a deeper

understanding and even more passion, mainly because of my experience with this group of women.

However, Stacey (1991) points out that this approach could also mask deeper exploitation or lead to exploitation. She reminds us that an interview always intrudes on a relationship and the final product (this dissertation) is the researcher's. A possible way around this is through critical and postmodern ethnographies. However, these do not take the problems away, they just acknowledge and describe them. Her conclusion is that there cannot be a feminist ethnography, only a partial feminist ethnography. She recommends rigorous self-awareness and regular monitoring of potential dangers.

So far in this chapter, I have described the methodology, methods and ethical considerations that have led to the production of this dissertation. The last consideration, getting close to the research participants, is closely linked to insider research. Before I conclude the chapter, I will discuss my role as an insider researcher and some of the implications for this study.

Insider Research

I joined the *HFH* team feeling a strong affinity for the practitioner-researchers, having worked in the field myself for 25 years. I was also an active participant in the study as Research Friend, minute-taker, literature-searcher and interviewer. This gave me a certain amount of insider status. However, I came to the project as a graduate student, not an instructor, and I had not yet worked in the college system in BC. This situation changed when the project came to an end. When the report was completed in 2004 and I began interviewing the participants, I became an instructor at Capilano College, in the

same department as two of the research participants. And as I worked through the data analysis and writing, I became more and more of an insider. By the time this dissertation goes to press, I will have worked at Capilano for five years and participated in three practitioner research projects, as a practitioner (Alderson & Alkenbrack, 2007; Alkenbrack, 2007). Throughout this time, I have continued to work on my dissertation, doing academic, not practitioner, research. So I agree with Justine Mercer's (2007) description of the insider position as being between two "poles of a continuum which is more or less fluid, depending on the way the end points are conceptualized" (p. 7). With my background, I considered myself to be sliding back and forth somewhere in the middle of that continuum, but usually closer to the practitioner end.

When I consider the insider/outsider issue, I identify strongly with what Collins (1991) calls the "outsider within" status that Black women scholars experience in the academy. The only way they could become true insiders was by giving up their own standpoint and assimilating the dominant (white male) worldview. Collins argues that many black feminist scholars have resisted this, and instead developed a particular way of seeing that is enriched by their marginal, "outsider within" position. Like the scholars Collins describes, I also feel very marginal to academia, and have a strong allegiance to practitioners.

My thoughts about insider-outsider research have also been shaped by reading and discussing the dissertations of UBC students who had gone before me (for example, Brooks, 2008; Marie, 2004; Murphy, 2005; Taylor, 2000). A particularly interesting one was John Taylor's ethnography of a teacher education program, which he conducted as a student teacher in the program. He observed:

My insider study entailed a great deal of studying up the well-established hierarchies of status and power within the university and the education system. For some of the faculty and school personnel, I was unquestionably a threat, for others I was, perhaps, a hoped for catalyst for change. (Taylor, 2000, p. 40)

My insider status was slightly different: While I am an insider in the field, I was not sharing the experience of practitioner-researchers in the project. Taylor was actually a student in the teacher education course he was studying and so it is natural that school personnel would feel threatened. In contrast, I may write critically about the forces that are swirling around the practitioner-research project, but not the practitioners themselves. I was fairly sure that I did not present a threat, but I did wonder if the practitioners felt uncomfortable at any time knowing I was researching their project. They reassured me that this was not the case. For example, Diana said,

It didn't make me feel like there were things I didn't want to say or places I didn't want to go because you were researching, I felt totally comfortable and free and safe that whatever you were going to produce is going to be respectful, responsible, intelligent, all that stuff. I had no qualms about that at all. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

Marina was in a slightly different position, as the person mentoring and advising the project. She said,

I have to say that at times I felt a bit vulnerable because it's, Oh, someone's recording me? What are they going to say? But overall, I hope that it was clear that I was completely supportive of it and I think that it's great. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

Being an insider-researcher is not without challenges. For example, as Mary Brooks warns, I needed to be aware of boundaries:

This same insider status sometimes kept me from exploring their statements in more depth, either because I assumed I understood what they meant, or because I transferred my concern about the topic to them. In addition, I sometimes lost sight of the boundaries between my research and my life or my position as researcher and the women's positions as participants. (Brooks, 2008, p. 59)

Another important issue related to insider research is that the practitioners I am writing about may be part of my audience, and so I need to pay a lot of attention to language. Academic literature often includes specialized vocabulary and long complex sentences that can be time-consuming to read and understand. While an academic might be motivated to do this work, practitioners often feel that their time would be better spent elsewhere. If I do not write in a way that includes them, they will look for other things to read.

Paulo Freire (who ironically is himself accused of writing in inaccessible language) makes this point in his first book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

Often, educators and politicians speak and are not understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address. Accordingly, their talk is just alienated and alienating rhetoric. (Freire, 1970, p. 78)

bell hooks was a huge admirer of Freire but also said, “Any theory that cannot be shared in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public” (hooks, 1994, p. 64), and that theory is not able to transform if it is not directed at daily life. Similarly, William Tierney (2000) urges academics to “develop an intellectual style of writing that engages the broad public” (p. 190), and to present research findings in a style that is more accessible and engaging.

Although I find it challenging to write in a way that is both acceptable to the academia and useful to practitioners, I know I do not want to write “ponderous slugs of theory” (Behar, 1999). I was guided by Ellis and Bochner (2000) who say,

No matter how you tell the story, the writing has to be engaging and evocative. That's not how social scientists have been taught to write. You'll essentially have to learn how to write by reading novels, and by writing and re-writing and getting feedback. (p. 757)

Because I feel so close to the research participants, it is understandable that some would question the trustworthiness of my data. I will describe some of the concerns and also the steps I have taken to ensure that my research is trustworthy.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) say trustworthy research is persuasive and worth paying attention to. Applying the idea to practitioner-research, Zeichner and Noffke (2001) argue that the word trustworthy “captures the need for practitioner-research to justify its claims to know in terms of the relationship between knowers and knowledges” (p. 315).²⁸

This rings true for me—both for the research I am doing and for the *HFH* project. However, there are potential challenges that I need to be aware of. For example, Janice Murphy (2005) points out that sharing a professional background with participants can have advantages and disadvantages:

While it was advantageous for me that, because of my 15 years experience working in residential care, I shared both the medical terminology and therapeutic recreation language used in EC practice, it was very important for me to continuously check my assumptions. (p. 63)

I also share my research participants’ professional background and need to be careful about making assumptions. Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack (1991) describe how making assumptions can harm the quality of the interview. Although they are not specifically referring to insider research, the lesson can be applied:

As a researcher, I have learned that critical areas demanding attention are frequently those where I think I already know what the woman is saying. This means I AM ALREADY APPROPRIATING WHAT SHE SAYS TO AN EXISTING SCHEMA [capitalization in original] and therefore I’m no longer really listening to her. Rather, I am listening to how what she says fits into what I think I already know. So I try to be very careful to ask each woman what she means by a certain word, or to make sure that I attend to what is missing. (p. 19)

²⁸ I will examine the trustworthiness of the *HFH* study later in this dissertation.

Another potential weakness is that my familiarity with the research participants could affect how we interact during the research, and this could affect research trustworthiness in two ways: I might distort data or analyze it differently because of my friendship with, or loyalty to, the practitioners—I might want to protect them. A related problem is that participants might “give me the answer I want to hear” because they know me so well. Mercer (2007) describes how this might have happened in her research:

At the first site, I had been very vocal on the subject of faculty appraisal [the topic of her research] for 18 months. It was a subject I felt strongly about, and one I discussed frequently with colleagues. Most of my interviewees already knew how I viewed appraisal, and this knowledge certainly affected the information they chose to give me, although precisely how I can never know. (p. 8)

As I read this, I thought of a comment one of my research participants made when I asked her a question about RIP politics: “*Certainly I expect that question from you*” (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005). How much did that expectation, and her familiarity with my political views, shape her response? Like Mercer, I will never know for sure.

Not everyone sees insider research as a minefield of trustworthiness hazards. Penelope Davies (2005) argues that research results will be more reliable because the researcher shares a culture with the research participants, and Sarah Evans (2005) agrees. She admits that her examination of the discourses of “worker-centred literacy” “represents an investigation of my own philosophy and practice of worker-centred literacy” (p. 157). She describes how she is deeply involved in the movement she is researching: The interviewees are close colleagues, she co-authored two of the texts she is analyzing, and she has worked in two of the programs—all of which place her pretty firmly on the insider end of the continuum. But far from seeing it as a weakness, she argues that her close relationship with the interviewees and her deep understanding of the

issues give the study both internal and external validity. Cokely (1993) makes a similar argument about the practitioner research projects she studied. For her, the fact that research is grounded in real life situations makes it more trustworthy: “A practitioner-researcher is sensitive to the context-dependent nature of the study, and she documents this context as thoroughly as possible” (p. 2).

Documenting the context is extremely important, and I have done that in Chapter Four. Merriam (1988) describes several other ways to ensure that research is trustworthy, six of which I have used in this study: triangulating the data, conducting member checks, providing a rich, thick description, conducting long-term observation at the research site, submitting the findings for comment by colleagues, providing a detailed description of the researcher’s position, assumptions and biases, and ensuring that there is an audit trail and that other researchers can use the description to conduct a similar study.

I have taken all these steps, but still have a niggling feeling that something is missing. The penny dropped when I re-read LeCompte (2000) who talks about the “goodness” of analyzed data. She argues that no matter how elegant the model,

[R]esults lack credibility, utility or validity if the cultural whole presented by the researcher makes no sense to the person or groups whose cultural whole is, in fact, being portrayed. (p. 152)

Merriam (1988) and Richardson (2000) make similar points, and Lincoln and Guba (1985) advise the researcher to show that

the reconstructions (for the findings and interpretations are also constructions, it should never be forgotten) that have been arrived at via the inquiry are credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities. (p. 296)

This tells me that the most reliable judges of trustworthiness are the people who lived the situation I am researching: the *HFH* team. As described above, four participants agreed

to read a near-final draft. There was a suggestion for clarity and a few corrections in the section on RIP history, but otherwise the feedback was encouraging. Here are three comments:

It is insightful and very complimentary. (Evelyn, telephone conversation, March 13, 2009)

What a opportunity for a trip down memory lane! That was quite a process we went through, all of us . . . and then some. You have done a marathon of a job to follow our progress and then describe it so carefully and respectfully. WOW! (Judy, email March 19, 2009)

My dear Betsy you have not been swallowed up enough, you have not been indoctrinated enough, you have not shifted into academic mindset enough. You have not made your dissertation difficult to read, so of course there are difficulties. And I say THANK GOODNESS, hallelujah! Way to be. (Bonnie, email, March 23, 2009)

My Critical Stance

As an activist, I am naturally drawn to the notion of taking a critical stance in my research. This has been described in the literature in various ways, including: assuming a political orientation (Lackey, 1997), taking an advocacy approach and being openly value-based (Lather, 1992), and/or placing oneself as writer, participant and interpreter within the text (McCotter, 2001b). These ideas have helped me to think about how I could take a critical stance in this dissertation.

But sometimes I was confused about the extent to which a critical researcher should criticize the project under study. John Taylor (2000) said that some of the professors and university personnel felt “threatened” by his presence as a researcher, knowing that he would be critical of the teacher education system. But he writes

respectfully about his fellow students. Similarly, Mitchell Duneieur (1999) writes about doing “diagnostic ethnography”:

I begin observation by gaining an appreciation of the “symptoms” that characterize my “patient.” Once I have gained knowledge of these symptoms, I return to the field, aided by new diagnostic tools—such as photographs—and try to “understand” these symptoms (which is some amalgam of “explain” and “interpret” and “render meaningful”). I also read in more general literature, seeking ideas that will illuminate my case. (p. 342)

On initial reading, this sounded too much like the medical model that critical teachers hate so much. Then I realized that it was not the men who were his “patients”—he has enormous empathy and respect for them—but the “sick” institutions that impose on their lives. In their ethnography of HIV/AIDS support groups, Lather and Smithies (1997), take a stand, not clearly against any one thing, but for women and for women who are HIV positive. This stance is reflected in one of the questions that guided their research approach: “How is it possible that the book might be of use to the women whose stories we tell?” (p. 219). Like Lather and Smithies, I am completely supportive of the people in my research project, but, like Taylor and Duneieur, critical of the forces that surround them. I am inspired by Lather and Smithies to ask the question, “How can this dissertation help the women whose stories it tells and the field they work within?”

Concluding Comments

I introduced this chapter by discussing two research traditions that influenced my choice of methods: ethnography and feminist research. I then described the methods I used, making frequent reference to the *HFH* research which was the subject of my study and which was happening in parallel to mine. I discussed site and participant selection, data collection and analysis, and the timeline. I then talked about important ethical

considerations: confidentiality, member-checking, and getting close to participants. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of insider research.

In doing this research, I am deeply aware of my position as an academically-based researcher writing about practitioner-researchers. I believe that academics should play a supportive, contributing role rather than being a voice of arbitration (Dadds, 1995; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). In this and all future research, I would like to follow the “Four R’s” described by Verna J. Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt (2001): Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility. Although they wrote this article in the context of First Nations students in higher education, it strikes me that these four R's would be useful to consider in many other situations, including bridge-building between ABE researchers and practitioners. I hope my research will be seen as:

Respectful of all those who came before me, and who work with me now, whether they are based in the university, the classroom, or the community.

Relevant to the needs of the ABE field and the practitioners who have built it.

Reciprocal, with an exchange of skills and information that empowers all participants.

And finally, may I be **Responsible** for all I write, do and say.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BC RESEARCH IN PRACTICE MOVEMENT

Sometimes in the Adult Basic Education (ABE/Literacy) field there is an idea that takes root and grows. It becomes difficult to name the exact source, but the field seems ready for it and the idea is well received. That was the case with the idea of studying effective instructors in the ABE/Literacy field. There are many instructors who have worked in the field since the 1970's, who have grown and learned and who have shared their experience in many ways over the years. The collective urge to document this generation of teaching practice coincided with the pending retirement of some of those experienced instructors. (Battell et al., 2004, p. 3)

The *Hardwired for Hope* project, and RIP as a whole, were indeed ideas that took root and grew in BC, and that is what this chapter is about. As described in Chapter One, RIP has not been successful in every province in Canada. Horsman and Woodrow (2007) report that most practitioners are “too burdened” with program survival issues to even think about engaging in research, and that “RIP can only develop when the working conditions of adult literacy providers have become ‘normalized’” (p. 11). While this report was a good reality-check for me, I feel that it does not adequately represent the successes that RIP has had in BC. In this chapter, I will argue that, while working conditions may not be “normalized,” RIP has somehow managed to flourish, and is within reach of and relevant to most BC practitioners. I will describe three things that have made this possible: a strong field of practitioners, effective support structures, and an impressive collection of projects and reports.

But before I discuss the factors that have contributed to RIP's success, I need to make an about-face and acknowledge that the BC literacy field as a whole is not flourishing and conditions for practitioners are not “normalized,” I will describe the state

of the adult literacy field as a whole in the province, as of November 2008. I will begin, as any good practitioner would, with the situation faced by adult learners.

Practitioners and Learners: Challenges of ABE in BC

Is anyone else having trouble journaling? Things are so depressing at the college with everyone away and sick, students bowing under welfare pressure and us no longer having control of hiring because of cutbacks and vicious infighting. I just decided today I couldn't just talk about it for another hour (email, March 4, 2003, recorded in Twiss, 2004, p. 27)

This cry for help in an email from one of my research participants to the rest of the research team was echoed by her colleagues throughout the spring of 2003, as they tried to conduct research while their professional worlds seemed to be falling down around them. They were angry and dismayed about the war in Iraq, but closer to home they watched in horror as their class sizes dropped because learners were forced to leave school and go to dead-end jobs due to government restrictions on education. Evelyn Battell writes about the “breakdown in motivation” experienced by the instructors they interviewed. The interviews took place in 2003 when the BC Liberal government's cuts to education were beginning to take effect in the colleges:

Jobs were lost, faculty were scrambling for work, and feelings were high and generally negative. Our students had been hit with welfare cut-offs and loss of daycare and medical and dental coverage. Minimum wage for teenagers dropped and people took extra jobs to make ends come close to meeting. In most colleges, fees were levied in ABE/Literacy for the first time in years. (Battell, 2004, p. 114)

For college instructors, a particularly distressing cut was to the Institutional-Based Training fund. In their critique of BC government policy changes around education and training for adults on Income Assistance (IA), Shauna Butterwick and Caroline White (2006) describe this fund as providing support to IA recipients designated as having

“multiple barriers” to study while receiving benefits. It was discontinued in 2002. Their findings confirm our research team’s experience:

College staff described a bleak picture: without the targeted funds and income support, there were no services geared toward low-income students. The only remaining formal support available to some students facing financial difficulties was the ABE Student Assistance Plan; however, it covered only tuition costs, not application fees, assessment fees, books or childcare. Study participants were dismayed when those IA students who had not yet completed their studies were forced out and pushed into low wage jobs. (Butterwick & White, 2006, p. 24)

Butterwick and White also note that single mothers are particular victims of government programs, because childcare services have been withdrawn or drastically cut back. This problem is widespread: an outreach worker in Burnaby described how refugee mothers had to wait at least 8 months to get into ESL programs because of a shortage of childcare support (V. Kreuzer, personal communication, June 13, 2007). A third effect of the policy changes that Butterwick and White describe, and one that I have observed at my college, is “a growing emphasis in some colleges on university transfer (UT) courses” (p. 25). These courses are more lucrative and can accommodate larger classes than literacy and ABE programs. They argue the ABE students are “further marginalized” because they can only apply for student loans if they take post-secondary courses. Judy Rose describes what that looks like on the ground:

The trend at our colleges and the political climate doesn’t leave space for the kind of students we work with. They don’t leave space for the complicated difficult problems that take a long, long time to work out. Those kinds of people are being forced to disappear because they don’t generate the right kinds of results. That is the direction that we’re going in and I think all of us see that. (Research Team Meeting, October 22, 2002)

Students who cannot access community college programs may be able to join programs funded by the provincial Ministry of Advanced Education through the Community Adult Literacy Program (CALP). However, these programs tend to rely on

volunteer tutors, who are well meaning, well-trained, dedicated, and often very skilled. But is it fair to impose a volunteer program on our learners—and to burden these volunteers?

One of the *Hardwired or Hope* team members says no:

My objection to volunteers is that these students deserve the best and to get and keep the best, you have to pay for it. These students deserve many hours a week, year round if they choose and no volunteer is going to work full time. These students deserve this chance at education, they shouldn't have to be grateful to anyone for providing it. It is almost impossible to run a volunteer program in which students are not expected, allowed, encouraged to be grateful. Finally these students deserve constantly growing and learning instructors and it is hard to expose volunteers to enough training, interaction with other teachers, etc and to EXPECT they will take up these opportunities. (Evelyn, autobiographical writing, "The ABEABC Years")

The other possible weakness in the CALP programs is what Judith Walker (Walker, 2007) describes as a disconnect between government assessment requirements and learner needs. The evidence of success community programs are encouraged to document is limited to job preparedness, language improvement and promotion to higher level academic courses. However, many of the successes that learners experience cannot be measured or quantified.²⁹

Walker identifies a broader and potentially more troubling issue linked to the community focus in Adult Literacy provision: that "an emphasis on community can often be coupled with a withdrawal of state or provincial support" (p. 4). She also argues that the recent shift from core funding to project-based funding will have a destabilizing influence on colleges and institutions.

²⁹ In a footnote, Walker reports that there is a collaborative project between government and community groups to design tools that will measure non-traditional outcomes. See a discussion of the "From the Ground Up" project below.

This is a bleak picture, especially when you consider that BC's Premier is a champion of literacy for all and has set a goal to make BC "the most literate jurisdiction in North America" (Premier's Advisory Panel, 2005, p.1).³⁰ Towards this end, the province has launched several initiatives: In 2004, "Literacy Now" was launched to promote collaboration between community stakeholders and to raise awareness about literacy issues by supporting the development of community literacy plans and small implementation projects. Also in that year, the Premier's advisory panel was established to assess the literacy challenges, identify needs and help develop a plan to meet the challenges. In November 2006, the Select Standing Committee on Education released its report, *Literacy through Leadership: Outlining an Adult Literacy Strategy for British Columbians*, based on hearings and position papers from institutional and community providers from all over BC. In 2007, the Premier held his second "Premier's Summit on Literacy" and launched the \$27 million ReadNow BC project with four key objectives: "increasing the number of children who enter school with the pre-reading skills they need to succeed, and improving reading skills among school-age children, Aboriginal people and adults, including workplace literacy (BC Premier's office, 2007). A large part of this, and a good part, is increased funding to Literacy Now.

Another potentially promising development is that in 2007 - 2008, all School Districts will be required to create "District Literacy plans" in collaboration with other community stakeholders. This signals a move towards the Ministry of Education (traditionally responsible for school-based learning) taking a lead role in adult literacy. While this, like the work of Literacy Now, may promote community collaboration, there

³⁰ The date was extended.

is also the risk that colleges will get sidelined and all the expertise developed over the years will be lost.

With all the money and all the planning that is going into literacy, low income adults still struggle to gain access. Students with the “complicated, difficult” problems will be left out because government policies favour students whose literacy will “result in economic gains” (Horsman & Woodrow, 2007, p. 29). And, as one community educator lamented at a meeting of education providers in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside,

Income assistance recipients have to “sneak” their education/learning and volunteerism or risk getting cut off. (It) should be a human right to be able to work on improving yourself, keep up your skills, and contribute to your community. (DTES Literacy Roundtable minutes, June 11, 2007)

The final problem that needs to be mentioned is the low status of the field.

ABE/Literacy work is referred to as the “Cinderella profession” (Horsman & Woodrow, 2007, p. 26). Part of this is because of the low status of the students—they often cannot pay to study and they are not working towards a degree. In addition, the subject matter—teaching someone to read—has lower status and potential for income-generation than academic or technical subjects like biology or film-making. The practitioners are also under-valued, as Joyce Cameron, one of the instructors interviewed in *Hardwired for Hope*, describes:

There seems to be really little value placed on the work that we do by the society that we live in. Our government is so hostile towards education and particularly hostile towards any acceptance for the people with whom we work, so it’s just another layer on things. That greater degree of disrespect manifests itself in the classroom in all sorts of ways—reduced budgets, reduced supports for people. The loss of the IBT³¹ funding—that gave really good support at our college to our students. All of that work of that support is thrust back on to the instructors now or on to a coordinator. It’s landed in all sorts of places and that makes it just that much harder. (Battell, 2004, p. 117)

³¹ Institutional-Based Training - discussed earlier in this chapter.

The practitioners—instructors, facilitators, coordinators—tend to be marginalized in comparison to their colleagues in the regular school system or universities. Looking at the national picture, Horsman and Woodrow (2007) describe it this way:

Many Canadian community-based practitioners work for low wages, often on a part-time basis, in very insecure jobs. There is a wide range in the pay scales and benefits available within different sectors. Though practitioners in institutional settings such as school boards or colleges get paid considerably more than their counterparts in community-based programs, they are often hired as contractors, not employees. The pay of college instructors, for example, may be tied to their teaching hours, with no compensation for preparation time and no access to benefits. Some have to apply for their jobs as often as three times a year. Many people work several jobs in order to make a living. (p. 26)

Horsman and Woodrow also point out that the majority of ABE practitioners are women, and so, as discussed by Code (1991, 1995) and Luttrell (1996),³² their work is devalued as other “women’s work” is devalued. One of Horsman and Woodrow’s (2007) informants on this issue is Evelyn Battell. She says,

You won’t find many men who will do this work because it doesn’t come with the pay, the security and the status. So it’s not surprising to me that it’s mostly women and the more women that are in [an occupation] the more it’s devalued. (Horsman & Woodrow, 2007, p. 30)

As one more example of how the field, and particularly practitioner knowledge within the field, is de-valued, I will discuss two reports that were released in 2008: *Learning Literacy in Canada: Evidence from the International Survey of Reading Skills (ISRS)* (Grenier, et al., 2008), from Statistics Canada, and *Reading the Future: Planning to meet Canada’s Future Literacy Needs* (Murray, et al., 2008) from Canadian Council on Learning (CCL). Both are intended to build on the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS), “the leading indicator of how well adults use printed information

³² Discussed in Chapter 2.

to function in society” (Atkinson, 2008a). The two reports provide details and suggest program solutions to address the needs of adults who tested at the lowest IALLS levels (levels 1 and 2).

In Chapter One, I quoted the CCL as saying that not much is known about adult learners. This is echoed in the introduction to the Statistics Canada/ISRS report which says:

Ironically, little is known about the learning needs of Canadians with low literacy skills. National literacy surveys have identified the main characteristics of persons likely to have low skills, where they live, and how low skill influences their quality of life. (Grenier, et al, 2008, p.8)

This was an omen that, yet again, practitioner knowledge would not be recognized or valued, and a Special Bulletin released by *Literacies* magazine (Atkinson, 2008a) made this point very clearly. The Bulletin reviewed the two reports and provided reactions from ABE/Literacy experts. *Learning Literacy in Canada* provides the results of six tests conducted to measure “reading-related component skills.” These tests required respondents to: identify images that corresponded to spoken words, quickly read a series of random letters, read a list of real words followed by a list of pseudo-words, to repeat, respond to and read simple sentences and short-answer questions, to repeat a series of digits in order and reverse order and to complete a spelling test. The *Reading the Future* report includes projections of adult literacy levels to 2031, descriptions of the “face” of low literacy, and suggestions for program and policy improvements.

In the Bulletin, Tannis Atkinson (2008) notes that the reports “ignore documented research-based and practice-based evidence about how adults learn to read and how to address individual and systemic barriers to learning” (p. 3). Similarly, Richard Darville (2008) warns that, while the reports make some useful contributions, they “are partial,

and should be read with a recognition that knowledge and evidence gained in practice are crucial to balance and to assess the knowledge gained through surveys” (p. 7). Of particular concern is that both reports emphasized the investment required to solve the literacy problem. These could well lead policy-makers to decide that some learners, such as seniors and certain ESL groups, would be “too expensive” to support—putting social justice on the back burner.

And these numbers make a fetish of level 3, assume it is the only thing that counts, and so divert attention from all the other gains in confidence and involvement that are often central in literacy learning. (Darville, 2008, p. 7)

Assessment specialist Pat Campbell (2008) criticizes the ISRS tests because they neither reflect the reading definitions, theories or practices that most Canadian educators support, nor address the complex nature of reading. Campbell points out that the clinical test that requires “reading” syllables and pseudo-words does not actually test the participant's ability to read or make sense of print. She concludes her commentary with:

Canadian educators bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the adult literacy movement. A deep understanding of literacy requires praxis, a cyclical process that unifies theory and practice. Let's continue to be guided by praxis, rather than statistics. (p. 3)

These comments come from people I consider to be colleagues, based in publishing and the university. While I appreciate the praise they give to practitioners, I am saddened—but not surprised—that our experience is not more broadly recognized.

In spite of all the problems, or in some cases because of them, RIP has blossomed in BC. In the rest of this chapter, I will discuss three factors that have contributed to that success: a strong field of practitioners, an established RIP support structure and successful products.

Start with a Strong Field

No one ever grew up saying, “I want to be an ABE/Literacy instructor;” it doesn’t appear in most job classification systems. It is irregular, part-time and in many places simply doesn’t pay. So why are so many deeply attached to this profession? The biographical descriptions in the final chapter, “Who Are We?” (p. 173) show that many of our interviewees and all five of us practitioner-researchers fell into this particular work, but wouldn’t leave it for the world. (Battell, 2004, p. 80)

This excerpt from *Hardwired for Hope* identifies something that many long-time practitioners share: they have come to ABE in a way that may not have followed traditional paths (such as teachers college)—they often come in “*through the back door*” (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004). This is more than just a colourful aspect of our profession. As Evelyn Battell points out, it has important historical roots:

Historically ABE instructors do not come from teachers. The very early history of ABE was Frontier College and working teachers in mining camps. People—not necessarily teachers—would go into mining camps, mine all day and teach at night. In my very early years in the ABE system, we had a lot more people from fields other than teaching than there are now. There has been a slow movement towards including more people who used to be teachers. That was an important part of the historical growth of our field, and I always held on to that perspective. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

This is one of several ways they are different from their colleagues who teach in the K-12 system. In his study of students in teachers’ college, Taylor (2000) points to another difference: Drawing on Britzman (1991), he observes that teachers often need to suppress aspects of their identity when they take on the role of teacher. In contrast, the *Hardwired for Hope* team wrote about the necessity of being authentic when they teach, and of bringing their whole selves into the classroom (just as they work to teach the whole person). Here is an excerpt from an email Evelyn sent to Marina about this, and then an excerpt from the chapter she wrote about instructors’ beliefs and motivations:

I started with what does a good instructor bring to the practice of

teaching? I'd like to explore the question of instructor authenticity in the classroom/or with students. I believe that one major thing that makes a good instructor is when that instructor is present as herself complete with her feelings and attitudes and choices. Good instructors do not choose material that irritates us, we raise issues of importance to us, we lead learners according to our own understanding of what matters in the politics, social, community, cultural, economic and race issues around them/us. We have lines that define what students may say to us and each other and they vary dramatically from classroom to classroom depending on our own comfort. Do you get the drift? Importantly good instructors admit when they are tired, impatient, bored, excited, discouraged, etc. We are respectful in our own understanding of what that means. If we are true to ourselves, authentic, we affect the power relation in the classroom.

I don't want to try to prove this – I want to take it and go from there. (Evelyn, email to Marina, September 27, 2001)

The connection with students seems to depend on honesty and authenticity. Instructors are people with lives, successes and failures, good days and bad days. Adult students pick up immediately if an instructor is present, involved, and paying attention to them, or only doing a job or playing a role. Students respond more if there is a real person teaching them than if they are being processed like so many numbers. (Battell, 2004, p. 85)

The writers identify other characteristics and beliefs that the practitioners they interviewed had in common. First, they usually are open to learning, trying new things and taking on new tasks and responsibilities at work. For example,

Sometimes instructors described how they grew to take on another role as they became more experienced in their institutions. Often they became leaders within their departments or with provincial committee work or in curriculum writing. All of the jobs carried with them a set of new skills needed for success. (Rose, 2004, p. 50)

They also often have experience with and commitment to mentoring and team building—to support colleagues, to improve student referral and to contribute to organizations such as the Adult Basic Education Association of BC (ABEABC).

According to Evelyn Battell, “This feeling of working with colleagues you trust and value has been one of the strong points, the benefits of ABE/Literacy work.” (Battell,

2004, p. 119). She also argues that effective instructors have a passion for their work, and a deep respect for the students they work with.

As I participated in this research project and, later, read through the report, I was often struck by how their attitude towards learners conflicts with the Deficit Model of ABE, which seems to permeate a lot of education policy. Those who promote this model, according to Beder (1991, p. 138), argue that learners with limited literacy lack the skills they need to survive and move ahead in society. Their failure has led to a low self-concept. We need to fix the deficit or the failure will be repeated. Critics (Carmack, 1992; Fingeret, 1983; Quigley, 1990) argue that this attitude leads to a patronizing, medicalized approach to teaching. Beder also points out that it perpetuates a myth: there are successful adults who did not finish high school and there is no conclusive evidence that the self-concept of ABE learners is lower than that of the general population. Also, many have dropped out of schools, not because of failure, but to escape an intolerable situation.

According to Tett (2003), some of the costs associated with the deficit model are: it stresses the mechanical features of literacy; it associates learning with individual motivation; learners are seen as passive; it promotes the idea that there are only right and wrong answers; it perpetuates the assumption that knowledge is value-free; it promotes standardization: tests, pre-determined core skills and learning outcomes; and it results in a disempowering, non-negotiable learning experience. Carmack (1992) observes that

The deficit model often fails to take into consideration the fact that undereducated women are responsible, capable and contributing members of their family and community; instead it defines learner objectives as they relate to the need to correct the student's deficit of knowledge in order to meet predetermined standards of performance. (p. 189)

Carmack's view is more in line with that of the instructors who wrote the report, and those they interviewed. In the classroom, they are skilled at teaching holistically, creating safe spaces to learn and reflecting on their practice (Gesser & Sawyer, 2004). And, sadly but essentially, they are masters at the art of "working off the sides of their desks." Leora Gesser writes:

For the practitioner-researchers as well as for some of the interviewees, the work that is involved to set up connections in our communities happens off the side of our desks, yet we manage to juggle it all. (Gesser & Sawyer, 2004, p. 169)

All of these characteristics, beliefs and skills contribute to their effectiveness as instructors—and, I would add, their effectiveness and openness to Research-in-Practice.

Another thing that makes the field strong is the solid core of practitioners who have been in the field for a long time. Audrey Thomas, the former projects officer responsible for Adult Basic Education in the Ministry of Advance Education, says,

One of the unique things about the literacy field in BC is the number of practitioners that have put in long years of service in the province and have got tremendous experience. And I think we are fairly unique in that in Canada because it is not too many provinces where literacy has primarily been housed in the post-secondary institutions.³³ And I think when you've got people that have delivered 20-25 years of service in the institution there is a wealth of expertise and experience. And it has been good to see those people willing to put their experience into a kind of a research effort and to bring along people who have not had quite the same experience in the field. (Audrey, interview, February 28, 2005)

And with all this experience, many of them are ready to try something new. This Jan Sawyer argues, is one of the things that led her to get involved in the *Hardwired for Hope* project.

Throughout my work, I've gone for a couple of years and then I need something else to challenge what I am doing. And it was time again and it seemed like a

³³ In addition to colleges, adult literacy and basic education programs are offered by school districts and community groups.

wonderful time to engage in something new that I hadn't done before and an opportunity to work with some people who . . . I respected in the field. So why not? (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

Paula Davies, another long-time practitioner describes similar motivations for participating in the RIP project, *Dancing in the Dark. How do Adults with Little Formal Education Learn? How do Literacy Practitioners do Collaborative Research?* (Niks, et al., 2003, described below):

While I consider myself to be very happy in the classroom, I have also always sought work-related experiences outside the classroom. I have been involved in a variety of Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program³⁴ projects and I have found that this involvement enhances the energy and expertise that I bring back to the classroom. I felt this research project would do the same thing. (Niks, et al., 2003, p. 92)

As I write this, I can imagine practitioners in other parts of the country saying, “Hey, what about me? I’ve worked in the field a long time. I’m committed. I’m a team-player and a risk-taker.” As someone who has worked in adult literacy in Toronto and South Africa, I can verify that there are a lot of very fine people who are wonderful educators and potentially wonderful Researchers in Practice. However, in BC, things came together so that this group of practitioners had the right combination of background, interest and opportunities to make Research in Practice take off. In the rest of this chapter, I will describe those opportunities and the resulting research projects.

Earlier in this chapter, I said that most practitioners are women, and the comment was made that only women would want to do this work. But at the same time, my research and my own experience as a practitioner, shows that they are powerful, wonderful, interesting women, and totally committed to their work. Here Linda Wentzel, a practitioner in Nova Scotia, explains why she often works overtime or for no pay:

³⁴ Federal-provincial cost-shared programs used to allow programs to apply for money for research and program development through the National Literacy Secretariat.

Literacy is my great love and my great addiction. Once you have this addiction it doesn't let you go. I often compare myself to my father, who was a sailor, and the way he related to the sea—it's either in your blood or it isn't. Literacy is in mine. (Wentzel, 2007, p. 48)

And some of the same things that attracted women like the *Hardwired for Hope* team to ABE/Literacy work, and encouraged them to stay for more than 20 years, eventually drew them into Research in Practice. The research participants reflect on this in Chapter Five.

Support for RIP: People and Structures

I thought, boy, something has happened in the field. People were really interested in research, they had lots of good ideas, they wanted to know the kind of thing they could do, they had ideas about mentorship and so on. (Audrey, interview, February 28, 2005)

Here Audrey Thomas is describing what happened when she “put up a trial balloon” at a conference round table session to see if there was any interest in research. She had a long-standing interest in research and had been inspired by national events she had recently attended: a “policy conversation” sponsored by the National Literacy Secretariat in 1996 and a seminar introducing research and practice organized by Alberta literacy practitioner Mary Norton. Both events helped to shape Audrey's thinking about possibilities in British Columbia. In her capacity as ABE/Literacy officer for the Ministry of Advanced Education, she went on to organize other seminars, which were also received favourably. Something was definitely happening in the field.

At the same time, Mary Norton was organizing a collaborative research project in Alberta. When Mary and other practitioners in the group did a presentation in BC, there was a very positive reaction and it also helped to cement close bonds between practitioner-researchers in the two provinces. The Alberta group had completed a project

to explore participatory adult literacy, a partnership between The Learning Centre in Edmonton and the University of Alberta Faculty of Education, funded by the NLS. Mary Norton describes the project this way:

The project had grown out of interest in the field in participatory practices and people saying, ‘What do you do at the learning centre and how do you do it?’ And of course it was also a project to get funding to keep programs going. In order to get NLS funding we were encouraged to do it more broadly than just our own centre, so it was a collaborative between the university and the learning centre. Grace Malicky taught the research part and I taught the participatory practices part. (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004)

One feature of the project that has never been duplicated in BC is that all participants were able to take it as a credit course through the University of Alberta. Six of the practitioners completed research projects on their practice, and this resulted in the report, *Learning about participatory approaches in adult literacy education. Six research in practice studies* (Norton & Malicky, 2000).

For Audrey Thomas, the time seemed to be ripe to launch a project to support research. She remembers,

And I thought, well I can’t do research now the way I used to do, being in government, but maybe there is a role I can play in trying to nurture the field and develop a research base in literacy because if we don’t do that, where is our knowledge going to come from? All the community-based groups who receive grants for program delivery, we encourage them to use evaluation in a thoughtful way to try to improve their practice. So it seemed to me that the next step was, if people were doing it thoughtfully, there probably were questions that would emerge out of the evaluation that could become the nucleus of a little inquiry. (Audrey, interview, February 28, 2005)

So in 1999, because all the provincial funds were going into program delivery, Audrey Thomas began submitting proposals to the National Literacy Secretariat.³⁵ At

³⁵ When the *Hardwired for Hope* project was taking place, the National Literacy Secretariat was the federal body charged with supporting projects, such as the Research Friend project and *Hardwired for Hope*, while the provincial Ministry of Advanced Education and Ministry of Education funded direct service. However, in 2006, the National Literacy Secretariat was disbanded and support for innovative projects gave way to

first, she contracted Allison Tom, (a professor in the Department of Educational Studies at UBC with experience in literacy research) to provide support to practitioners, and Allison soon passed this work on to Marina Niks, who became the “Research Friend” to many BC practitioner-researchers. Marina remembers when the term “Research Friend” came into use, at a workshop she co-facilitated at Literacy BC’s Summer Institute in 1999:

When we finished one of the two sessions that we did, we said well, we are available for help, and Suzanne Hale said—I remember it as if it was today—“What we need is a research queen.” And everyone pointed to Allison [Tom]. And Allison said, “Well I’m too busy, I cannot take this now, but I can give you the research princess.” I said, “I’m no princess.” So it was probably Suzanne Hale who suggested that “friend” was a good word. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

And so, the Research Friend was open for business. Marina’s work consisted of three things: providing workshops to interested practitioners (Audrey estimated that they occurred twice a year), providing support on the Hub (Literacy BC’s electronic conferencing system for practitioners across the province) and providing support to individual research projects. According to Marina, the online work was most difficult of the three, because it made her feel “very vulnerable”:

I didn’t know who was reading it, I didn’t know who the audience was. And people wouldn’t respond as much. It was mostly them asking us questions. We wanted to generate more of a dialogue, and that wasn’t necessarily happening. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

But it got easier as she got to know who was “out there,” and as some practitioners gave her some guidance along the way:

preference to training linked to essential skills. Also, national support for a lot of literacy networking and professional development came to an end.

Michelle Wiens was the literacy coordinator in Fort St Johns. And she said, “ I need something shorter, I need larger fonts, I love the bolds, using bold to highlight what the thing is about. Give space between paragraphs.” We’re in academia, and all that matters is THE TEXT! [emphasis in original] (laughs). So I was learning as I was doing it—fascinating! (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

However, the fact that a provincial government body was applying to the federal government for funds was viewed by some as a conflict of interest and also criticised because the government was competing with community and college-based projects.

Marina heard from the critics:

I know that some people complained about it, not formally to the National Literacy Secretariat or anyone, but truly it was the government using some of the funds. I think that Audrey had some funds set aside for a different phase, but over the years what happened is that we would put together a proposal just as any other cost-shared proposal, but truly it was the government applying to itself. So I know that it was iffy. I’d like to think that it wasn’t questioned because it was a good project and people thought the money was well used. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

In addition to the problem of research grant applications competing with program grants, there was some concern about the amount of control that was attached to the grants.

Evelyn Battell comments:

If you wanted Audrey’s money you got Marina. And that was fine, Marina’s a wonderful person, but it’s not like you had a choice about how to go about your research. How you went about your research was in consultation with Marina. I think Audrey made a really good choice—Marina is excellent and has had a positive effect with her work, but right from the beginning we knew, you dance through hoops to get money. This was an old familiar story, we will continue to do it. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

The Research Friend project led to the establishment of RIPAL-BC (Research in Practice in Adult Literacy-British Columbia). This group came out of the organizing committee for a pre-conference on Adult Literacy which was part of the “Portraits of Literacy” conference at UBC in 2002. After some time working informally, RIPAL-BC applied for and received funds that allowed it to formalize its structure and initiate or

support a number of Research in Practice projects, in addition to mentoring individual practitioner-researchers.

The pre-conference in 2002 was the second in a series of national gatherings of practitioners and academics with an interest in Research in Practice. The first one was in Edmonton in 2001. Sixty people attended, from Canada, the UK, Australia and USA. There were workshops, inquiry groups and discussions about Research in Practice. This meeting really set the tone for others in terms of exploring alternative ways of doing research and collaboration across sectors. Mary Norton organized this event, and she remembers:

For me it was just really important to have something in the university but do it differently. I'm optimistic I guess, but I think just because it's that way, it doesn't have to be that way. We had a round room, and that was really symbolic. (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004)

The Edmonton Gathering is also significant because it was where the idea that became *Hardwired for Hope* was first discussed. I describe the beginnings of this project in Chapter Six.

Those of us who attended the third national event, in St John's Newfoundland in 2003, left with the feeling that something new and exciting was happening in the RIP movement—and we were proud to be part of it. It was a time of intense learning and exchange, with an ongoing institute on different topics related to adult literacy research happening every morning and different workshops and seminars each afternoon. There was bridge-building between academics and practitioners and mentoring of new practitioners. Many of the presentations at the event were made by people from BC, including the *Hardwired for Hope* team, so it was also a time for us to promote the good

work in our province. And finally, most exciting for us westerners, it was infused with Newfoundlanders' wonderful spirit and culture—lots of dancing and singing!

These events are significant because they give practitioners a sense of an RIP movement and provide opportunities for them to share ideas face-to-face. Horsman and Woodrow (2007) found that this is by far the preferred way for practitioners to gain knowledge. The events have also allowed us to make links with colleagues further afield—mainly in the US, the UK and Australia. We have particularly close links with colleagues in the UK, whose Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) Network was established in 1985 (Jackson, 2004; Quigley & Norton, 2002). In addition to promoting research linked to practice, it supports collaborative research among different players in different settings, campaigns for the rights of adult learners and critiques policy that is “based on simplistic notions of literacy as skill” (Quigley & Norton, 2002, p. 17).

RAPAL was founded by scholars who work within the “New Literacy Studies” (NLS) tradition (Barton, et al., 2000; Street, 1984, 2001; Tett, 2003). NLS theorists describe literacies as practices embedded within social institutions. Central to this is what Street (1984) calls the “autonomous” and “ideological” view of literacy. The former, traditional view, describes literacy as a skill you either have or do not have, separate and autonomous from any context. Adherents to this view focus on what literacy can do for the person who has it. For example, Elda Lyster (1992) describes how this view has influenced the promotion of literacy programs in developing countries. She documents the numerous claims made about what literacy can achieve, including: giving the voiceless a voice, cementing socialism, changing thought processes, accelerating economic development, narrowing the gap between rich and poor and improving morals.

In contrast, the ideological view sees literacy as a social construct. Scholars who subscribe to this view do careful studies on what people do with literacy. Scribner and Cole describe literacy as “not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use” (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 236).

RAPAL has been very influential in the Canadian RIP movement: Their members have been invited guests at our RIP conferences (as described in Jackson, 2004; Norton & Woodrow, 2002) and contributors to our publications. In addition, BC practitioners have presented at a number of RAPAL conferences. There are clear signs that our research has been influenced by the NLS approach, although this is not stated in our promotional material and NLS scholars are seldom referred to in the practitioners’ research reports. But Mary Hamilton and David Barton (2000) describe NLS as an approach that starts by looking at local experience and studying different literacy practices within different domains. They argue that “literacy only has meaning within its particular context of social practice and does not transfer un-problematically across contexts” (p. 379). A study of the RIP reports that were created between the mid 90’s and the present will show that this is indeed the approach that most, if not all, BC practitioners have taken to their research, so it is no surprise that we have found friends at RAPAL.

However, this preference could expose the RIP movement to criticism, from both the academia and the field. For example, a practitioner from the Interior of BC once told me that she does not feel welcome in the RIP movement, because her research interests fell into the positivist, quantitative realm, and she felt this was “not allowed” in RIPAL.

While this is not the intent of our professional development activities, it is indeed the result: the vast majority of practitioners attracted to RIP are interested in small, qualitative studies.

The 2003 gathering has not been repeated, in spite of good intentions and a few funding proposals. There is no appetite, in this conservative time, for such expensive (and subsidized) learning and networking. In the spring of 2008, funding for RIPAL-BC came to an end and we closed the project with a spirited, informative gathering where we celebrated all our accomplishments and projects. In the next section, I will describe some of those projects.

The Projects and the Reports

The term “Research in Practice” has only been familiar in BC since the late 90’s, and as noted above became a recognized term when Mary Norton and Jenny Horsman wrote *A Framework to Encourage and Support Practitioner Involvement in Adult Literacy Research in Practice in Canada* (Horsman & Norton, 1999). However, a scan of adult literacy research reports shows that practitioners have been doing research that is grounded in their practice, with or without academically-trained research mentors. They have done research to assess needs (often as part of a start-up grant for a new program), to evaluate programs as part of a report to funders and in many cases, to complete graduate degrees. All of the participants in my research had done some sort of research before they joined the project.

My search for examples of research done by practitioners before Research in Practice structures were in place revealed at least 27 reports, falling into three “typical” categories. The first one is research to examine a particular aspect of their practice. In

Phonological awareness and adult beginning readers (1995), Joyce Cameron draws on her long experience in the ABE field to examine the relationship between phonological awareness and the reading level, decoding strategies, and progress of adult literacy learners. Another thing to note about this project is that Joyce conducted it as part of her graduate work. So although she was technically “located” in the university (under university supervision and to complete a university requirement) she chose to look at a question that was grounded in her day-to-day practice. The second type of research is needs assessment. There are many examples of this, including large scale ones such as *Native Literacy Research Report* (Rodriguez & Sawyer, 1990) which surveyed “56 potential literacy learners from 8 geographically and culturally representative communities” (p. 81), and shed light on their perceptions of the purposes and value of literacy, past barriers to learning to read and write, and preferred ways of learning and current barriers to participation. More localized studies focussed on one organization or community, such as Sarah Evans’ (1998) study of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside residents who use the Carnegie Centre. This study is particularly significant to me because some of my current work is at Carnegie. I can see how the needs assessment—and recommendations such as “the learning centre staff needs to see the entire building as their classroom”—has influenced our work today.

A third type of research that practitioners do is evaluation. Again, drawing from many examples, I will choose one: *It guided me back to learning: A longitudinal research study on calls to the Literacy BC helpline* (Middleton & Bancroft Planning and Research Associates, 1999). I have chosen it because the principle researcher was Literacy BC staff member, Sandy Middleton. After she conducted this, her first, RIP

project, she went on to conduct another one with learners from across BC, looking at learner leadership (Braathen, et al., 2001). She then became an active member of RIPAL-BC and has initiated and supported several provincial and national RIP projects.

One national project that helped to lay the ground for RIP was the curriculum document *Making Connections: Literacy and EAL Curriculum from a Feminist Perspective* (Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, 1996). It was a collaborative project produced by ABE and ESL teachers from across Canada, each one of which wrote a chapter with curriculum ideas. The collaborative nature of this project, combined with the role practitioners played in research meant it provided good preparation for those who would participate in RIP later on.

Since the Research Friend project began, 17 research projects have been supported through to publication. Of the ones that came out before *Hardwired for Hope*, I will describe three that have been particularly influential to the group, the field and my own practice.

Naming the Magic: Non-academic outcomes in basic literacy was the project that Evelyn Battell (2001) worked on before she started *Hardwired for Hope*. She worked with a team of ABE instructors to develop, refine and field-test six techniques for documenting non-academic outcomes. In addition to describing the techniques and how they came about, the report plays an advocacy role in that it makes a strong case for paying more attention to these outcomes, being transparent and building safety and respect into our teaching. One of the recommendations that came out of this report is that more extensive work needs to be done to build a case for Non-Academic Outcomes (NAOs) being a *raison-d'être* for literacy instruction (p. v).

In *Literacy for Women on the Street*, Lucy Alderson and Diana Twiss (2003) document their efforts to conduct participatory research with one other educator and women at the WISH Drop-in Society, which works with survival sex trade workers.³⁶ In the process of finding answers to their research question (“How can literacy activities empower and stabilize the lives of women in the sex trade?”), they debunk three myths about sex trade workers (see page 53-54) and learn a lot about how to conduct research and measure success with a group of women whose lives are in constant flux. An important aspect of this study was that, while intending to conduct a participatory research project, they ended up settling for “participatory instances”:

Although the project did not follow the rigorous definition of participatory action research, we were able to achieve many participatory instances in the research process. We also learned a great deal in our efforts to do collaborative inquiry and analysis with women in transience, addiction, poverty and homelessness (p. 15).

Another important finding was that, in an environment that is constantly changing, alternative measures of “progress” had to be found. These included: staying focussed, functioning in groups, regular attendance, participating in collective structures, etc. (p. 52). Like Evelyn Battell’s study, this research recognized the importance of non-academic outcomes.

These projects are important to this study because two members of the *Hardwired for Hope* team were involved in producing them (Evelyn Battell and Diana Twiss) but they have also had a lot of influence in the field. For example, at a 2008 training session a practitioner from Salmon Arm described how she uses a tool from *Naming the Magic* as

³⁶ A survival sex worker is defined as “Anyone who can’t exercise their right to refuse performing sexual acts for food, shelter, drugs, money or other survival necessities” (Living in Community Project, 2006, p. 36).

part of her regular student intake process, and the report also inspired another RIP project: *From the Ground Up: A Research-in-Practice Approach to Outcome-Oriented Program Evaluation* (RIPAL-BC, 2007) has assisted practitioners to develop assessment tools to measure non-academic outcomes, and WISH was one of the research sites for the project. *Improvements... no less than Heroic: Harm reduction and learning in Vancouver's downtown eastside* (Alkenbrack, 2007) builds on Alderson and Twiss' work to look at harm reduction more broadly using WISH and another Downtown Eastside centre as research sites, and re-visits the importance of non-academic outcomes along the way.

Dancing in the Dark: How do Adults with little formal education learn? How do literacy practitioners do collaborative research? (Niks, et al., 2003) is about a collaborative project which addresses two research questions: In the first, "How do adults with little formal education learn?" the researchers look at learning strategies used by people who did not complete grade 12. In the second, "How do literacy practitioners do collaborative research?" the researchers look at how four literacy practitioners, with no formal education in research, carry out a collaborative literacy research project.

The project was influential to the researchers who produced *Hardwired for Hope* for at least two reasons: It was the first provincial collaborative research project in which all practitioners worked on an equal basis as researchers, and, as described in Chapter One, it takes the revolutionary stand of not writing a literature review—and documenting their reasons in the chapter, "The Literature Review We Didn't Do." I will discuss their arguments and the implications for the stand they took in Chapter Five.

The role of the Research Friend was different in each of these projects. In *Naming the Magic*, Marina worked closely with the principal researcher to plan the research, then analyze and write up the data. In *Dancing in the Dark*, she was the overall coordinator of the project as well as the writer for one section. Each team member wrote one section of the report, but the whole group worked on the analysis together. According to Marina, the group “pushed each other to go deeper in our analysis” but it was a “cumbersome, lengthy” process (Research Team minutes October 22, 2007). In *Literacy for Women on the Street*, Marina helped the team with analysis and writing at the end of the research.

When *Hardwired for Hope* was in its final year, Marina applied for and received funding to facilitate a new project to support practitioners to carry out small, individual research projects in their workplace and support each other through regular group meetings and email contact. It was called RIPP—Research in Practice Projects. In planning this project, Marina was influenced by a similar set of projects organized by Mary Norton in Alberta (Holt Begg, 2002; Park, 2002; Pheasey, 2002; Steeves, 2002; Still, 2002) and was structured partly to avoid some of the pitfalls that the *HFH* team encountered. Marina explains,

I thought these [previous research projects] are huge projects. They are very expensive, there are too many people, there are very many complications about the collaboration too. I wanted to see smaller projects too. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

Unlike the *HFH* project, RIPP practitioner-researchers were paid lump sums that compensated for the time spent on research, but did not pay them an hourly wage. This was easier to raise funds for, but perhaps not as fair to the practitioners. Secondly, because practitioners were doing their own writing and analysis, they did not have the challenges the *HFH* team had in collaborative writing and analysis (described in Chapter

Six). A third challenge Marina identified was the difficulty practitioners had with writing proposals for research projects.³⁷ The RIPP structure supported them to do this:

So what if we ease that process for them, by having the money and then the proposal-writing process would be very supported, it would be part of the project, in the sense of me being paid to support that. They would apply internally to a sub-committee, and they would get the support from each other. So it was similar to what Mary Norton had done, but without the course aspect to it. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

For RIPP, Marina was the coordinator and the Research Friend. Over a three-year project, the five practitioners met face-to-face and online to support each other on their research journeys. But the actual research—from proposal to final report—was done individually. Dee McRae, a RIPP practitioner-researcher, writes,

My fellow research practitioners in RiPP have offered unending support, empathy, feedback and understanding during the learning journey that is this project. I think I learned as much from their projects as from my own. I had clarity when I looked at their work, and only messiness when I looked at mine. As fellow travelers we banded together and created a space for our individual projects and the RiPP project amidst our swirling lives. (McRae, 2006, p. 10)

The result is five separate reports, all set in the practitioner-researchers educational locations. The topics were teaching and supporting students to be self-reflective learners (Beebe, 2005), supporting marginalized youth to make changes in their community (Sondergaard, 2006), using students' personal narratives in the teaching process (Davies, 2006), practitioners conducting reflection-on-action (Docherty, 2006), and learners conducting research on agencies in their community (McRae, 2006). In the last example, the practitioner was, like me, "researching the researchers."

The last two projects I will describe were ones I was directly involved in. *From the Ground Up: A Research-in-Practice Approach to Outcome-Oriented Program*

³⁷ See Chapters 6 and 7 for a discussion of how this played out in the *Hardwired for Hope* project, and a discussion of possible alternatives to formal written reports in Chapter 8.

Evaluation (RIPAL-BC, 2007) was a collection of five tools developed by groups in eight communities across BC. The tools were developed to measure things that made sense in the different communities: learning in a group setting, progress adults make with their individual goals, community partnership development, reflective practice and volunteer tutor progress. The process used to develop them was similar to the RIPP process: All practitioners met for initial training in outcomes-based monitoring and then three times after that to share our progress. But we developed the tools in our communities. An additional dimension was that field-testing took place with practitioners around the province, consulting online throughout. The RIPAL role was to initiate and guide the project and to give feedback to each research team.

Finally, *Improvements. . . no less than heroic: The Links Between Harm Reduction and Learning* (Alkenbrack, 2007), was built on Capilano College's experience working in the Downtown Eastside and our developing understanding of Harm Reduction. We received helpful editorial feedback from RIPAL-BC through Marina Niks and Suzanne Smythe. However, it wasn't until I began to write up the report that I made an explicit connection to Research in Practice. I wrote:

This [RIP] approach to doing research seems particularly fitting for the topic of Harm Reduction. Both RIP and Harm Reduction challenge traditional ways of working and ways of knowing—and whose knowledge matters. Both are, fundamentally, about respecting people on the ground: valuing their expertise and validating knowledge that is learned through experience and practice. (p. 9)

The reports reviewed in this section deal with different topics related to adult literacy practice and used a variety of traditional and non-traditional research methods. Most used interviewing, but they also incorporated some more unusual approaches which are worth mentioning: participatory action research (Alderson & Twiss, 2003; McRae,

2006), narrative (Davies, 2006), using email for interviews and research journals (Docherty, McRae, 2006), journals (Alderson & Twiss, 2003; Alkenbrack, 2007) and piloting and field-testing (Alderson & Alkenbrack, 2007; Battell, 2001; Davies, 2006)

Practitioners also record some interesting challenges and issues related to RIP: engaging learners in research (Alderson & Twiss, 2003; McRae, 2006), collaborating in research projects (Niks, et al., 2003), finding time to do the research and “working off the side of your desk” (Niks et al., 2003 and the RIPP reports), and what seems to be a universal problem—writing up the research. Battell describes it as a lack experience with reporting and reflecting on experience and blames the problem on the fact that we do not have a culture of sharing our instruction. In the general introduction to all the RIPP reports, Marina Niks describes it as “an almost insurmountable hurdle that was hard to make space for in busy professional and personal lives” (Beebe, 2005; Davies, 2006; Docherty, 2006; McRae, 2006; Sondergaard, 2006: Preface).

Another common issue is that many practitioners have trouble seeing themselves as researchers. Battell points out that teachers’ knowledge and the contribution they can make is often under-rated and unrecognized, including by the teacher herself.³⁸ Some practitioner-researchers, like Melanie Sondergaard (2006) found it difficult to “untangle” the roles of teacher and researcher. She writes:

Writing this report has been a challenge for me, with having to probe and analyze my own practice and weigh my own risks while choosing words to describe my learning in a respectful way. It has felt vulnerable at times. (p. 26)

Although they are different, these reports have one thing in common: they are out there, on paper and on the web, being read by practitioners and academics around the

³⁸ I discuss “self-recognition” in Chapter 7, below.

world, and as such, they are both evidence of, and inspiration for, the development of RIP in BC and elsewhere. In addition, engaging in these projects has helped practitioners to look at their practice in a new way. As Anne Docherty says,

I have been pushed to explore my practice and my beliefs and approaches to practice beyond that of reflection. I have come to realize that the rigour demanded of research challenges me to change the lens in how I look at my practice. . . . Without this research, my activities and use of tools would have given me only experience. I believe by having to write this report I am creating knowledge rather than only experience. This is a key element in practitioner research. (Docherty, 2006, p. 15)

Concluding Comments

It is about a legacy, it is about articulation of some ideas, conceptualizing some of the things that they do and why they do it. So it's almost maturity for the field. And also, I think it has created a space for people who think about literacy in a particular way to come together, to re-connect. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

There are many ways RIP has been beneficial to practitioners and to the field as a whole. I will try to articulate some of them, with guidance from the *HFH* team and practitioner-researchers who have been involved in other projects. As Marina says in the quote above, practitioners are often drawn to RIP by the opportunity to work with others, to make connections with like-minded colleagues from different programs and regions. This would not be possible without the logistical and technological resources that provincial networks or research grants can provide. RIP also provides a challenge and a new adventure for those who may be looking for something new. Horsman and Woodrow (2007) say that it “decreases burn out and may lessen staff turnover” (p. 105). At first I wondered how this could be, given the amount of extra work that is often required. But again, Marina provided some perspective when she reflected on her experience working

with the RIPP group. She told me about a practitioner-researcher whose children had recently left home and was looking for a new challenge:

[S]he came to the workshop the first time and she said, “I’m 50 now, my younger kids are finishing high school next year, they’re going to university, I want to start planning my next stage in life.” So I think there is something about that too, as well as for many of them, they’ve been teaching for so many years, and it’s nice to see that they see this as an option or a way of staying in the field, but with a different goal. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

As I will show in Chapter Five, *HFH* team members had similar experiences. They used phrases like “jumping at the chance” and “new opportunity.” Also, Jan and Leora, who both come from smaller communities, talked about how much they valued the reduced isolation. There was also significant learning for most of the team members. For example, Jan said, “*I felt that I was getting some higher learning as well and for me that was important. I mean it was a growth process*” (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005). Diana found it valuable because it “*pushed her thinking*” in significant ways (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004). Also, it gave them a chance to reflect on their practice from a distance. There was geographical distance, because they left their programs to come to team meetings, distance in time because they were looking back over twenty to thirty years of practice, and the kind of distance that research can provide—where they look at their practice through a new lens. Practitioners also said that, in spite of the criticisms they had to face,³⁹ they felt recognized and respected as thinkers and knowers—because they were doing research.

RIP also benefits the field as a whole. As discussed in this chapter, it provides a documented record of issues, teaching approaches and ideas that other practitioners can

³⁹ Discussed in Chapter 7.

use to improve their practice.⁴⁰ Also, it was important to the team that the research would benefit learners directly. Judy argues that RIP has provided a vehicle for advancing an important issue that affects how colleges serve ABE learners:

With the colleges now having block funding, it looks to me as if one of the things that some colleges would like to do is just push their ABE programs out completely. And so if there is research and that research is celebrating what ABE accomplishes, then it means that places that were thinking of getting rid of it can't. And that's a huge thing. Because our people are not, we are not going to have our students go on and become academically-successful people, necessarily. . . . I think they are the people who most of all need more support, most of all need the help. And their complexity just makes it more interesting. And so when you force people to see it, then you force people to pay attention to that complexity and to maybe start to address it. (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

In this sense, RIP is a political act, because it is a way, not just to improve practice, but to make a difference in BC and across Canada.

In this chapter, I have discussed why I think the RIP movement has been successful in BC. In spite of difficulties in the field and in the working lives of practitioners, it has survived and thrived for three reasons: First, the practitioners are strong, committed, experienced and enthusiastic about RIP. Secondly, support structures were set up to encourage and work with practitioner-researchers. Finally, a body of work has been developed which is publicly available, is a satisfaction to the practitioner-researchers who created it and an inspiration to those who might like to follow in their footsteps. As a final offering, I present a time-line showing how the events and projects discussed in this chapter fit together chronologically (see Table 4.1, below)

Throughout the chapter, I have mentioned some of the practitioners who were involved in my research and who worked together to produce *Hardwired for Hope*. In the

⁴⁰ How HFH was shared and responses from the field will be discussed in Chapter 7.

next chapter, I will introduce each of them to you before I go on, in Chapter Five, to describe how they worked together.

Table 4.1: RIP Timeline

Years	Events and Reports
1985 - 1999	<p>RIP Networks Around the World</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RAPAL Network and Bulletin (UK) - Virginia Adult Literacy Research Network - Action Research network in Pennsylvania - ALNARC- The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium
1990-98	<p>Practitioners doing RIP on their own</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Native Literacy Research Report</i> (Rodriguez & Sawyer, 1990) - <i>Phonological awareness and adult beginning readers</i> (Cameron, 1995) - <i>Making Connections: Literacy and EAL Curriculum from a Feminist Perspective</i> Canadian (CCLOW, 1996) - <i>Carnegie Literacy Needs Assessment</i> (Evans, 1998) - <i>It guided me back to learning. . . .</i> (Middleton & Bancroft Planning and Research Associates, 1999)
1996-2000	<p>RIP seeds planted in Canada</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Making Connections: Literacy and EAL Curriculum from a Feminist Perspective.</i> (CCLOW, 1996) - Policy Conversations and Seminars in Ottawa and Edmonton - <i>A Framework to Encourage and Support Practitioner Involvement in Adult Literacy Research in Practice in Canada</i> (Horsman and Norton, 1999) - <i>Learning about participatory approaches in adult literacy education. Six research in practice studies</i> (Norton & Malicky, 2000) - Research in Practice in Adult Literacy (RiPAL) Network established in Alberta
1998	<p>... and germinate in BC</p> <p>Audrey Thomas and the Minister of Advanced Education sponsor 2 RIP seminars</p>
1999	<p>The Research Friend opens for business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshops twice a year and support to practitioner-researchers.
2000-01	<p>Projects supported by the Research Friend</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Literacy-Based Supports for Young Adults with FAS/FAE</i> (Raymond & Belanger, 2000); - <i>Literacy in isolation</i> (Wiens, 2000);

Years	Events and Reports
2000-01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Naming the Magic</i> (Battell, 2001); - <i>Making Connections</i> (Braathen, et al., 2001)
2000-01	The beginning and end of the Literacy Research Circles
2001-02	2 National RIP Gatherings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Edmonton Gathering (2001) - The Vancouver Pre-conference (2002)
2002	RIPAL-BC established
2003	3rd National RIP Gathering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The St John's Institute
2002-08	RIP blossoms in BC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>From Incarceration to Inclusion</i> (Hobley, 2002) - <i>Dancing in the Dark</i> (Niks, et al., 2003) - <i>Literacy for Women on the Street</i> (Alderson & Twiss, 2003) - <i>Hardwired for Hope</i> (2004) - Research in Practice Projects (RIPP) (2006) - <i>From the Ground Up</i> (RIPAL, 2007) - <i>Improvements . . . no less than Heroic</i> (Alkenbrack, 2007)
2008	So What? Closing conference for RIPAL-BC: But the spirit lives on! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>A Traveller's Guide to Research in Practice, 2nd Ed</i> (Norton, 2008) - <i>Moving research about addressing the impacts of violence on learning into practice</i> (Battell, et al, 2008)

CHAPTER FIVE: THE *HARDWIRED FOR HOPE* TEAM

I am a kind of product of my time. There were opportunities and limitations that have constructed my life as it is, and that is going to be a part of my story, just because of the life I've lived and how my teaching has meandered from this point to that point. (Judy, Research Team Meeting, October 23, 2002)

Judy Rose made this comment at one of the first research team meetings, when the group was doing autobiographical writing as a first step in their research. They were beginning to construct the story of their lives and their experiences as ABE instructors. In this chapter, I will draw on that same writing and other data sources to describe the seven women who worked on the *Hardwired for Hope* project: the five women who took on the research project and the two women who travelled with them as Research Friends. I conclude the chapter with a description of the third Research Friend—myself.

The Practitioner-Researchers: Rich Descriptions in a Poor Field?

In previous chapters I have described research reports that highlight the deprived nature of the adult literacy field (for example, Horsman & Woodrow, 2007), and this aspect of BC literacy work definitely came up in research team discussions and the report they produced. A lot of discussions were about poverty: the poverty of their students, the poverty of resources and the poverty of imagination and sensitivity on the part of policy-makers. But they also talked about lives and work that has been rich in creativity, professionalism and relationships. And by writing “rich descriptions” (Toma, 2000; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001) of each woman, I hope to portray some of that wealth, while at the same time looking critically at the problems and struggles they have faced over the years.

In the early stages of the research process, each team member wrote autobiographical pieces and journals, excerpts of which have been published in the final report. I have drawn on this published and unpublished material, as well as their emails, minutes and tapes from their research team meetings, the interviews I conducted with each of them and my journal reflections to provide each research participant's story.

I have decided to write very detailed descriptions for two reasons: The first relates to my understanding of feminist ethnographic research. According to Reinharz (1992), feminist ethnography commonly has three goals—all of which seem to be congruent with rich descriptions: 1) to document the lives and activities of women, 2) to understand the experience of women from their own point of view, and 3) to “conceptualize women's behaviour as an expression of social contexts” (p. 51). My second reason for going into such detail is that I want to honour the women who worked on this project and do that, as much as possible, in their own words.

The report *Hardwired for Hope* documents the characteristics, beliefs and motivations and the styles, strategies and skills of effective ABE/Literacy instructors. In some ways, the descriptions in this chapter parallel that report. As they did, I will describe the research participants' characteristics, beliefs and skills as teachers and leaders in the field of Adult Basic Education and Literacy. What is missing in these chapters, but very present in their autobiographical writing, journals and interviews are their descriptions of the rich and interesting lives they have lived outside the classroom, as daughters, sisters, mothers, partners and community members—their lives before and outside of ABE. Some of this will be included in each description. The research participants also comment on their experience in the project and the role they took

within the team. I will touch on this here, and deal with it much more detail later, when I describe the nature of practitioner research.

Evelyn Battell

I started being someone when I was eight years old and I am still constructing that person. And that person is an ABE instructor. It's real clear to me that many pieces led to my being an ABE instructor, and that's what I'm going to be when I die. . . . It's real clear where this awareness and that awareness comes from, all of which I use every day in the classroom. (Evelyn, Research Team Meeting, October 22, 2002)

This comment made at a team meeting shows the passion and clear thinking that Evelyn Battell brought to the *Hardwired for Hope* project. I will start this chapter with Evelyn because the research project started with her—she was the one who first conceived of the idea, pulled the team together and did most of the coordination work that lead to what many consider to be a ground-breaking report. And a survey of the literacy work that has taken place in BC and Canada over the past 30 years will show that a lot of ground-breaking projects have been initiated or touched by Evelyn Battell.

The central core of all her work, whether it was on the streets, in the classroom or in her community, is social justice, and Evelyn learned about this at a very early age, with her sister Jeanie. Although she was bright and capable, Jeanie lived in a wheelchair and was unable to care for herself, and Evelyn was her constant companion and source of locomotion. In *Hardwired for Hope*, Evelyn writes:

Finding out how and when the world was prepared to accommodate Jeanie, how and when she was taken seriously in spite of being in a wheelchair, shaped all my early years. We encountered discrimination in terms of physical access, patronizing attitudes that assumed she was mentally handicapped as well, financial restraints because her condition and the necessary accommodations were costly, and distorted tales of what was possible and available for “everyone.” I learned very early to distrust the media and government claims. Soon I knew that

our society wasn't "fair" around all kinds of people, not just the physically handicapped. (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 174)

Aside from her description of life with Jeanie, Evelyn does not write about her early life, and was quite surprised by teammates who wrote in detail about their childhood and families. She felt they didn't explain how it was relevant to their roles as effective instructors (which she understood was the point of writing the autobiographical pieces). What Evelyn does write about, incredibly eloquently, is her work and her politics.

Before she worked in ABE, she did street work in Edmonton for many years with the United Church of Canada, first with women and then with children, and like Jeanie, these people showed her "how the world looks for them." She writes,

I started to learn respect for those who make a life out of nothing but hardship and continue to come up for air after being knocked down again and again. I started to learn that each person constructs themselves as somebody—they may not be somebody to anyone else but they are somebody to themselves.(Battell, et al., 2004, p. 174)

After teaching for a year in Alberta, she came to BC and worked in literacy and ABE classrooms for 27 years. She taught math, English, science and computers on reserves, in prisons and in classrooms, including at Vancouver Community College and Malaspina College. She designed new courses, worked on government-sponsored projects and was an early member of the Adult Basic Education Association of BC, where she worked on the newsletter, *Groundwork*, with fellow *Hardwired for Hope* researcher, Rose. She also worked on the provincial *Literacy Materials Bulletin* and participated in several research projects including *Discovering the Strength of Our Voices: Women and Literacy Programs* and *Naming the Magic: Non-Academic Outcomes*

in Basic Literacy, as well as a report on ABE and First Nations Students, which surveyed First Nations-oriented programs throughout BC 1991.

Unlike many other instructors, who she says “*have never known anything outside BC*” (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005), she always saw the field developing in the national context, and has participated in a number of national projects. My first encounter with Evelyn was when I read the book *Making Connections: Literacy and EAL Curriculum from a Feminist Perspective* (Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, 1996). I first saw this book when I was working in South Africa, where politics and literacy were so intertwined, and was excited to read curriculum materials from Canada that did this too. And according to Evelyn, it was an exciting project to work on. Her work with the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women involved writing, research and conferences, which, she writes, “sparked and transformed the way I did my classroom work. I grew into political maturity in that I combined my politics and classroom work more than ever before and with more confidence” (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 175).

Evelyn’s politics shine through all her writing. Her critique of certain “taken for granted” literacy “norms” continues to influence me as a literacy practitioner. I have already shared her views on voluntarism (see Chapter Four). In these excerpts taken from her autobiographical pieces, “The ABEABC Years,” she writes about two other issues:

On group work: I deeply believe in group work wherever possible. . . . The majority of students find real power, not to mention pleasure, in finding they are not alone, they have situations, problems and learning challenges just like others. They can also learn from each other and become politicized by each other. (politicized = begin to see things as located in the culture/society/ community, not just in them, but begin to see in more specifics how this might work and how they might work to change things)

On being community-based: We are a community based campus. We are in a small town, what changes go on in the town are immediately reflected in our program offerings. As we get more students kicked off welfare, we up our efforts to provide food and clothes through the college. As job openings appear in forest management, we review our prerequisites for the math and science course this new crop of students will have to have to enter Resource Management Officer Training. When we need to offer Home support Resident Care Aid to a group of long time workers in the field who don't have a credential, we devise a work up course and an altered assessment to get them into the course they need. Then we offer alternate methods of delivery to meet their learning styles. These kind of adjustments go on daily in our ABE/literacy classes. It is a matter of attitude, not the size or resources of the offering agency that makes something community-based.

Along with her political perspective comes clear criticism of individuals and institutions that stand in the way of social justice. Like others on the team, she is particularly critical of systems and instructors that don't do their best for students.

And along with the political battles is an ongoing battle to stay healthy. Throughout the project and beyond, Evelyn was in constant pain due to arthritis and/or dealing with heavy medication. In a message to an online discussion about Violence and Learning she wrote:

Women and First Nations folks have always been huge foci for me. . . . The violence in their lives and the larger systemic violences in life are a whole lot of what wore my body out. (email introduction to "Violence and Learning" online conference, April 2007)

And, like most other things she experiences, she applies this to her practice as an ABE/Literacy instructor:

How can I urge students to do more than they are doing, not knowing what their limitations are? I think it is disrespectful to urge people to greater efforts; so often they are already doing the best they can figure out. Their "failure" to do whatever, pass the test, come on time, learn how to spell, isn't aimed at us. It isn't aimed anywhere. It is what they can figure out how to do right now. We insult them when we suggest they aren't trying hard enough. (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 176)

Evelyn said more than other team members about weaknesses in how the team worked together and the final product. But she was also the rock and the driving force of

the group—she initiated it, coordinated most of it, held it together. In an early email to the group, Jan Sawyer wrote: “*Evelyn, you are such a motivator and certainly know how to get me into ‘get with it’ mode*” (Jan, email, November 6, 2002).

At the same time as she was holding and inspiring the group, she was also the first to challenge assumptions she felt were not well-thought out, or object to conversation that seemed frivolous (for example, about clothes, shoes). But when we discussed politics she became animated and articulate. Diana admired her for both her straightforwardness and her politics. She describes her as a “*very different kind of literacy person (who) wasn’t afraid of anybody*”:

Most literacy people are just nice, really kind and really sweet and would never hurt anyone’s feelings, you know that warm nurturing model, and Evelyn didn’t seem to care about that, because her politics and the essence of what she believed was stronger than that. And also she believed that if we couldn’t handle that, we should get out of the kitchen. And I think she’s right, like I think there is a time and a place to delicately step around people and issues, but not when you are with your peers. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

Evelyn describes herself as “blunt,” and was unapologetic about this, right from the start. In an email to the group after a difficult meeting, she was apologetic, but still clear about her reasons.

By one of my definitions, community is a place where you can speak your politics - you guys qualify. I realized I seldom argue for my politics. I tell them and wait to see what comes back but arguing for them is arguing for Jeanie [Evelyn’s sister who lived her life from a wheel chair] - that’s pretty deep . . . I know I have a history lots of places not just with this group - of putting stuff out - pretty persuasively I know - then emotionally walking away if it doesn’t seem safe or I don’t have the heart to spend. . . . You really drag me kicking and screaming to very hard places. I don’t resent it but I thought you should know why it seems so hard to make me do it. (Evelyn, email to the group, March 7, 2004)

As I will describe in Chapter Six, Evelyn was disappointed with the level and quality of collaboration. To help me understand this disappointment, I read the

description of the editing process used in another collaborative writing project she had been part of—the national project that produced *Making Connections*:

We went over the chapters in great detail. We worked alone, in pairs, in groups, and in whirlwinds. The feedback which we had been largely unable to give over distance during the past year flowed from us. Assumptions that had been made at the last meeting were cleared up. Small and large changes were made to the chapters; some were completely re-written, others tightened up. (Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, 1996, p. 8)

If this is a true reflection of Evelyn's experience, it is easy to see why the editing process in *Hardwired for Hope* was a disappointment. She says that in *HFH*, "*I don't think we had time to collaborate. We . . . didn't have a chance to agree or disagree with what anyone was writing at any meaningful level. We were too busy*" (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005).

So I was left to wonder, did anything good come out of the project, for Evelyn? Yes: "*The interviews were fabulous. And reading the other interviews was fabulous*" (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005). And, although the process was frustrating, she learned a lot about research—and has carried that knowledge to at least one other research project that will benefit the field (Battell, et al., 2008). And, although she was not always happy about the process, she was very happy about the group members:

I liked the group I picked, I liked those women. They are typically wonderful ABE people, and when we got little tidbits of how they teach, I was absolutely fascinated. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

I was not sure if Evelyn was complementing the group or her own skill in choosing groups. When I checked with her, she said, "*I wasn't complimenting anybody—I was naming my pleasure in the group: I'm delighted with those women who are out there teaching ABE*" (Evelyn, personal communication, December 15, 2008).

Although she could be blunt, she was also a caring, nurturing person. She sent out regular emails asking how we were doing (and not just with the research), was keen to socialize during the research meetings—and introduced me to Crantinis.⁴¹ And she was also quite sensitive about her role as coordinator and the power relations that were involved, as this email shows:

I'm going to start acting like coordinator a bit during this next part—I'll keep posting and checking but if I'm overstepping bounds please let me know. (E. Battell, email, January 2003)

In *Making Connections*, Evelyn wrote the section entitled “Role Models,” and collaborated on the chapter “Women and Work.” Both are full of stories and activities that demonstrate the holistic, nurturing approach to literacy education that is promoted in *Hardwired for Hope*. In “Role Models,” Evelyn writes:

When we are young we might have said, “I want to be just like her.” As adults, we no longer feel so open to possibilities. We are pretty much fully formed and we may feel trapped by our circumstances. But we are influenced, guided and inspired by women around us and by those we read about or see in the media. (Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, 1996, p. 121)

Reading this again almost ten years later, I realize that, in many ways, Evelyn and the other practitioner-researchers I am writing about are role models for me. While I have been in the field for a long time, I am relatively new to BC and Evelyn’s legacy is a beacon for me. I admit it: I want to be just like her.

Judy Rose

Hey Jude . . . this songs for you
Take our last song and make it better
Remember . . . working for BC Tel, it must have been hell
Ain't Cap College better, better, better, better . . .⁴²

⁴¹ A martini made with cranberry juice—a drink Evelyn enjoyed when the group went out for dinner.

⁴² Song re-created by colleagues at staff retreat to celebrate Judy’s many years of work, May 2008

As I joined my colleagues in the department where I now work with Judy Rose, writing silly lyrics about Judy's long history at Capilano College, I thought about how she and her "generation" have made life easier for practitioners like me. Judy has been a mentor to both students and fellow practitioners (including me!). Her writing is infused with comments and stories about mentoring: It is something she feels very passionate about, and I can attest, from experience, it is something she excels at. So, because I have had direct experience with her mentorship, it is there that I will begin Judy's story:

Mentoring for me is the most natural thing in the world. It is a philosophy. It is a way of working based in cooperation and sharing and identifying with the group. Mentoring is successful when there is a combination of those that know a body of knowledge and those that want those knowledge or skills or attitudes. (Judy's autobiographical writing: "Mentoring")

And many others have benefited—partly because of her long and rich experience in the college (touching the areas of literacy, First Nations, financial aid, income assistance and many others) but also because she has a natural inclination towards mentoring. She has valued the mentors in her own life and has passed this on to new instructors, like me. She has also encouraged mentoring in her classroom:

Whenever there is a group of adults together there is a range of skills within the room. I will always have an old student take the new one to show her around the college (or) place students together creating their writing. . . . Affirming someone as an expert is tied up in sharing their knowledge with someone else. No one can demand generosity from you so the mentoring cycle has to be a willing thing. (Judy's autobiographical writing: "Mentoring")

She also describes herself as being very community-oriented, whether that community is the close-knit rural area she grew up in or the community of educators at the college:

As I wrote about my early years, I recognized that I have a deep understanding and appreciation of community. I grew up in Ontario in a small place surrounded by extended family and people who had lived in the area for three or four generations. My experiences from those early years helped me to move into other communities later and to recognize familiar patterns. The

community theme resurfaced in other forms for me during the writing when I chose to write about mentoring and the work family. (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 181)

Judy began her teaching career at 20, working in an elementary school. Her first class was “in a tobacco growing rural Ontario area. I had a classroom full of 45 grade 3, 4 and 5 students with a range of needs, no resources and no trouble from parents” (Judy’s autobiographical writing: “Mentoring”). She continued doing this for eight years, and learned about “the complexity of teaching and the importance of preparation and organization.” During that time, she attended university part-time during the summer, so that she had a BA by the time she left the public school system in 1976. Her hard work and determination was partly fuelled by a desire to be independent and to see the world:

I developed a passion for traveling as I became a young adult, at least partly as a way of establishing my own identity and looking for the adventure offered by exotic, faraway places. I had all the confidence of youth and so it was fun to remember that period of my life. The travel was a huge motivation for me as a young adult. I was always curious about people in all areas of the world and I had a sense of wonder about the way they lived. (Judy's autobiographical excerpt in Battell, et al., 2004, p. 181)

She is still fascinated by the people she meets, many of whom are in her classroom. She describes an “intense interest in people and their lives, especially their stories” (Judy’s autobiographical writing: “Emerging Themes”), and an ongoing curiosity and fascination with the students she teaches. This is a theme that the other team members touch on, and in fact is described in Evelyn’s chapter of the report on beliefs and motivations.

In 1978, after travelling around the world, she decided to settle in Vancouver, and got a job with Capilano College at their Mount Currie campus.⁴³ This was both a difficult time and a time of great learning:

I had so little knowledge about the background of First Nations people, specifically in Mt. Currie. However, the setting was not unlike many other places I had experienced before and very like the village where I grew up. (Judy's autobiographical writing: "What makes me an effective instructor?")

It was also in 1978 that she began working with Evelyn on *Groundwork*, the newsletter of the Adult Basic Education Association of BC. This collaborative friendship continues to this day, and it was through Evelyn that she got involved in the *Hardwired for Hope* project.

After three years in Mount Currie, she moved to the campus in North Vancouver, and "pieced together a job in ABE/Literacy." Judy, along with Jan, write more than the others about the precarious nature of their work in the early days. Judy writes about

the feelings of disappointment and lack of validation I experienced. Like other temporaries at my college and other colleges, I was always looking around for another job or trying to balance two jobs to keep my options open. I was always thinking that I would be without a job very soon, and then one day, when I had been hanging on the edge for nine years, I was regularized. However, it took a long time to recover from the attitudes developed during my time as a temporary. (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 182)

As I read this and other descriptions of constantly changing jobs and insecurity from one year to the next, I thought about how things are different in the ABE field today, and how they are the same. Sometimes I feel that we are still fighting some of these battles. But I also know that my professional life is easier now because of the battles Judy and her colleagues fought before me.

⁴³ Mount Currie is a First Nations community in the Pemberton valley, north of Whistler, BC.

Judy worked full-time while completing both her BA and MEd, completing her MEd in Adult Education at UBC during her maternity leave. This gave her a special insight into her students' lives:

My own history of always going to school part time while working has helped me to appreciate the level of commitment required by ABE/Literacy students who struggle to balance their lives when they decide to take on upgrading. (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 43)

Another life experience that has given her a strong sense of empathy for her students is mothering two sons with learning difficulties. She writes,

I have learned about the ways my sons encounter the world. I see first-hand how the medical and education system excludes, ignores and discriminates against them. It makes me a more effective instructor because I can appreciate what it is like for our students to learn when they are affected in similar ways and have learned to cope in different ways. I think all of us might understand on a cognitive level, but to live with it with loved ones, provides a more profound understanding. I feel optimism because I know my children can learn so when I encounter something similar in my students, I work with it and figure it out like a puzzle. (Judy's autobiographical writing: "Emerging Themes")

Judy has recently completed a term as chair of the Faculty of Developmental Studies at Capilano University. She has worked with the Adult Basic Education Association of BC (ABEABC), the Literacy Materials Bulletin, the Selection Committee for the Learner Events, the Articulation Working Committees and the Cost-Shared Selection Committee. One program within the college that provided her with "great learning and personal growth" was the Career Access program, which she describes as a "giant student success program (that could) support students enough to make a difference to their ability to persist" (Battell, et al, 2004, p. 182).

She still maintains a strong belief in the value of "working with a group in a collegial way." This work is not without its challenges, as she comments in *Hardwired for Hope*:

At its best it works really effectively, and, although decisions may be slow, people participate and feel a sense of ownership of the process. However, sometimes the process becomes distorted. There is lobbying and bickering and bullying which poison the atmosphere, leaving everyone feeling tense and defensive. (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 183)

Judy brought her skills and beliefs to the research project, invited by her old friend and colleague from ABEABC days, Evelyn. While others joined the project to participate in and experience the collaborative process or to learn about research, that wasn't Judy's motivation:

The product was what interested me; that got me hooked. We've gone through all this time as ABE instructors and we know a lot about it—how to approach people—and I don't want that disregarded. And I've just watched a lot of people damage learners for years and years in that kind of systematic way. So it was the ability to put something together that was constructive, and to pay attention to those kind of details that we haven't paid attention to for years. That was very compelling. And I guess because all of us are getting older, we want to say something. That last ditch effort, that swan song! (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

She was also interested in the opportunity this project presented to “dig deeper and try to articulate some things that I had never put into words before,” and she wrote about this in the final report. What she didn't write about was the struggle to juggle this project with her very demanding family and work responsibilities.

*I was working double time before I went to the meeting, then I went to the meeting, then I was working double time after the meeting. So for me, just being there, just having gotten that bum in the seat, was a huge deal, and all of my family was affected.*⁴⁴ (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

The project became even more stressful when Judy was called on to be the peacemaker, to negotiate and smooth the waters when discussions became emotional. And she, in turn, was able to call on the group when she needed emotional support:

Then in the middle of our process, my mother died. After that, I carried the weight of my grief through the remainder of the research, but at the same time I felt the

⁴⁴ Also known as the problem of “working off the sides of our desks,” this is discussed in Chapter 6.

support of the group and I carried on. This loss, and the support that went with it, became part of my journey through the research project. (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 183)

As I re-read this excerpt, I think about a time last year when I had just returned to Vancouver after helping to bury my father. Judy arrived at my home with flowers, a card from the department, and lots of time to sit and listen to my stories of my father. The ability to support people through both personal and professional struggles is something I will always remember about Judy, and something that every “effective instructor” should learn and prioritize.

The personal support provided to team members was important, and it will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. But there are still several players to introduce. The next one is Judy’s (and now, my) Capilano University colleague, Diana Twiss.

Diana Twiss

My interview with Diana was scheduled for a few days after she and her colleagues had interviewed me for a faculty position at Capilano College. I thought, when I set the date, how awkward it would be if I didn’t get the job, or didn’t know whether I had the job. But luckily, when we sat down in Diana’s office, it was with the happy knowledge that we were now colleagues in the Community Development and Outreach department. I was brimming over with excitement, and it was difficult to stop talking about the work and start the interview—in fact, our work conversation spread into our interview time, and we had to re-schedule another time to continue. This “spreading over” has continued in all my interactions with Diana. The many different projects we have worked on together and our personal lives seem to blend together, so that one

minute we will be discussing a budget or research project, and the next she will show me a new creation made with her hand-spun yarn, phone her kids or sell me some fresh eggs from her farm. She has become a friend and colleague who inspires me to follow her lead in doing what she describes as “*cutting edge work*” (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004). Before I describe some of that work, I will tell you a bit about her beginnings.

Diana was born in Augusta, Georgia in 1961 and moved several times with her family before settling in Espanola, a pulp and paper town in northern Ontario. She devotes a lot of her autobiographical writing to her early life: her love of and success at school, her teachers, her difficult family life and her experience with being the new kid in school, to name a few things. She describes a feeling of “not belonging” which has stayed with her:

Feeling like an outsider, that's been a constant theme in my life. . . . In many ways I have felt like I was missing something that many people had, an extended family that was readily available. I have had to create my family wherever I was living. And I have moved many, many times in my life. (Diana's autobiographical writing: *Good Teachers I Have Known*)

Throughout her writing, she constantly connects her early experiences to her work as an ABE instructor. For example, she writes about the “magic moments” when teachers read to the class, used stories to teach history, or generally showed how much they liked kids, and about the Ojibwa boy in her class who had a great sense of humour and good heart, but struggled with school, perhaps as a result of FAS. “I hadn't realized, until I wrote about it, the extent to which those early experiences had shaped my view of how good teachers need to behave and react to their learners” (Diana's autobiographical writing: “*Good Teachers I Have Known*”).

Sometimes when I read Diana's autobiographical writing, I think her life and mine intersect in interesting ways. For example, we both grew up in small towns and went to large high schools with kids bussed in from far and wide. I share her opinion that the small town experience can follow you well into adulthood (and I have spent more time living in big cities now than in small towns). Diana writes:

I came from a small pulp and paper town in Northern Ontario and was easily intimidated by other people's intelligence. It took years to get over that and to be inspired rather than intimidated by other people. I felt that everyone was much more sophisticated than us from Espanola. If I didn't understand something I didn't ask for fear that the answer was obvious and I'd look like a fool. So I hid my confusion for a long time (Diana's autobiographical writing: "Good Teachers I Have Known").

Diana's work as an ABE instructor began at the Invergarry Learning Centre in Surrey, BC. But she believes she had been preparing for it for a long time:

As I understand it, it's more of a mind set than anything else. When I was working for the Rainy Lake Ojibwa Education Authority, it was a First Nations high school but the clientele we had were people who didn't finish the normal high school setting and so I was writing curriculum to try to re-engage this group back to learning. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

After Invergarry, Diana began working at Capilano College where she was encouraged to take up a wide variety of interesting teaching projects. As I read through Diana's descriptions of her teaching life, three experiences stand out for me. First is her experience as a "Writing Out Loud" instructor and trainer. "Writing Out Loud" is a national program which trains literacy instructors to incorporate free writing groups in their classroom practice, and Diana was one of the first group of instructors to participate. When I first read about it in her autobiographical writing, I was inspired to take the course myself, and have found it to be a wonderful addition to my teaching repertoire. It was also an excellent introduction to "best practice" in online learning, and Diana is about to embark on a research project on this topic with the Writing Out Loud director,

Deborah Morgan. Here she reflects on a face-to-face workshop she attended with 25 other instructors:

The common feature amongst these women is their capacity to nurture, offer compassion and inspire others with their energy and experience. Many of the women themselves are in various stages of healing, as part of their own journeys. It is that struggle, and that awareness that we are all “healing” in one manner or another that seems to be a common feature and that thing that drew them to literacy work. (Diana’s autobiographical writing: “Good Teachers I Have Known”)

The second teaching experience that stood out is her critical reflection on teaching a college success class. At the time she wrote her autobiography, she was in her fifth cycle, teaching two classes a term. She felt uncomfortable with it because it is “highly teacher directed” and her students “expect and want me to have all the power”:

This kind of teaching is so different from literacy work. I love the power dynamic in the literacy class or learning center. I love the fact that the one of main goals of literacy is to get the learners to take responsibility for their learning. I encourage them to look at themselves as learners, to take into consideration their learning style, and to be kind to themselves. (Diana’s autobiographical writing: “Reflections on Teaching”)

The considerate, kind, participatory approach that she so much prefers is exactly the one taken at WISH, a drop-in for women in the sex trade, where Diana taught while the *Hardwired for Hope* project was underway. It was also the first place I taught when I began to work at Capilano College. Diana worked on a research project at WISH with the team that produced the report, *Literacy for Women on the Street* (Alderson & Twiss, 2003), an examination of how literacy activities can “empower and stabilize the lives of women in the sex trade” (p. 1). A significant finding in their research, and one that has influenced my work as an instructor there, is how the women described what a “safe” learning space looks and feels like: “We realized that attempts to involve the women in

activities designed to bring them into decision-making roles must first address the issue of safety in a non-threatening, non-judgmental, safe and realistic way” (p. 25).

Diana finds it surprising that so many ABE/Literacy instructors come to the field without formal training. She is not one of those people. Like Jan and Judy, she chose to go to teachers college because she saw it as an essential way into the teaching profession. She believed she needed to get the piece of paper, the validation, in order to teach, but in retrospect believes that “it hasn't made me a better teacher. It just got me in the door” (Diana’s autobiographical writing: “Teacher’s College).

I honestly can't think of anything useful that I learned in teacher's college. We didn't learn about learning styles, we superficially touched on learning difficulties/disabilities. There were so many kids who fell between the cracks, we never looked at them and asked ourselves why. What you need to be a truly effective teacher is not something that can be taught. (Diana’s autobiographical writing: “Teachers’ College”)

So if a teaching certificate doesn’t automatically make a good teacher, what does?

Since “effective instructors” are the subject of the research project the team worked on, it makes sense that they did a lot of writing, thinking and talking about this subject. Diana had lots of ideas about this, but I will describe just three things she wrote and talked about.

First, good teachers are more interested in the process of learning than the content, which doesn’t mean the content is unimportant: “But if a student is having difficulty understanding, good teachers look beyond the stuff they are teaching at a variety of other factors” (Diana’s autobiographical writing: “Good Teachers I have known”). Again, Diana draws on and learns from a personal experience she had in high school when she almost failed some courses. “At no time did any teacher ever sit me down and talk to me about my learning experience, even when I was failing because I

wasn't doing the homework” (Diana’s autobiographical writing: “Good Teachers I have known”). This experience has shown her what not to do, and she also believes that having similar experiences to students has made her a better teacher.

Sometimes when I hear my students talk about themselves, I hear the same kinds of things that I used to think about myself. And I wasn't a bad learner, or stupid or incapable of learning. I was full of so many other things that learning was crammed into one small cluttered corner of my life. . . . The very fact that I have gone through the same kind of issues, being a single mother, struggling to make ends meet and finding the time for learning, help me to be empathetic with my learners who are experiencing the same challenges. (Diana’s autobiographical writing: “Reflections on Teaching”)

Diana has been involved in workplace education, community development literacy, family literacy, as well as regular college instruction—often doing work that requires her to go out on a limb. She is proud of what she is able to do in the classroom, but also clear that this work is made possible by a supportive team of colleagues that do excellent development work and then say, “*Yeah, go out on that limb*” (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004).

Diana came to the *HFH* project with three other research projects behind her, including a national study of literacy instruction (Hoddinott, 1998) and the WISH study (Alderson & Twiss, 2003). But the one that really brought her in to this project was *Naming the Magic* and her previous experience with Evelyn. She said when she received the email inviting her to join the project, she barely hesitated before hitting return. She had “*no clue of what it was, but confident that it would be something interesting*” (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004). And why was she so sure?

Because it was Evelyn. I met her at the Naming the Magic weekend, and had recognized her as a very different kind of literacy person—she wasn't afraid of anybody. And I had also known from other stuff that I'd seen—Making Connections and that—that she had a background, a handle on stuff. . . . I

thought, I want to work with this woman, and if she collects people, its going to be an interesting group of people. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

Diana is the most junior member of the team, in both age and years of experience. At the time of the project, she had only worked in ABE/Literacy for about 10 years, compared to the others who had worked between 25-30. But what she lacked in experience, she made up for in enthusiasm and drive. She approached Evelyn to see if she could work with her on the *Literacy Materials Bulletin*, and Evelyn agreed. Unfortunately the funding was cut before they could work together, but Evelyn felt she had made a promise to invite Diana to work on a project. And this is how a person with significantly less experience in ABE got on the team. She later became the chairperson of Literacy BC and is now the deputy director.

Like most of the others, Diana speaks glowingly about what she learned. But as the person who wrote the methods chapter of the report, she had a bigger challenge than the others. Everyone in the team was involved in collecting and analyzing data about the research topic (effective instructors) but when it came to describing the research process, or methodology, Diana was usually on her own. This was an important learning process for her:

I have learned so much about group process and my own memory from going through the tapes. I realized that it was my reality that I constructed. A methods chapter needs to be about what really took place. Our decision-making was amazing. I had to do detective work to find out how and when we finally made the decision to interview instructors. It took me two days. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

I will end Diana's description with a comment that shows a typical example of a practitioner-researcher working, not only off the side of her desk, but off her kitchen table:

And it was a lot of work, like I worked all of May and June. I remember I didn't even come to the college. Pat would say, "Where are you?" I'm working, I've got to get this chapter done." So I'd get the kids off to school, I'd work all day on it. Pick the kids up after. I spent my whole Christmas holiday listening to the tapes. Listening and listening and oh man. It was great, though there was a lot of anxiety around it. But I know I can do it now. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

She certainly can. Earlier in this section, Diana talks about being easily intimidated as a young woman. I cannot imagine that now. As she steps bravely into leadership positions in the BC ABE/Literacy field, I am happy to have someone with her experience, talent, and understanding of the literacy reality speaking for me at provincial and national forums.

Other members of the team write in a similar way about their pride in achieving something new, challenging, and a little frightening—but none so clearly as Leora Gesser, the next team member I will describe.

Leora Gesser

When I interviewed Leora, she was still glowing from successfully completing her blue belt in Karate. *"I just got it with full marks. I've been doing 10 hours a week. Not bad, for 53—I'm pretty excited!"* I could feel the excitement over the phone line (*"Let's do it by telephone,"* she said. *"I'm a phone person."*) and I was happy for her, but not surprised: Leora was always the active and energetic one in the group. At meetings, she always managed to do a session at the hotel gym and once reported to a teleconference that she had "skated for miles" on the weekend.

She is also someone with a ground-breaking spirit who describes herself as a “founding mother” of the provincial ABE articulation system, and who chaired the English committee for several years:

BC was one of the beginners in ABE in Canada. I think we were the first even to create the articulation system, which allows us to transfer a course from college to college, and it really bumped up the status. So I was fortunate to be there from the very, very beginning. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

Another innovative effort was a collaboratively-written materials project for adult learners, and tutoring a psychology course by teleconference, long before the internet made this kind of long-distance work easy. She has acted as department head and steered numerous successful proposals through the system.

So, from a small little town, I've been very fortunate to be valued at that time by people at the college and be out there representing the college in a number of forms. A very rich career. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

Leora has not always lived in a small town. She talks about her early experience of growing up in “Jewish in Montreal in the mid 50’s” which, in spite of the size of the city, was quite a sheltered experience:

I never met a non-Jew until I was in my teens and had pretty much lived an insulated life, embedded, nurtured, and influenced by this community until then. (Leora’s autobiographical writing: “Despair”)

I am not sure what took Leora from Montreal to Grand Forks, BC, but as I read and hear about her life in the Interior, I see in it yet more evidence of the fearless, adventurous spirit that I often see in ABE teachers. To settle in a small town where she is the only Jewish person with an African American husband, to me, shows courage and a desire to explore new territory. I was moved by her reflections on racism in her autobiography, and still feel tears when I read about the tragedy she has experienced, losing her life partner to cancer:

It was only after my husband's death that I understood about trauma and fear. I felt that my locus of control had left my inner being and was floating outside of me. My inertia was so great and my confusion so profound that it took me more than a year to begin to function as I had been doing before the event. (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 179)

Like others on the team, Leora links her own life experience to that of her students' and it makes her a better teacher:

Through this experience I learnt that a whole set of things must be in place for people to recover from life's traumas. Many of our students have been traumatized by their experiences. Many of these traumas happened to them during their childhood years and during their school years. Many of them, like me, were paralyzed by inertia and a true inability to proceed because of their confusion and fear. I realized that I needed to help set up an environment that gave them as many of the things that need to be set in place as possible. These things included a place that was safe, did not judge them, with people around them that were trustworthy. (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 179)

Although she grew up in Montreal and went to McGill, she has lived for a long time in the BC interior and has worked at Selkirk College for 26 years. Like others on the research team, Leora combines the technical skill with sensitivity to students' needs and awareness of their vulnerabilities. She writes with passion about the highlights of that work:

There are so many reasons for it being such a rewarding job. The key reason for me is that I get to be part of someone's baby steps into a life change. I get to hear about the dream, help plan a path to get there and sometimes, cheerlead the person to the finish line. We often don't know that person succeeds in his/her next endeavour, but if we are lucky we will receive a fax, postcard or visit years later that updates us and often is a testimony to his/her hard work and perseverance. (Leora's autobiographical writing: "Becoming Empowered")

When Evelyn phoned to invite Leora to join the research team, true to form, Leora jumped at the opportunity:

Why would I say no? I didn't really think what I was getting into. It was just an opportunity that if you say no to, it's a missed opportunity. It tends to be how I operate a lot, when opportunities come to me I think, like in retrospect, I think about my life and my career. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

As I got to know Leora, I pictured her as a warm, energetic, articulate woman who has been a leader in her field and grabs opportunities when they come by. So I was amazed, during our interview, to hear her describe herself as a “timid” person. But she maintains that both she and Jan were “the timid ones in the group,” which is one reason they worked closely together throughout the project:

Well, we were timid, which is kind of funny because there was no reason to be. But we were. And I tend to, because it's a brand new opportunity, be timid at the beginning, when I start anything, and then gain momentum, as you've seen, as in take over. But I think originally Jan and I thought, "Let's support each other." (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

And they did. Together they wrote the chapter in the final report entitled, “The Tightrope Walker: Styles, Strategies and Skills,” and they gave each other additional support on the telephone between meetings and tasks.

Leora is philosophical about the tense moments and difficult times during the project:

You know, in retrospect, everything unfolded as it should have. I mean I really think so. We got it in on time, we stayed with our plan, different people wrote at different speeds and at that moment in time it might have been frustrating, but, look, it happened. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

All the team members comment on their individual working and participation styles, and how this varies from team member to team member. This has implications for the roles, choices and responsibilities they took throughout the project. For example, Leora admits that perhaps her style was a problem for some group members:

I felt at times that I spoke too much, like in the way I interrupt. I don't know if it's a good style for collaboration. I mean I think I have passion. And I engage, and my brain works . . . kind of fast sometimes, so I just get in there, and (may seem) to not be respectful. So that is a problem maybe in my whole life, not always just because of collaboration . . . part of it is the way I engage, and you either find me disrespectful or you find me passionate. Diana and I had a conversation about

her Italian upbringing and my Jewish upbringing and then Marina is a lot like me, too. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

During the last year of the project, Leora was on sabbatical in Calgary, attending art school. This had an interesting effect on her capacity to engage with the research project:

You asked me if it was difficult to be out of the loop that year, and I almost want to say that in some ways I had the benefit to not be locked into a job, and maybe it's the converse that I had the energy, even though at times it was, "Oh, God, I have to think work!" I wasn't swamped in the same way as Judy was and Diana. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

The project benefited from this experience, as Leora designed the cover of the report. She also brought us the title of the research report in one of her autobiographical pieces. Writing about the Holocaust survivors who taught her Hebrew she describes how traumatized she felt by the graphic stories they told. ("I will probably carry them in my heart forever.") The experience caused her to question

what makes people live/survive in a world that is full of atrocities? I would think that some would take the option of suicide. Yet the will to stay and live life seems to prevail in most people. Most of us are hardwired for hope. (Leora's autobiographical writing: "Despair")

She and Judy later wrote about this in the report's introduction:

We had not yet collected our data and we had not yet attempted to articulate what we felt. What we all knew was that effective ABE/Literacy practitioners have a deep passion for what is possible, and that ABE/Literacy instructors are in awe of their students' spirit and bravery in the face of hardships. "Hardwired for hope" seemed to consolidate a single characteristic that effective instructors possess. (Battell, et al, 2004, p. 5)

Leora went on to take on the coordination of the project at the end, following the report's printing. After all her experience with coordinating big projects this one was "*a no-brainer. I just kind of lurk in the background, making sure things are unfolding like they do.*" But in spite of this, when asked if she would consider initiating another research project, she said she was "*still too timid at this point*" (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005).

But participate in another research project? Definitely. One of the things she liked best about it was that it made her feel uncomfortable:

When I'm learning something and I don't get it, I have what I call my dis-ease with it. And it's a niggling feeling and I think as an adult and a learner, well as an instructor, I can embrace that dis-ease and relate to my students who are struggling to understand something that we might think is basic, but for them is a new concept. That dis-ease, I like. Like it challenges me. So for instance during our research, there were times, well you saw it, where I was confused or not clear or all of us were. And that demonstrates in me an actual almost like physical niggling, I don't want to say an agitation, more of a niggling. And I have to figure it out. And that's good for me. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

She feels proud that she was able to hold her own in the project, and is pleased at how much she has learned in the process:

I am just pretty darn proud of all of us. Like when I look at my first draft, ha-ha-ha! You know, seven drafts later, I'm pretty proud. And I'm proud of all of us not just me. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

Like Leora, I am very proud of the group, and proud to have worked with people like Leora. Now retired, she is in Calgary, “*Still happily ensconced in art school*” (Leora, email, March 5, 2009), taking her creativity and energy to other fields.

Finally, I will describe Jan Sawyer, the last of the five researchers. She is Leora's good friend and, according to her, the other “timid one in the group.” We'll see if Jan agrees with this description.

Jan Sawyer

Betsy, I, too, would like to add my voice of thanks [for taking notes at a meeting]. Truly, I don't know how you do it! During the initial part of our conversation, I had started to take notes. However, I was quickly drawn in to the words and emotions, and my writing stopped. thank you, and thank you to all of you out there. i don't feel so alone. (Jan, email, March 12, 2003)

This email jumped out at me because it seemed to speak to me about Jan's warm, supportive nature and also about her position as the other team member from BC's

interior. She lives in Salmon Arm, and at times found this isolating. So she was keen to get involved in a collaborative province-wide project when the opportunity came up. The collaboration that would be involved in *Hardwired for Hope* was what pulled her in and kept her motivated.

I think, living in the Interior, I always had appreciated the opportunity to go elsewhere to work on committees, because I (could) engage with others who were interested in the same things I was or . . . and be part of what was happening. And I saw this as another opportunity, not to be in isolation, but to work and to discuss and be with others who generally cared about the field. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

Another thing that brought her into the project was a strong interest in reflecting on her practice. This goes back to her first teaching job, in Musgrave Harbour, an outpost in Newfoundland. Here she learned “the beginnings of how to teach.”

Through the kids I learned the joy of learning, experiencing, succeeding and trying again. My colleagues were wary and concerned that we were having too much fun; learning was expected to be tedious and arduous. The administration expressed the need for a firm hand, literally, and suggested it would be best for my students if I toughened up. (Jan’s autobiographical writing: “Challenged”)

Two years were enough to convince her to go back to university and get a teaching certificate. She found that the experience she had gained in Musgrave turned her into a very different kind of student:

I saw learning in a whole different light. . . . I was so much better able to participate and respond, because I could reflect back on my practice and what I had been doing over the past two years. And my teaching experience brought a wealth of knowledge to my learning and just forced me to think. Instructors would be talking about this theory about such and such, and at that point because I had had the experience I also had the confidence to say, “Well you know, that wasn’t my experience.” (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

Having the courage to stand up to academically trained professors at such an early stage in her career was perhaps an indication of the direction she would take in later years, getting involved in curriculum development and provincial articulation committees

in BC—and, finally, in this research project. As I will discuss in Chapter Six, she proved she was able to face a critical college ethics board and stand up for her beliefs and principles.

Her experience in Newfoundland was also a politicizing experience—one that she admits was not something she was born into. In *Hardwired for Hope*, she writes about growing up in a privileged family in Michigan:

I thought life was fair. This thinking came from a home where I was taught that if I worked hard, put my mind to it, made good choices, the world was mine. I transferred this notion when I was younger to everyone. . . . I don't think I was insensitive, but rather [I was] unthinking and privileged, and I had never had this assumption challenged. (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 184)

But a choice she made at the age of 19 ensured that her assumptions would not only be challenged, but “shattered” and that she would need to reassess her ideas about what was “fair.” That choice was to journey through life with Don, her future husband, who “constantly challenged [her] thinking” (Jan’s autobiographical writing: “Challenged”).

I was gradually becoming politicized. Although I had always been sensitive to people and my surroundings, I had never gone the next step. I had never made the connection between what was happening to people, the poverty, inequities, Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, to government policy. (Battell, et al, 2004, p. 72)

In retrospect, this was a good thing, but it didn't always feel good at the time. She writes: “Suddenly I no longer had truths. . . . I was losing my grounding. I didn't know who I was and my only belief at that time in my life was in the goodness of the human spirit” (Jan’s autobiographical writing: “Challenged”).

After university, she moved to Lytton BC, which she describes as a time of “transition.” She saw “hunger, desperation, neglect, and the results of rape, alcoholism,

hatred, and the loss of one's language and identity." But she also describes it as a time when she learned "as much from my students as they learned from me" and worked hard to provide "a classroom atmosphere that was safe and supportive" (Battell, et al, 2004, p. 185).

Through the lives of the young people in this community, I saw the importance of connecting learning to the lives of the individuals in the classroom and the knowledge that a person's life outside school can not be ignored and left on the front steps. We have the "whole person" in the classroom, and if learning is to occur we need to work together inside and outside the classroom so students' basic needs are met. (Battell, et al., 2004, p. 186)

During her participation in the project, Jan was an instructor at Okanagan University College.⁴⁵ She describes a "love-hate" relationship with the college, full of frustrations and joys. In particular, like Judy she talks about the uncertain position of instructors, and as I read about these experiences again, I am grateful for the struggles she and her colleagues have gone through that have ultimately made my life easier. I will share a few comments from her autobiographical writing here to give you an idea.

I never knew from one year to the next if I would have a job. And if I had a job, I never knew if it would be 4 months or 6 months or 8 months, or if it would be through the ABE department or the Continuing Education department. The only guarantee was that if I did have a job it would be part-time, temporary and no pension. This situation continued until five years ago when I was given a full-time continuing contract.

I felt a growing bitterness particularly each spring when my job would end. . . . I was in the same line-up at the employment office as many students, and I had the same disdain for the system that they did. Together in the line-up and in the class, we talked about the humiliation we felt as we tried to manoeuvre through the system. This gave me a first-hand look at one of the obstacles students face on a regular basis. (Jan's autobiographical writing: "The ABE Years")

⁴⁵ When Jan first started there, it was Okanagan College, and now is Okanagan College again, since the university side of the institution has become part of UBC.

Although she had a “love-hate relationship” with the institution, she clearly loved the students and the work. She describes a time in 1986, when she returned to Okanagan College after being laid off for over a year:

I thrived in the classroom and brought many of the principles that had been a part of my earlier classroom experience. Just as in my first days in Newfoundland, the classroom became a place for experimentation, honesty, trust, support, flexibility, commitment, patience and creativity. I work with students to create an environment that is safe and relevant to their lives. (Jan’s autobiographical writing: “The ABE Years”)

She has carried these beliefs and this approach to teaching through her career and into the research project that resulted in *Hardwired for Hope*, ultimately deciding to write about teaching the whole person and creating safe spaces for learning.

Jan’s approach to the *Hardwired for Hope* project was similar to Diana’s and Leora’s: She went into it without pre-conceived ideas, just an openness to the possibilities that might come up and an interest in taking on a new challenge.

Because there will be opportunities there, but I usually don’t attempt to name them until I get involved. Perhaps I used to work the other way and I found it somewhat limiting: Oh, there’s this door here, but I hadn’t planned on that so . . . I tend not to have expectations except to know that opportunities are waiting and let’s go for it. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

But she was worried about how her slow, “ruminating” style would fit with the group, and whether, when push came to shove, she would be able to “write on demand” But she was able to do this, as her eloquent autobiographical pieces show. And it was a relief to her that other team members were supportive and non-judgemental.

We all approach our writing from very different perspectives and points of view, but that was all honoured, and for me, that was the key point. It set the tone. Realizing I am going to be able to do this, and that the people who I am working with . . . are supportive, that they are encouraging, but also honest with each other. And I think probably in retrospect, moments like that one helped during the more difficult times because we came together and we started building on our

strengths. And I think for me in the end, I carried through because we had had those times. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

Leora said she and Jan were the “timid ones” but Jan does not emphasize this aspect of her personality. She did see herself as “a listener,” a seeker of clarification (for herself and others) and “a safe place to go.” She also, during those difficult times, found she had to bite her tongue for the sake of the group. This is a lesson that she learned from her daughter (now 28) many years ago:

I think very, very definitely I have learned through her to pick those things that for me were worth it. You know really looking carefully and listening and observing and then if there was something I really felt I needed to attend to, I would do it. But otherwise it was, “I can live with this.” With her I knew if I nattered at her or picked on things I would have lost her before she was one. [And] with this group as well, if there was something I really was concerned about, I certainly spoke to it. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

During the last year of our research, Jan became a Canadian citizen. She had lived in Canada for 27 years, keeping her US citizenship, but this changed when the Iraq war began in 2004:

I was horrified. . . . And there were a lot of things I didn't like about the States, but I had remained loyal to it all, but I couldn't do it any more. And so for me this was a real breaking point. And it was interesting too, because one of my daughters was down there, so there was just a lot going on. And some of the students were from other places and they were very upset. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

These distressing events affected all the team members and their ability to carry on with the research. I will discuss this in Chapter Six.

When the group decided which chapters each person would write, Jan did not know that she would be retiring at the end of the project. In retrospect, she found her retirement made her focus on classroom practices particularly appropriate.

I think perhaps I realized but didn't know, that I might not be in the classroom again soon. And so this was such a rich opportunity for me: What is really

working here, and what isn't? I felt until the last day I taught, that each day was probably richer than the day before. I really felt that going through this process definitely made me a better instructor—there's no doubt in my mind. And I've always been a person who has reflected. I would go home and think about what had happened in the classroom, if I'd done this, if I'd done that, oh wow, this was neat. But I think that with this opportunity, I could go deeper. It was rare. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

I can relate to Jan on many levels: as a fellow practitioner who has worked in classrooms and volunteer tutor programs, and as an activist concerned with community, national, and international issues. I relate to her description of being politicized, her passion for social justice and her interest in working internationally—something she has taken on now that she has retired.

The Research Friends

I have used personal writing (published and unpublished), emails, interviews and my own reflections to describe the core members of the research team. Now, drawing on slightly different sources, I will go on to describe the “Research Friends.” In the previous chapter, I provided background information on the Research Friend position, and in chapters to follow I will talk about how they worked with the team and supported their research. Here I will talk about the people behind the jobs: Marina Niks, the person contracted to provide research support to the group, Bonnie Soroce, who came along because of a strong interest and a willingness to be useful where needed, and me, the “trainee” Research Friend, practitioner and participant-observer.

Marina Niks

This experience opened my mind to understanding relationships as the source, framework, and location of knowledge production. I became profoundly interested in research methodologies, specifically in collaborative ones. (Niks, et al., 2003, p. 90)

I am starting my description of Marina Niks with this quote because, for me, it crystallizes so much of what she is about: collaborative research and relationships. She is talking about the first research project she was part of in Canada, an evaluation of two

adult learning centres in the Lower Mainland. She wrote her master's thesis about team research. She has gone on to be a source of support and information on research, and along the way, she has made good friends throughout BC.

Marina Niks began her career as a researcher in 1986 when she became part of a research team that studied the socio-cultural needs of a semi-urban neighbourhood in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. This project taught her about working with a team and involving research participants in research—two interests that she carried with her to Canada, where she settled in 1990.

After she completed her master's degree, she went on to work on a PhD, and it was as a PhD candidate at UBC that she became the Research Friend for BC literacy practitioners, and later, a founding member of RIPAL-BC.⁴⁶ In both these roles, she has worked to support and guide literacy practitioners to doing research.

I have led literacy research workshops, consulted with individuals and groups, facilitated electronic discussions about research on an electronic network, participated in conferences, and assisted practitioners to write research proposals. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

Marina has been involved in most of the practitioner research projects that happened in BC since 1999. Some of them involved just consulting on the final report, which was the case for *Literacy for Women on the Street*, but others involved seeing a project through from beginning to end and being part of a team. For example, she was a mentor to Evelyn Battell in the project *Naming the Magic: Non-Academic Outcomes in Basic Literacy*, and she coordinated *Dancing in the Dark* and the RIPP projects. All of these are described in Chapter Four. In *Hardwired for Hope*, her role was as a mentor, but she was also called on to facilitate the group and worked with the coordinator to plan

⁴⁶ See Chapter 4 for a description.

each meeting. In an email to the research team just as the project was getting started, Evelyn Battell wrote:

Marina is willing and very able to assist us in many ways - one way is how to make our project be more acceptable and valid to those looking for "research." She is very interesting and stimulating to talk your work with because she pushes the ideas in new directions and into richer understandings. I find her very respectful and curious about the world of ABE. I trust her to help us make our project acceptable to the widest degree possible and still be able to do what we want to do and enjoy it. (Evelyn, email, October 1, 2001)

Marina was chosen to do this work, not because she was a literacy practitioner, but because of research experience and connections at UBC. For Audrey Thomas at the Ministry of Advanced Education, she was the perfect choice:

Having somebody who's been as accessible to them as Marina, who has been struggling with her own research and knows a little bit about the field but has at the same time the wider perspective. Because she didn't come from literacy per se but more from a social community perspective. I think that has really been useful. (Audrey, interview, February 28, 2005)

Marina is not from the literacy field, but has worked very closely with literacy practitioners, the government and Literacy BC. She is also an amazing networker and relationship-builder. So, she was often called upon to attend literacy events and present at literacy conferences. I wondered how it felt to represent our field as a non-practitioner.

Here is her response:

I don't represent literacy as a field. I think that people want the Research in Practice part of the literacy field, which is a bit different. Because I don't feel I have any knowledge of literacy per se, I would feel very uncomfortable speaking to that. . . . When I found out I was invited to the Premier's panel, for example, I wasn't sure why. . . . It's a very small world, so it's just people who, (you) know. But I don't think of myself that way and I'm always surprised by that. And I don't feel that I represent anyone. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

Through all of this work, Marina has had a great influence on our field: She has helped practitioners to shape their research, worked hard to put research on the provincial, national and international agenda, and promoted Research in Practice widely. For Evelyn

Battell, this influence has been very strong: *“How Research in Practice has gotten shaped in BC has been affected by Marina’s theories, intentions and perspective”*

(Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005).

While Marina would describe herself as a researcher and talks about research being her passion, she is also very much a teacher. And some of the instructors who worked on *Hardwired for Hope* talked about how much they appreciated her teaching skill. For example, Jan Sawyer said,

I thought, this person is good at what she is doing. And she is working with people who are very different. All strong personalities in their own way, but very different in how she’s working with that group. And how she wouldn’t let go at times with certain things. And I liked that, I liked being pushed by her. Now I don’t like being pushed by everybody. But there is a way to push, obviously, that works for me. I mean I think she was always respectful, she told us what she was doing, which is something I firmly believe in adult education when you are working with students. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

Marina’s response to this praise is a humble one:

I love that they said that, because I respect them so much . . . and I know how good teachers they are. And I think of myself as an educator as much as I think of myself as a researcher, because for me research has the potential to be an education. So I don’t see them as disconnected. And that comes from that first project I was involved in Argentina, so I’m embarrassed, you know like I go red, and I am very honoured that they say that. And that’s something I really enjoy doing, facilitating. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

She is also, as Jan points out, praised for her ability to “push,” and this comes up often when she describes her work. Here is what Marina says about “pushing”:

I think research is about pushing. Not necessarily pushing each other, although when you are doing collaboration, I’d like to think of it that way. I think pushing is going deeper and deeper. It’s just questioning assumptions, pushing for a deeper and more complex analysis. So that’s what pushing is to me. And when I say that practitioners are used to ‘doing’, I’m not saying that they are not reflective practitioners. It’s just that with research, you go into a completely different depth in that reflection. And that’s what the pushing is, and the pushing is about the ideas. It’s not about the person at all. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

When I think about my relationship with Marina, the notion of model and mentor is what comes to mind first. I learned so much from watching her work, and her generous spirit pervades all of our connections. She has lit the way for me as a researcher, Research Friend and graduate student. In her self-description in the *Hardwired for Hope* report, she describes an aspect of being both a worker-student that really rang true for me:

As we were doing the research, I was also involved in writing my dissertation. I found it hard to focus on my individual academic work, it was so much more fun to exchange ideas with the team and reflect on what we were doing as a group than sitting in front of my computer doing analysis and writing on my own. (Niks, et al., 2003, p. 90)

This really sums up my experience of graduate work: I am constantly saying no to friends' invitations, wondering how I can possibly keep writing with so many pressures from work, and wishing I could have conversations with colleagues instead of with my computer. But the part of her experience I can't duplicate is the way Marina, like women graduate students and practitioners everywhere, has juggled work and family life. Her family is so much a part of how I think about Marina. We did our interview at her kitchen table with her son, Joshua, playing nearby. Many people remember that the first time they met Marina was at a RIP seminar and she was "very pregnant" with Joshua. He briefly visited some of our research meetings, and stories about him and his older brother, Jeremy, came into many conversations around the table—as they did with the other mothers in the group. This is a natural part of working together in the literacy world. We bring our families with us to work on many different levels. For Marina, this was welcome, enriching part of her work.

Of all the projects she has worked on, *Hardwired for Hope* was the most challenging. *"Not that I learned the least. I learned gazillions of things. But the process*

wasn't as enjoyable"⁴⁷ (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005). But would she do it again?

Absolutely!

I love working with other people. In all of these projects, I've learned so much and such different things. And I make friends, very strong connections. I go different places. So yeah, I'd do it again. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

It is interesting to note that a lot of the information in this description of Marina comes from other people. I could have used her words alone, drawing on the interview, her emails and the writing she has done about RIP. But to really give a full picture of Marina, I felt I had to bring in other voices. I think this is because she has played such a big role in the lives of many practitioner-researchers around BC—not just as a researcher, teacher and adviser, but as a friend. In the words of the next person I will describe, she is “a wonderful human.”

Bonnie Soroke

My interview with Bonnie took place in her car, walking along a river trail and sitting by the fire in her log home. It was a wonderful day, and the feelings it generated are for me still as vivid as the words on the tape and on paper. In the “Who We Are” section of *Hardwired for Hope*, Bonnie describes herself as

a founding and active member of RiPAL-BC (pronounced 'Ripple'), mother of a teen-aged son (my computer mentor), writer of a recently completed masters thesis (ethnography of an adult literacy centre), visual artist (with zippers & wire), gardener (on wilderness acreage), musician (flutes, piano, accordion) and motorcyclist (on an '86 Honda Custom). (Battell, et al, 2004, p. 204)

This description is the briefest of them all, but curiously typical of Bonnie, who is often able to say a lot with very few words. It also brings up a certain playfulness that I have

⁴⁷ All of the research participants discussed challenges in this project, and these will be discussed in later chapters. They include challenges to effective collaboration, weaknesses in research methods (both discussed in Chapter 6), criticisms of their research process and their right to do research, (see Chapter 7) and logistical challenges, particularly lack of time and money (see Chapter 7).

always enjoyed. Practitioners on the research team enjoyed it, too. For example, for Jan, Bonnie brought “*some moments of fun and the opportunity to play and get dirty*” (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005).

She also brought a very serious side, a deep political side, and a very hard-working side. Here she describes her involvement with previous projects:

Research in Practice saved me! [I was drawn in to it because] it's open-ended, it's not prescribed, and that we are creating with the new all the time. I was involved in academic research, and then was doing work through Marina Niks. We got different contracts, and my first sort of foray into it was looking at how to connect Research in Practice practitioners with the research literature. That was where I got my feet wet, but while I was doing that, I was working with the “Dancing in the Dark” group as a Research Friend I guess, . . . plus I was on the sidelines when “Naming the Magic” was happening, talking with Evelyn and Marina about that, and so all the projects that have been happening in BC, I've had involvement in some form. (Bonnie, interview, September 13, 2004)

Along with the humour, organizational skills and artistic sensibilities, Bonnie brought to the group a lot of wisdom about group process and research. She worked with Marina on the initial funding proposal, doing a literature review to back up their claims (see more discussion of this in Chapter Six) and provided suggestions and feedback to the group when required. She shared minute-taking duties with me, and acted as the group cheerleader, as this email about the draft report shows:

Oh this is totally engaging . . . what I've read so far just fills me up in so many ways - felt like crying for happy cuz of all the work and energy that has gone into this amazing product - wow you guys, what a feat. And feeling full of such affirmation and solidity about the literacy work we do - this report gives so much in so many ways by putting to words the richness of the field. . . . THANK YOU for letting me be a part of this, I've been so honoured to be included. You've all given SO much to me in the process, and now we have this wonderful product - way to be !! (Bonnie, email to the group, August 21, 2004)

Bonnie was the first person I interviewed. We needed to do it before she left for a 2-year contract in Northern Ireland, where she was to work as a teaching fellow in a

project called “Literacy and Equality in Irish Society.” She buzzed with excitement throughout our interview. Here’s an excerpt from an email she sent to the group about the move:

I'm totally thrilled, I constantly get little heart pops all the time. been a whirlwinding week. am so glad Joel [her son] is coming with me. This is SUCH an opportunity - hope to stay in touch thru the hub in some kind of way - reporting back to the field-kind-of thing. (Bonnie, email to group, August 3, 2004)

She completed her contract in Ireland and returned to us, bringing new insights, resources, contacts and a love of Guinness. She is now working to develop an adult literacy curriculum in a national family literacy program. She continues to work with us in RIPAL-BC, and to bring creativity, humour, passion and zipper sculptures into our lives.

Betsy Alkenbrack

I was delighted from the beginning to have you as one of our research friends because you have such a background in teaching, you know so we don't have to explain all kinds of stuff. You just know it, the way good ABE teachers know stuff. But it felt, and it still feels, very—I still can't find the word, I tried to find it with the group—very chuffed, very prideful, to know that somebody would research us. This is the way students feel when we say to them will you take part in my research? Yeah, sure. Somebody wants to consult me, to study me, that makes me really special. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

Writing this chapter has confirmed for me that, yes Evelyn, you are special, this group is special, and my participation in it has been special. Another thing that strikes me, as I read through the descriptions, is the extent to which my life and work parallels the women in this group—I grew up in a small town like Diana, I have followed in Marina’s footsteps as a PhD student and, like Leora, I have shared my life with a person of colour. But most of all, I have had the similar feelings of awe, excitement, curiosity and political enlightenment as I have worked in this field for 25 years. These parallels

and similarities exist in spite of geographic distances and institutions, because we share similar world views and are driven by the similar beliefs and motivations. Where have these beliefs driven me and what has brought me to this place, this work and this dissertation? That is what this final section of this chapter is about—the third Research Friend.

I began my career in adult literacy at East End Literacy in Toronto, where I worked from 1982-1990 as a co-ordinator, tutor trainer, program developer and student writing facilitator. During a sabbatical year in 1990, I signed up for a six-month technical assistance project with a non-governmental organization in South Africa. I stayed for 11 years, helping to build the adult literacy movement and participating in the new democracy. I trained. I evaluated. I helped create national adult literacy exams. I wrote and edited an easy-English newspaper and easy readers. And I taught factory workers, domestic workers and daycare workers. One of the many highlights was participating in voter education during the first democratic election (1994)—helping people aged 18-100 to vote for the first time in their lives.

It was during this time that I developed a deep curiosity and respect for adult educators in various sectors: literacy, ESL, health education, community development, political education, industrial training and prison education to name a few groups I worked with. I was fascinated by the people who devoted their lives to learners. Many of them saw this work as political—from their “underground” classes in the anti-apartheid movement to their contributions to the new South Africa today. Many were volunteers or working for very little pay—some had emerged from the workforce they taught. They were often almost as marginalized as their learners—by lack of language skills, by

poverty or by living in remote communities without access to resources and further education. In one of a series of letters I sent to the BC electronic conferencing system, I wrote:

The educator is often accused of being “the weakest link,” because she somehow doesn't implement what she has learned at workshops—she falls back on the old methods she grew up with. But she needs more than the occasional workshop. She needs long-term mentoring and support. And that of course takes money and a new attitude towards ABE. (Alkenbrack, 2000, p. 35)

So for my master's thesis I decided to explore what such a long-term mentoring and support system would look like if we applied it to a materials development program that would tap into the expertise of the rural educator and teach them marketable skills in writing, editing and producing literacy learning materials. I also began teaching in the adult education department at the University of the Witwatersrand, and this convinced me that teaching at the tertiary level, especially with adult educators, was the direction I wanted to go.

A PhD seemed like a logical next step and that was what brought me to Vancouver and UBC. But what to research? I am not one of those PhD students who came to graduate school with a burning question that I desperately needed to answer.⁴⁸ I knew I was interested in teaching and in the lives and work of teachers, but I felt less passionate about research itself. That was until I was invited to help organize a pre-conference on the topic of Research in Practice, which led to joining the RIPAL-BC management team and participating in one of Marina Niks' RIP workshops. She knew I was desperate to find a PhD project that I could sink my teeth into, so asked if I would be interested in joining the *Hardwired for Hope* research team and somehow shaping my

⁴⁸ When asked for advice from would-be graduate students, I invariably tell them not to even think of applying without having a powerful research question firmly in place. I sincerely think having such a question to drive me would have made my academic journey much more bearable.

dissertation around their work. As described in Chapter Two, it was not a straight-forward process to get their permission, and they asked that I participate as a researcher, not a practitioner. This is what I focussed on most of the time, but sometimes my discipline slipped. For example, during the time when the group was writing their autobiographical pieces, each participant posted their pieces online, and the rest of us responded.⁴⁹ I was very interested in comments Evelyn made about the “Toronto influence,” because I had lived in Toronto in the 80’s and been very active in literacy work there. Here is an excerpt from our email discussion about Evelyn’s autobiographical writing, “The ABEABC years”:

Evelyn: At first we had to resist certain moves from Toronto which focussed on “community-based” programs. In these programs, which were “student-centred” we were told, students ran things. But in fact very few total hours of instruction went on. We were to call ourselves facilitators, not instructors. In short, we threw the baby out with the college bathwater. . . . I find I want to talk about Toronto and the differences because Betsy is reading this. I don’t know how useful it is for this project.

Betsy: Evelyn, thanks so much for this. I know I am not supposed to respond to your autobiographies as a practitioner, but I feel there is a sort of invitation to say something about Toronto. I cringe with shame to think that I might have been part of those imperialist tendencies that said because something worked in Toronto (and I think some of it did) it had to be replicated in the rest of the country. . . . I try not to apologize for being an ex-Torontonian, because I think it is like any other dominating place that others resent (e.g. the U.S.): there are plenty of wonderful, committed, skilled people we can relate to, and I must say I learned a lot there. (Betsy and Evelyn, email November 20, 2002)

I was interested to learn in later discussions that two of the Torontonians Evelyn worked closely with on national projects were close colleagues of mine as well. Elaine Gaber Katz and Jenny Horsman were my mentors and inspirations when I was first starting out. Elaine, in particular, taught me how to work with learners and how to think politically about my teaching.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 6, The Team at Work, for more details on this process.

And now, as I begin my fifth year as an instructor at Capilano College, my mentors are Diana and Judy. Along with other colleagues in the Community Development and Outreach Department, they have guided and supported me, and, as Diana says, “encouraged me to go out on a limb.” The learners I work with in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver remind me a lot of learners in the East End of Toronto. And I also see similarities between the practitioners I have worked with in Vancouver, Johannesburg and Toronto—particularly in how they work together and support each other through difficult times and oppressive situations. So I have come full circle, but with the understanding, confidence and humility that can help me make a useful contribution to the field.

One of the last questions I asked in the interviews was, “How did it feel to know I was researching your project?” The answers were for the most part reassuring and enlightening. For example, Diana said,

It felt great, it felt—I don’t know the best way to describe it. I was really honoured that you thought that what we were doing was worthy of taking a close examination. And I was really interested to see what you are going to be able to say about it, because it’s an interesting project to be inside and outside of.
(Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

I, too, felt (and still feel) honoured. And I, too, am curious to see what I am going to write in the rest of this dissertation!

Concluding Comments

The personal writing, emails and interviews reviewed in this chapter reveal a group of women who have come from different places and have different life circumstances, but share a commitment and enthusiasm for their work and their students.

They also have a variety of professional experiences, all centering on education, and often part and parcel of struggles for better working conditions and better opportunities for their learners. For Judy, Evelyn, Jan and Leora, the early days were difficult and uncertain, while for Diana and me they have been easier, allowing us to focus on our teaching and on other struggles.

Diana described a group of women she worked with as having the “capacity to nurture, offer compassion and inspire others with their energy and experience.” She could have been talking about the *HFH* team. I would add to that list a growing political understanding and commitment.

There is also the theme of “jumping at the chance”: the women share a deep curiosity and sense of opportunity. One of the chances they jumped at was to do research, and a theme that comes up for some of them is uncertainty about whether they could do it. For example, Judy commented that family commitments affected her ability to focus on the research and Jan worried that her “slow, ruminating style” would slow down the group. But it didn’t and they triumphed, which brings me to the other common theme of the pride of accomplishment that many women felt.

These women are, all of them, leaders and builders of the field. For Evelyn, having a national perspective is very important, and working nationally has been a great source of inspiration and power for her. Others have made their mark provincially, working on the articulation committees, creating curriculum and contributing to provincial umbrella groups. And they continue to be field-builders. After the project concluded, Evelyn, Jan, Judy and Diana went on to work on new research projects. Jan, Leora and Evelyn have retired from their colleges, but Jan now consults on program

development and teacher training, including in New Orleans and West Africa. Evelyn, in addition to her research work, is an active with local political groups. Leora has embarked on a new adventure, as a full-time art student in Calgary. Diana, the “newcomer,” is now an important player in the national field. In 2006, she became the president of Literacy BC and has made numerous presentations at national and provincial events, including to members of parliament and senators in Ottawa. She is now the deputy director of Literacy BC.

And what of the Research Friends? Marina continues to provide mentoring to new researchers, and currently works at Douglas College in New Westminister. Bonnie followed her heart and is now living and working in Ireland. And Betsy still loves her job at Capilano University and looks forward to a dissertation-free life.

Having introduced you to the team members, I will go on to tell you about how they worked together, how they related to university-based research, and the support that helped them in their work. That is the topic of the next chapter, “The Team at Work.”

CHAPTER SIX: THE TEAM AT WORK – COLLABORATING TO CREATE KNOWLEDGE

When Evelyn Battell called a group of college ABE/Literacy instructors together to research their practice she had a clear goal in mind:

To interview a bunch of long-time instructors about what made them effective. That was my goal. I wanted them to articulate their politics and their motivation and their beliefs about the students. I wanted people on record. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

In previous chapters, I have described the women she called and the field they came from. In Chapter Four, I argued that the RIP movement has blossomed in BC, despite problems, because the seeds of RIP fell on fertile ground. The field was already strong, creative, and able to create wonders with limited resources. In Chapter Five, I described a group of skilful, brave women with long histories in the field of adult literacy and basic education, combined with varying amounts of experience and interest in research. They all share a sense of adventure, and interest in going in new directions. All of this equipped them well to explore new ways of working and doing research, leading to a report that meets the needs and interests of the field they knew so well.

In this chapter, I will describe how the team worked together to create *Hardwired for Hope*, focusing on two issues: collaboration and knowledge creation. As with other chapters, I will use interviews, the minutes from Research Team meetings and online exchanges to uncover this information. I will also draw on the *HFH* study itself, especially the methods chapter, ‘Wearing the Silver Shorts’: Methods and Collaboration (Twiss, 2004). Following Diana Twiss’ lead, I have tried to focus on issues rather than

individuals, because I think the practitioners and the Research Friends did the best they could, given the restrictions in time and resources with which they were faced.

Overview of the Research Process

When our research group began to examine the data collected from the autobiographies, journals and interviews, we developed a number of codes and then organized and gathered the codes into themes or topics. From the groupings of our codes, I chose to work on the topics of Personal Growth, Qualities and Characteristics. I ended up with a list made up of code words and thoughts and phrases. I continued to group and regroup, trying to organize in a coherent way. At each stage, I felt the power of reflection to support and inform the collaborative process. (Rose, 2004, p. 44)

Judy Rose's description of how she and the group analyzed data and wrote the report gives us a taste of both the group and individual process involved. Before I discuss the issues of collaboration and knowledge creation, I will give an overview of the steps in the group's research process, to help put my discussion in context.

The methods chapter records that "from October 2002 until June 2004 the research group met six times and had eleven teleconferences" (Twiss, 2004, p. 18). They also communicated extensively by email and telephone between meetings. The three kinds of data collection methods they used were autobiographical writing, journaling their daily practice and interviewing other instructors. I will briefly describe each of these, as well as the collaborative analysis and writing process they employed.

Autobiographies

The first data-gathering activity consisted of each participant writing autobiographical pieces. They began with a series of exercises to open up the writing process. Here Jan comments on the first exercise:

I truly enjoyed that process . . . for me it was great because I thought, hey I can write on the spot, I can do this. I loved how we all did it differently, for me that

was the richness of it. And I found it also quite interesting those things that I ended up writing about. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

There was indeed a lot of variety in the pieces: Some of the titles were “Good teachers I have known,” “Challenged,” “Collegial Model,” “Women” and “Becoming Empowered.” A complete list of titles is attached as Appendix E.

After a very intense time of writing during the first meeting, each member of the team went home and wrote on her own. They then shared their pieces and responded to each other online.

The autobiographical pieces were used in three ways. First, after the autobiographies were coded and broad themes identified, these themes contributed to the analysis of the journals and the development of questions for the interview protocol. Secondly, they formed data for the report. Here are two examples. In the first one, Judy uses an excerpt from Leora’s autobiography in her chapter, “Thinking, Feeling and Learning Intertwined” (Rose, 2004):

A number of instructors described how they stumbled into the job of teaching in ABE/Literacy and have learned so much from their own experiences and their resourcefulness over the years. Leora’s comment is an example of the value of that experience in her work:

My confidence expanded and I began to take on more projects that required leadership types of qualities and thinking. I began to feel more sure about my version of the workplace and what needed to be done to create the environment that would best support our students and enhance their learning. (p. 49)

In “A Passion for the Possible,” Evelyn draws on Jan’s autobiography to discuss what it means to have a political perspective: “Jan talks about becoming

politicized and defines that as seeing the connection between the individual and the larger social organizations” (Battell, 2004, p. 72).

The third and most powerful way the autobiographies were used was to provide “rich descriptions” (Crabtree & Miller, 1999) of the practitioner-researchers. Each team member chose sections of the autobiographies that she wanted to share. These pieces went into the final chapter, “Who Are We?” (Battell, et al, 2004, p. 173). Leora said, “*It was very freeing to choose sections of the autobiography that I liked and wanted to share, and that didn’t have to be coded*” (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005).

Analyzing the Autobiographies

Writing the autobiographies took place in the fall of 2002 and practitioners learned about coding during a teleconference. They then coded their own autobiographies and met in January 2003 to develop a set of common themes. Twiss (2004) describes this process as “tricky,” because practitioners did not have experience with it, and also because they were coding their own experience:

Coding is not a simple activity and, for our group, the difficulty was compounded when we worked with our own autobiographies, for it was a challenge to see how our thoughts and experiences can be grouped into larger themes. Too much gets in the way. (p. 33)

She describes these and other sessions where codes and themes were developed as “moments of intense collective analysis” (p. 34). I will discuss the successes and challenges of this process in more detail below.

Eight themes came out of the autobiographies: Life before ABE, ABE Career Path, Personal Characteristics, Teaching Styles and Strategies, Politics and Power, Students, Learning Environment and Community (Research Team Meeting Minutes,

January 21, 2003). Each practitioner-researcher coded their autobiographies for these themes, and then sent the excerpts to the member of the group who was responsible for that theme and who wrote an essay about it. Twiss (2004) observes that

The essays were shared at the April 2003 meeting, but not edited, challenged, or processed any further. We wrote them so we could further explore the theme and see what sub-categories came from the theme. (p.35)

The lack of processing has been described by some as a weakness in the process and will be discussed later in this chapter. However, I did experience a challenge to my essay when I took responsibility for collecting and writing about the theme of “Students.” In the minutes I wrote: “The RT did not recognize their students in what I wrote” (Research Team Meeting, April 15-17, 2003). As a result I re-wrote the essay and emailed it to the group. However, by then they had moved on to the interviews, and the “Students” theme ended up not taking up much space in the report. I will discuss the reasons for this below, under “Interviews” and “Knowledge Creation.”

Journals

The second data source for the research team was journal-writing.

According to the minutes, the group agreed to write journals about their daily practice over a six-week period:

Agreed that we will start on 13th and do 1 ½ hours of journaling before the meeting. Noted that Judy’s and Leora’s work in administration is also part of effective teaching, so they can journal about that too. You can also mix teaching and admin in one journal session. (Teleconference minutes, December 17, 2002)

As Twiss (2004) describes, the team hoped to build on their autobiographies:

Given that we had our essence defined to some extent in our autobiographies, how did that play out in our day-to-day encounters with students and others? (p. 26)

Again the group identified themes that came up in the journals—most were the original ones from the autobiographies, plus two extra: demands of the job (broken into the sub-codes: dealing with students, curriculum, day to day, and classroom management (Research Team Meeting minutes, April 15, 2003). Team members did an initial analysis of the main themes and recorded them in tables (not in essays). As I will discuss below, journaling was the least successful of the data collection strategies, and in fact, very little of the data collected were used in the final report.

Interviews

The interviews were fabulous. And reading the other interviews was fabulous. It was exactly what I wanted. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

The final data collection strategy was interviews with other instructors throughout BC. Here the group drew on the themes identified in the first two stages of data-collection to come up with a list of questions. They then identified the instructors they wanted to interview and each team member interviewed three instructors. Marina and I each interviewed one instructor, bringing the total to seventeen. A list of the interview questions developed for each theme is provided in Appendix F.

Originally, the team planned to interview students as well. However, they did not receive as much funding as they had applied for and were forced to cut back. When they got the news about reduced funding, they had already completed their autobiographies, so the options for cutting back were to stop doing journals or to do half as many interviews with both students and instructors or to cut one of

the interview groups completely. There was lengthy debate, and the decision was a difficult one.

Thinking about dropping the interviews with students led to concerns about reactions from the field: What would the funders think if we dropped the input from students? What would our colleagues think? What reaction/repercussion would we get from Ethics Committees? Would students feel left out of the conversation? (Twiss, 2004, p. 30)

However, ultimately it was the practitioner voices they were looking for, and so it was decided to interview them and try to interview students at another time. Some of the implications of this decision will be discussed below, under “Knowledge Creation.”

Framing the Data

When the interviews were complete, the team brought all the data together. At this point the themes were refined and the group came up with three categories, which became the data chapters in the report: “Personal growth, qualities and characteristics,” “Beliefs that motivate us” and “Strategies, styles and skills.” Each researcher was asked to code and extract information from the interviews she had done and send them to the person responsible for each theme.

Writing

Writing is typically the most difficult part of practitioner research. Participants commented that it was difficult to find time to write, that it “felt really big” and they felt guilty “about not getting into things” (Research Team Minutes, Nov 3, 2003). This guilt could be quite immobilizing. It is not just a matter of fitting writing into already very

busy work lives, but that it is a solitary thing and one that does not have the immediate rewards of, for example, planning a lesson or participating in a team meeting.

But for most of the practitioners in this project the writing was also an enriching, learning experience, made easier by all the work that had gone before.

Leora, Jan and Evelyn talk about this.

The totally most fabulous part was the writing. I mean I had no idea . . . Like when I look at my first draft, ha-ha-ha! (laughter). You know, seven drafts later, I'm pretty proud. And I'm proud of all of us not just me . . . I mean, just the confidence gained by all of us, and I'm talking about me, around my writing was magnificent. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

I had gone through so many steps in the earlier process—preliminary work with the group and individually—I had coded, I had highlighted, I had organized things in different ways. Then I thought about it, and I did so much thinking, that when it came time to sit down and write, it came fairly easily. And it didn't feel like work at that time, it was actually fun. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

Evelyn: I have started writing, and it is a thrill. I've done seven or eight pieces. It's wonderful to find the coherences and edges. I took what you sent me about beliefs and motivations and colour-coded them. I am beginning to get in my head what the edges of phrases like "belief in the human spirit" look like. (Research Team Minutes, February 1, 2003)

The three data chapters were divided among four of the researchers (while Diana Twiss wrote the Methods chapter). They worked alone on their sections, with a colleague assigned as their peer reader. They also consulted the Research Friends and there were feedback sessions at team meetings.

I was not sure how the decision was made to work on the chapters individually, and could not find a record of it in the minutes. But Diana remembered how it happened. According to her, "The decision wasn't in the minutes because it was something that evolved." She explained this to me in an email:

We had that meeting where we carved up and categorized all the codes, leaving us with larger categories that eventually turned into chapters. We divided those up based on interest, and who spoke up for what . . . At this time we had talked about various approaches to writing, and because we were finding the collaborative thing time consuming, decided to individually write first drafts, have a team partner/member read it and give feedback. So we had individual data gathering and analysis of codes, collaborative sharing and analysis of data as we figured out what all these codes meant, and individual chapter writing with input from a team member. (Diana, email, March 11, 2009)

As Diana said, there were both solitary and collaborative parts to this research, and the collaborative parts were time-consuming and at times challenging. Now that I have provided an overview of the procedures as a reference, I will look in more depth at issues of collaboration.

Collaboration

As described in Chapter Five, all the participants have extensive experience and skill in collaborative work, whether it was working on a curriculum development team, provincial articulation committees or boards of a community organizations. This was how they had worked all their lives. As Judy said,

I collaborate with people all the time. I make a huge amount of effort to make sure that I'm consulting and I don't, you know, I'm not a top-down person in anything I do. So you would think it should work. So that was interesting for me to be able to do that and really like that so much that we had enough experience with the project to be able to do it. (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

Collaboration is also a natural fit with the work they do. Practitioners talked a lot about how much they respected learners, how they build relationships and share power with learners (Battell, 2004) as well as how important process is in their classroom. For example, Leora said, *"I teach process more than I teach content in some ways—I'm very big on process"* (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005). So the process of collaboration was

important to them, and when they shared their views about what worked and what didn't work in this collaborative project, they spoke with authority.

For Evelyn, there was some doubt about whether we could even call this project collaborative. She is more comfortable with the term "group work":

I mean collaborating to me is a very conscious process, and our process was a lot more free-wheeling than that. I do think we did a group project. I think that everybody is particularly attached to the part of the document that they wrote and not nearly so attached to the rest of it. And I think that they understand the part that they wrote and are real dicey about their understanding of the rest of it. And that tells me that we didn't collaborate. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

She gives the literature search another illustration of how the project was not collaborative: "*We couldn't agree, first of all on what a literature search was, we had different expectations of how we were going to use the literature and we used the literature differently.*" I will discuss the literature review under "Knowledge Creation" below and come back to this argument.

In this section I will discuss collaboration, showing how it started with a commitment to collaboration, then describing strategies for collaboration, both face-to-face and online. I will call on the practitioners to describe the moments where collaboration worked well and the places where it broke down, why they felt it did and what would have worked better.

Commitment to Collaboration

From the beginning, the group was committed to working collaboratively, and there were numerous discussions about what that meant. For example, minutes from the third Research Team meeting record this discussion:

Points from group discussion: Why bother to collaborate? It would be cheaper, simpler and faster to let individuals do research projects. After doing it with

others, I know how much faster it would be to do it alone. Group: But there are advantages to working in groups: learn with others how to do it; there is respect; more possibility of innovation; buy-in, ownership of project; transformative learning for whole group as process unfolds; richer, more complex product . . . For example: we came to the last teleconference depressed and felt better after the call. Difference is valued: part of our identity, individuality. We value this difference.

Judy: the advantage we have here is that we chose to be here, unlike collaborative projects at work. This is special because we can go to higher ground.

Jan: The fundamental instructors were really scattered,⁵⁰ but worked collaboratively. Now there has been a break-down in this, and this is a great loss. So it is great to be in a group. At times there is tension, but that is where the growth happens. (Research Team Meeting Minutes, April 16, 2003)

For Diana, the diversity of the group played out in the final report:

You get, you actually do get the opportunities for different perspectives, and different energies and different politics and different interests and enthusiasms, so you're not just looking at the cup from this side, you're looking at it hopefully from all these different sides and you negotiate how that will all be explained, so you have, I think, a richer description of something. And I think that was what we were able to do with this document. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

With this commitment established, I will move on to look at how they collaborated.

Collaborative Strategies

Twiss (2004) reflects the feelings of the group when she records that

“Collaboration and working together in a close manner made the findings rich.” She

gives several examples of how the group collaborated:

- reading each other's autobiographical pieces
- developing the research question
- drafting of the proposal.
- negotiating tasks, plans, and directions
- negotiating meanings, themes
- planning and making presentations

To make this possible, the team needed to have regular contact, and by far the preferred

⁵⁰ Jan is referring to the instructors in her college who teach at the fundamental level (up to Grade 8) who were working in different campuses.

type of contact was face-to-face. Over the two-year period, the group met six times, and had eleven teleconferences. Twiss observes:

The team meetings drove the project forward, got us focused and reconnected to each other. Getting together however was not a simple task. It was a challenge to get away. The research group had to choose a period that worked for eight highly active people and organize all the aspects of the meeting: travel, accommodations, substitute teachers and parents where needed, food, equipment and of course, the agenda. (Twiss, 2004, p. 19)

Participants found the face-to-face contact extremely important, but teleconferences were also important. This excerpt from a teleconference reflects that:

We agreed to bring summaries to the meeting. We may not work with them very much, but can check them for accuracy, etc. Leora: you guys are wonderful. I feel so much better now—I feel I can go ahead and do this. Evelyn: Yes, I feel more energized than I have felt in months! All: Thanks everyone. Bye. (Research Team Teleconference, March 11, 2003)

Between meetings and teleconferences the group communicated online through “The Hub,” an electronic conferencing system offered to the BC Literacy community by Literacy BC and Capilano College. It uses “First Class” software, which enables people who join the hub to have their own email and to talk to other literacy practitioners through various online “conferences” and special interest groups. The *Hardwired for Hope* team had their own private conference between 2002 and 2005. This is where all the discussions happened and where all the data, reports and other documents were stored.

There is evidence in the minutes of the Research Team meetings that attention was paid to collaborative processes. Here are two examples:

Evelyn: What will you do if you are unhappy about something I

do? (Others: Tell you).

Evelyn: But this is an extremely caring and sensitive group, so don't be afraid to tell me if I am going too far or too fast. I can only go on pushing if I am confident that you will feel comfortable telling me you are not happy or uncomfortable.

Leora: This is also true if others do something inappropriate.

Others: Yes, but more so with Evelyn as coordinator. Suggestion: be conscious that some of us are on the hub on weekends while others aren't – make demands/requests accordingly. (Research Team Meeting Minutes 23/10/02)

Closure (first meeting):

Evelyn asked us to think of an object you would give the group, showing what the group represents for us.

Evelyn: Gladiola – peach coloured. Opens slowly one petal at a time.

Marina: Fishermen's net: bringing up things slowly. Still tangled, but starting to come together.

Jan: a cobweb with glistening dew—beautiful, working towards the centre.

Betsy: beautiful piece of coral—you have to dive for it, rooted, beautiful

Diana: flashlight: everyone needs one, and can illuminate places where there wasn't light before. The plant borage to give us courage.

Judy: gum boots; walking through the mud, trying to sort out pieces. The gumboots will get us safely through. Sweet peas that will permeate and last for quite a long time.

Leora: Those sculptures made from straight lines. Very simple, but get very complicated. In a mobile form—not grounded yet. (Research Team Meeting Minutes, October 24, 2002)

These show good intentions, but as I will show below, they did not always

lead to effective collaboration. But there are many examples of strategies and approaches that were effective and in the next section I will describe two examples.

Two Innovative Approaches

The group developed some innovative approaches to collaboration, both at meetings and online. Here I will describe how they worked together on the autobiographies and the journals.

Writing and Analyzing Autobiographies

As a participant observer in the process, the autobiography method was new to me and I found it quite intriguing. I was also fascinated and moved by the women's writing, and felt privileged to be part of their discussions as well as to be included as a reader at the early stages.

Here are two examples that show the collaborative process. In the first one, Evelyn is talking about her autobiographical writing on "Story-telling." First is an excerpt from the minutes where she reflects on it, followed by an excerpt from the actual writing, with two responses.

Excerpt from Minutes:

Reflection on second batch of writing: Evelyn: I wrote about story-telling—where I learned about it and how I use it in my teaching. It was really exciting, because I got feedback and wrote some more. No one has ever asked me about this. It is more interesting to write the stories that people here have asked me about, because I have already told the other stories. (Team meeting, October 21-25, 2002)

Evelyn's writing, with responses:

Interesting that to me the quickest way to help the student relax about "telling" is to say I've been there, done that in some way.

Diana: Is this only to make them relax or is it true, in terms of how you feel?

Leora: It seems to me that you are talking about making connections with your students through stories. . . . this is the seed for me on how to teach reading and writing . . . the connections that are made between the reader and the writer and that as humans we share fundamental human experiences is what sets up true comprehension of the material. (Evelyn's autobiographical writing: "Storytelling")

In the second example, Jan describes how a piece of Diana's writing inspired her to write on a similar topic. Here are the minutes, followed by excerpts from Diana's and Jan's writing, with responses.

Minutes:

Jan: I wrote about something Diana had said, about thinking of myself in the school system the first time I felt like a failure. What happens to a person inside

and how receptive are they to the outside. Being a failure in the school system, which I never thought I would be, was linked to how I felt about myself. I can take that further to what I try to create in the classroom. (Team meeting, November 21-25, 2002)

Diana's writing:

Even though I had a lot of confidence as a learner when I was a kid, things got shaky when I was at university. **(Jan: for me too, particularly my early years in university)** There were many things going on in my life that added to my lowered sense of self-esteem, but I didn't look at all those things at the time. I just judged myself as a bad learner, or poor student. **(Jan: me too)** Sometimes when I hear my students talk about themselves, I hear the same kinds of things that I used to think about myself. And I wasn't a bad learner, or stupid or incapable of learning. I was full of so many other things that learning was crammed into one small cluttered corner of my life. The very fact that I have gone through the same kind of issues, being a single mother, struggling to make ends meet and find the time for learning, help me to be empathetic with my learners who are experiencing the same challenges. (Diana's Autobiographical Writing: "Reflections on Teaching")

Jan's writing:

Interesting as I think back, all my years of success in the classroom didn't seem to carry over. I wasn't able to reach into that reservoir of achievement and use it to lift me up and pull me through those dark days. I received my first D. And with that, I was lost. **(Diana: Were you lost because you were so incredibly homesick, or because the school was difficult, or a mixture of both?)** Meanwhile, my confidence as a learner continued to erode. **(Diana: Confidence at that age, can erode quickly. I know that feeling.)** (Jan's autobiographical writing: "Kingswood")

This kind of analysis continued for the journals and interviews. Diana was involved in the data gathering and group analysis at every stage, but she did not have similar support when she wrote the methods chapter. She explains,

It wasn't until the end, when I was going through the methods chapter and it was becoming bigger and bigger, that I realized: Hey, no one's coding this stuff for me. I coded for everyone's chapter, and went through that whole process, as a data-gatherer I guess or initial level of analysis. But nobody was coding for me, like going through the minutes or listening to some of the tapes. And it was an enormous amount to stuff, and there was quite a multitude of issues. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

Journals and “Conversations with Intent”

The journals have been criticized because they did not produce very much data for the report and because of inconsistencies in rigor. This will be discussed below in Knowledge Creation. However as a collaborative strategy, they worked well.

First, as the journals were shared with the team, there was rich discussion, which eventually helped to move the process forward. For example, “belief systems” was an important issue in the research, and this is discussed here after this excerpt from Jan’s journal.

January 15, 2003

English 61/62

8:30 am to 10:20 am

Students are asked if they will share their personal coat of arms. I told them earlier in the week that they would have this opportunity . . . their first oral presentation. . . . Mike, the youngest in class who has just turned 18, says he wants to do his first. (He was in my class last term.) **I have placed a chair at the front of the room and I have suggested that students can go to the front of the class if they wish, or they can present their work from where they are sitting.** Mike comes forward and holds his Coat of Arms in front of him so the others can see his picture. He tells us that his greatest achievement is being off drugs for 14 months. **Everyone leans forward to hear although he is speaking strongly and his words are clear.** Mike continues and has eased the anxiety of the new students in the class by his openness and willingness to be honest. I noticed Natalya’s nodding throughout his presentation. **I wonder if it is for encouragement or showing agreement.** [Emphasis in the original]

Comments from group:

Diana: I liked the way you used bold to show what was going on in your head.

Leora: It is about belief system and behaviour. E.g. Michael was able to stand up and say something. You didn’t talk about the environment or strategy, or link it to your belief system. You said where you ended up.

Jan: I was writing in the moment. How do I know what will end up being important for you?

Leora: But your belief system made it possible for Michael to feel comfortable.

The journaling process was very difficult for the practitioner-researchers.

Twiss writes that the prevailing climate of cutbacks and the onset of the war in

Iraq made it difficult. Here Jan talks about her experience of that.

I was one of the people who found that extremely difficult. . . . In our institution it was very hard, our numbers were down, our students were really struggling, it was the beginning of the (Iraq) war . . . for me, I mean this was a real breaking point. . . . And trying to write about all of that, I mean it was like living it and then having to regurgitate it again, and I didn't need to do that, I didn't need to put that down in writing. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

So the decision was made to have “telephone conversations with intent” in pairs, and this proved to work much better. Here are some comments from the

April 2003 meeting:

Evelyn: When I talked with Jan, she asked questions for clarification which lead me in directions I might not have gone in a journal. . . . It certainly worked for me in spite of the screwed up tape. I got to talk and have someone else on the line. It is so much slower writing and I would have got bogged down.

Diana: Sometimes the writing takes more energy.

Jan: I liked having a listening ear – someone who was slightly removed.

Leora: I liked the fact that we did not have to be so detailed when we journalled. Like when we said we could just write down notes. I wrote little phrases and could just go from one to another. I will be able to code without writing all the details. It was very freeing not having to write every word.

For Jan, the collaborative process that led to the decision to switch to telephone conversations was particularly gratifying:

The group was communicating on first class – Well, how's it going? -- and I didn't respond. Then two days later, Evelyn would say “Jan, I'm not hearing from you, how's it going?” (laughter) And I would have to write back, it's not going very well and then finally, you know, we need to talk about this. Because I wasn't the only one. And that's the nice thing too, I think about collaborative

work.....You didn't feel alone, there was a sense of having others out there who might understand, and if they didn't understand they weren't going to judge you. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

Magic Moments

Most of the team members have “magic moments” they remember, demonstrating effective collaboration. Here are some of them.

Evelyn on autobiographies:

Oh I'm having such a good time--your writings are great and since I'm typing there is no limit to what i can say. Since I'm first, I have an easy job—i don't know how easy it will be for you all to find my reply and reply to it—that's the way we planned it so all the comments end up in one document. I'm just bubbling with excitement - good luck. (Evelyn email to group November 11, 2002)

Diana on pulling the data together:

Oh, yeah there was that moment, when we had all the data on the table we had teased out all the things . . . And then we were put into groups—I was in your group—and asked how would you compress this? What sort of larger groups do you see? And you and I came up with what we thought and Jan and Leora did and Evelyn and Judy did. And then from that we put ours up on the board and we pushed and pulled and then we came up with those three categories. And that, that was magic for me. And that's where I thought, we could do this because we had unpacked all that other stuff and really saw where different things. We still had some, there's that beautiful overlap (between) philosophy, belief and practice. And it's just this side of the picture, and that side of it. So it came out beautifully in the book, we were able to write and they make lovely references back and forth to each others chapters or that piece, “for more explanation see . . .” (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

Jan on the opening dinner of each meeting:

And sitting around that first night where we would share, you know how are things going, what's happening with your family, how are you feeling, how are you doing? And I sensed, you know, I certainly cared. And I think others cared, and I think for me that was the gelling. (B: Yeah it was, eh? I also looked forward to it.) It showed that we were all willing to risk and that the group, I mean we learned more about each other. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

Bonnie on the email collaboration:

There were times in the email messages when I would come and read them and think, “Far out, this is great!” You know, people were so supportive of one another, and there were some really neat momentums going on when I would dip in occasionally, and that felt very strong there. I think starting with the supper

was always brilliant, that was a nice one. (Bonnie, interview, September 13, 2004)

Judy on collaborating with Leora to write the introduction:

When Leora and I wrote the introduction, . . . she was still in Calgary. We were back and forth on the phone and for me, that was a wonderful piece of collaboration. . . . And there was that kind of ability to concentrate on each other, to decide what we were going to do, to get a plan put together. . . . And it felt truly collaborative . . . It was just at the moment when her granddaughter was being born and so we had that as a kind of a side-bar. (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

I have enjoyed re-living the magic moments and thinking about what made strategies work. Now it is time to re-live the moments that were not so magical, by describing the practitioner-researchers' ideas about what did not work and why.

Where the Collaboration Broke Down

Yesterday was a hard day as a group, team and individually. It's heavy. It's a laborious process.

L: This a place where I can be who I am, and I thank you for that. Doesn't happen often. Reaching consensus is difficult and time consuming and messy.
(Research Team minutes, January 22, 2003)

So far, we have a picture of a successful, effective group with good strategies for collaboration. And the group produced a beautiful report that has been read and appreciated throughout the field. Yet, this excerpt from the minutes shows that collaboration was not always easy, and all participants talk about frustrations they had. As mentioned above, Evelyn even called into question whether we could call the project collaborative.

I have written about the complicated lives the women brought to the table, including health and family issues that were hard to leave at the door. Evelyn, in particular was under constant pain throughout the project. These issues are bound to

make the work emotional at times. Also, Bonnie points out the stressful, emotional nature of their work as ABE/Literacy instructors:

[T]hey were talking about their heart, blood, soul, I mean this is their life! And I think, for most of these women, I mean, some of them have families and that, but their work is their, it's their life! It's not a job! Plus all the shit that was going down in BC, I think that took a lot of stress and strain. (Bonnie, interview, September 13, 2004)

In other words, tension and disagreement are completely to be expected. But still, the group had a lot to say about where the collaboration went wrong and where it could have been improved, so I would like to record it here with hopes that it will inform other practitioner research projects.

Two Strategies that Did not Work

Judy: Well, that for sure is going to be an issue for all of us in some way. I mean you know your stuff so well [but] how does it read? I mean how does it read the first time for people—because we can't expect them to read it line by line and ponder it. But I did add that because I knew my struggle here throughout this thing was how to articulate what I knew inside me. Where you said oh I don't understand what you're saying. I hear what you're saying [but] I don't know what to do about it (laughter). (Research Team Meeting, March 2, 2003)

With this comment at a team meeting, Judy articulates the internal struggle that goes on in a writer's head, but also responds to critical feedback on her writing that she received from the group. The process of giving group feedback was one of the strategies that was judged not to be effective. This is closely linked to the other not-so-effective strategy—analyzing data as a group.

At the first Research Team meeting, practitioner-researchers discussed how they would give feedback to each other.

How will we work together?

What will happen when we read each other's writing?

- We need to be careful not to push too much if the other is not comfortable. Some of us might get defensive about this.

- Maybe we need to warn each other if we are going to push.
(Research Team Minutes, October 23, 2002)

From the beginning, the group adopted the term “to push” to indicate gently challenging each other to think more deeply about ideas—something Marina was quite famous for by then. Diana explains what it meant to her:

[Marina] talked about this notion of “pushing”, you know I’m going to push you. And I really love that concept because that really puts it outside of the person. I’m pushing the idea. But that didn’t happen in our group, for some reason that language wasn’t readily adopted. And that’s too bad. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

But for some group members, the pushing wasn’t effective. By the third Research Team meeting, Evelyn raised this with some concern:

E: That’s a question for me—when do we get pushed in our analysis. When I read the essays, had some thoughts, that’s interesting but ill-supported, that’s obvious, that has nothing to do with the question. . . . Before we put anything out we have to be a whole lot clearer. Explain ourselves quite a bit more thoroughly. (Research Team minutes, April 15-17, 2003)

She raises this again in her interview:

We weren’t allowed to comment on that, we weren’t allowed to question or push, we weren’t doing any of that, until . . . the last half day of the project. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

The fact that the group did not push the analysis at the early stages meant it was difficult to do it when they were giving feedback on writing later on. And yet, they were very aware that they needed to pay attention to the feedback process, as this excerpt from a Research Team Meeting discussion shows:

Things to keep in mind when giving feedback:

1. Remember that feedback from Marina and Betsy comes from our place in academia.
2. Some of us will be unsure what to do with the feedback we are given
Jan: think about how we give feedback in class – modeling, making suggestions, speaking visually. Let’s speak as teachers.
Leora: With students, I am cognizant of the stages they need to go to get there. I would not push them as much as I need to be pushed today.

Leora: Also think about emotions. If I get emotional, don't stop and think you have to protect me.

Marina: There are two levels. One is the content; the other is that people will feel defensive.

Evelyn: I have no problem receiving criticism, but I don't know how to do what you are asking me to do. I am hungry for feedback. We are at the stage where we want to produce something we can all put our names on.

3. Things to watch for:

Watch for places where quotes had been used twice (although we might not act on it now).

Watch that your interviewee is being represented wholly . . . Also look at the really good quotes and make sure they are being used in the best place and best way.

Make sure all the information in your interview has been covered . . .

Leora: I am willing to do this, but also keep in mind that there is an overwhelming amount of data. We might need to agree to let some quotes go. (Research Team Meeting minutes, March 1-5, 2004)

In spite of these guidelines, a number of the practitioners identified problems in the processes of peer feedback and group feedback. For example, Diana said,

When we were going through people's individual chapters, I think we needed a different time and a different way to do that, and I don't know yet what would have made that better. It was too difficult to have your head in someone else's chapter in an analytical way while you are still building your own. . . . And I've also found that some of the input I was getting on my chapter was making me more frustrated than helped. And it's no insult to anybody, it's just that, you're not in this mind set. So I could see part of the criticism, or the comment, but I just knew they were wrong. But I had to endure it. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

Leora describes the group feedback process as "arduous" and agrees with Diana that it was difficult for her to give feedback on another person's chapter: "*I'm taking ownership that it's not necessarily her chapter, like it was just a very big bulk and it didn't fly for me, so I found it difficult.*" She says the feedback she trusted the most was that received from Marina and me: "*Like having an expert, having somebody that you perceive as an expert, I really appreciated*" (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005).

The idea that Marina and I were “the experts” is a big problem for me. We might have expertise in research, but when it came to the content of the chapters, the experts were sitting around the table, representing over 100 years of experience in the field. Leora may have valued the fact that we had some distance from the stories told, that we were more objective. And the tape of the first meeting I attended⁵¹ shows that it was Leora who asked me to participate as a researcher rather than a practitioner—perhaps there was more wisdom in this request than any of us realized at the time. This notion of who are the experts and who has the right to create knowledge (or give feedback) will be explored in more depth below, under Knowledge Creation.

For Evelyn, the group feedback should have started earlier in the process, along with pushing each other on analysis. She suggests:

that you should take the very first piece of writing you do and perfect it to the point where you are prepared to give it to the public. Because you won't do that without coming to some agreement and that will force you to . . . pare your terms down to something that we can talk about. And we use the terms knowing what each other means. Even if you never give that to the public, you write it as if you were going to and that will force you to. (B: And to that at the very beginning). Yeah, do it right after, when we first did that coding and started writing those little essays, . . . right then, we need to start doing some actual work together that involves trust, not just compiling and gathering and producing and saying wow, this is wonderful, this is so exciting. I mean there's a real limit to being positive. There is not much meat in positive. And we're grown people, we can handle it. We're all tough successful professionals. We could take a lot more. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

Marina had worked with other groups that had responded well to her “pushing,” and some members of this group found it helpful. (In Chapter Four, Jan is quoted as saying “I liked being pushed by her.”) But Marina agrees that this was not generally successful and attributes it to time and lack of trust.

⁵¹ The minutes record this as a decision taken by the group. This is discussed in Chapter 3.

I don't think it worked as well. I think the whole trust thing wasn't there. . . . Some people felt very offended with the pushing. I don't think we had enough time in the analysis with the writing. Because that's where you push the most, right? That's when you just go, OK, say more about that, can you dig deeper, how is that connected with this other thing, and what does it mean when this person says this in the context of this other thing? (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

She also says that because of the lack of time, people came to the table with what they considered to be almost-finished drafts and they did not want to wrestle with ideas.

They were ready to let go of the project by then. So that's not a good place to be pushing. . . . The writing, they felt, was already polished, so they wanted feedback on typos or grammar. "How would you say it? If I'm not saying it well, what would you say?" Well, no, for me, it was engaging the thoughts. Clearly there wasn't that basis of trust to work with each other. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

Evelyn makes a similar point. As described above, she felt the group did not have time to collaborate properly or discuss each other's writing in a meaningful way. She explains:

I mean when somebody produces a piece of writing, if you're then going to stop and argue about what the main points are, you ought to do that before they write it, because you get caught up in dealing with the writing as compared to what the ideas are. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

As someone who has participated in many group-writing projects and benefited from feedback from colleagues, I sometimes felt impatient with what I perceived as people defending their own writing. I thought it should have been a straightforward process because, as Marina points out, "*What we want here is to make a better product and to get our heads around it in a different way*" (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005). Clearly, I under-estimated the difficulty and level of discomfort that practitioners would experience with this process. The issue of feedback is absolutely central the collaborative process, and those of us who have had experience with peer feedback and collaborative analysis—whether we have gained that experience in academic or practice-based

settings—need to find more effective ways to prepare new researchers for the challenge and to support them through the process.

Participants also had things to say about why they felt the process broke down. The most often mentioned issues were different styles and speeds of working and unresolved process issues.

Different Styles and Speeds

One of the most-discussed problems was that there was a big difference in what each practitioner brought to the table, especially in terms of the amount of time, thought and energy they could put in between meetings. Judy talks about the problem of having to work double and triple-time—at home, at work and on the research project:

You can't separate people from their families and their jobs without there being a ripple effect, Some of the others were that way too, but I had the feeling that other people in the group had spent a lot of time pondering and preparing and thinking through the issues, and I didn't think I did. (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

She also notes that the difference in work and communication styles could be uncomfortable for some.

Because with that talking and over-talking, the volume goes up, and people get anxious and people get all the things that they get, and there is less and less chance that I'm just going to dive in there, because they're going faster and faster. And that happened over and over again for us. And that that's a really natural style for (some). It's not natural for me at all. (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

Leora freely admits that she is one of the over-talkers, and as described in her rich description, she notes her upbringing has a lot to do with this. But she also worries that this might not have worked for others in the group: “Whereas Jan is way more respectful,

or one could perceive as respectful. She would wait until somebody finishes, where I'm just 'wah-wah'" (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005).

But personality was just part of it. Some found the different work-styles and pace of work more difficult to deal with. Diana says,

There are some of us who have our ideas fully formed, and . . . there are some of us who are new to our ideas and have to talk them through. And that's how we find them out and then we have to sit with them for a while and talk them out. And this is where, I think I wrote it in that chapter, there are some people who are comfortable with fast talking and over-talking and all that sort of stuff. And there are some people who think about the project all the time and some just start thinking about it—like me, I would just get right back into that world, and often I hadn't thought about it since the last time we needed to talk, or met, or had to do something for the project. And so I was getting back into the mind set and starting to think about all these things where the decisions had already been made. So I think there has to be an understanding of that. So I think that's why our group spent a lot of time trying to convince Evelyn of things. Not that it was the wrong decision, and not that she was leading us down a bad path, but we just weren't up to speed on that thinking. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

So what did group members do when something wasn't working? Some stayed silent, or chose not to talk because it seemed to be working for other group members. For example, Jan found she had to "bite her tongue" at times:

In collaborative work you try to think of the group and what will work best, and so, this might be what I want and I need, but having to do that self-reflection, is this clarification for the group or is this for me? And having to stop and say, no, this is what I need, or think I need, but this is not going to take us anywhere. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

Similarly, Diana describes a moment that illustrates this:

There are times when I knew something isn't working for me, but I will see that within a group it is working for them, and I'm not going to stop a group process because it's not working for me. Unless it's causing me damage, right, unless my feelings are getting hurt and I'm demoralized by the process, then of course I'd stop it. But if I'm just, you know, it's just not working for me, I don't know that I would want to stop it. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

Like other team-members, Diana commented on how she missed the fun she had experienced in other groups of practitioners:

Rather than just soaring and playing and having fun and it being light, I felt we were always sort of pulled back to this serious place, and I really noticed the difference when one time I went to the RIPP group⁵² that Marina was doing. . . . And it was just so much fun. It was serious, it was intense, but it was light and people disagreed. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

Similarly, Judy talks about “a heaviness” in the meetings, and Jan speaks about the guilty pleasure of taking time out to have fun.

I can think of a couple of times where a giddiness took over and it was fun and you could laugh. We were reprimanded, but it was, who cared at that point. And so the giddiness was showing our refusal, so it wasn't a verbal response in anger, but it was just continuing to be playful for a few minutes longer. So I think that's what I missed—a joy and a playfulness that I think certainly was in some other groups that I've been in. . . . I really liked getting together, I really liked putting our heads together, I really liked collaborating. I really liked the process that I was being forced to go through. But I think it could have just been a bit more fun. (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

There is no question that socializing is important. All practitioners would agree that it is as important to bring the whole person into the research project as it is to bring her into the classroom. But there was a difference of opinion about when and what kind of socializing was acceptable and helpful to the group—and that led to breakdown in collaboration.

Process Issues

As discussed above, the team members came to the project with lots of experience with collaboration and confidence that they could work collaboratively again. Perhaps this led to over-confidence that collaboration would just happen. Bonnie points out that some members assumed they could transfer their collaborative skills from other projects to this research project—and argues that this assumption might be wrong.

There was an assumption that we know what collaboration is cuz we work collaboratively all the time, but that it took a different kind of collaboration than

⁵² Research in Practice Projects (RIPP) was another practitioner research project facilitated by Marina Niks. For a description of their work, see Chapter 3.

their almost task-oriented work before would do, you know they would be able to get together, discuss something, make a decision, act on it and do it, whereas research is not like that. You don't; it's more of the process and the probing that is the task and the goal, and I don't think that was really known. (Bonnie, interview, September 13, 2004)

When Judy articulated the problem of different speeds and work-styles, I asked her if she would look for a different group to work with.

Either that or I'd look for a process, a process that would give me a space. So that I didn't have to go in there and kind of make my space. Or that I didn't feel that people were saying, "Now Judy will you say something?" Sort of them creating a space for me. Because maybe at that moment I didn't have anything to say. But you can create structures that limit some people and create that kind of circuit and to honour that circuit more and not let people interrupt and to have kind of rules around that. I think there are ways to do that. And maybe it's not as creative and spontaneous but maybe it would have kept things under control better. . . . And you know, maybe it never would. You know, even in a more regulated process, I would certainly liked to have talked more. (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

Even when there is experience with collaboration, it is important to talk about how they will handle conflict and build trust. This is something Marina always encourages with any group she works with.

I feel funny every time I bring up issues of collaboration at the beginning of a project; it always seems too soon. But every time, when I look back, I think it's a good thing to do and it should be re-visited. Did we talk about collaboration, did we talk about trust? I forget what happened. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

It seems by most accounts that this did not happen. Diana says:

We talked about roles, in terms of like, Evelyn was going to be the coordinator, what Marina's role was going to be, but we didn't talk about our own individual roles. And we didn't talk about how we were going to make decisions and how we were going to handle conflict. And that is something I would encourage any group collaborating to have a discussion about that at the beginning . . . Because it's going to happen. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

Judy echoes this: *"We all just came together, we didn't talk a lot about how we were going to be with each other. So maybe more of that needs to happen"* (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004).

Evelyn agrees: “*We didn’t work out the terms of reference, we didn’t agree on how we were going to manage problems.*” She argues that there should have been more trust-building exercises:

Every time we got together we’d do this sharing thing, and we’d go round and everybody would say how they were and how they were about the project and how they were in their life and how they were with their families and so on and so forth. And that somehow that was connected to our trusting each other . . . that would allow us to talk about tough issues and to be pushed, that there’s some connection between those two. And I’ve always thought that just sharing like that has its limits. I think just sharing like that is more important with a less sophisticated, less generally confident group. That if you want us to trust each other around research, you need to set up some exercises that involve us trusting each other around some things. And telling you how my day went and the fact that I’ve started a craft, I’ll tell anybody that. That’s no measure of trust. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

She also suggests that it would have been useful to have a course on research to start the project off—similar to the ones that Marina offered to the Literacy community.

*And then we could decide not to do things that way, but we would know why it was proposed. And I also think, we designed this thing in a weekend and we designed it before any of us knew anything about research. Judy and Diana had both done master’s degrees, so they had that much experience with research, end of story, with academic research. And the rest of us really didn’t know. I mean Marina laid out the stages, and I’d been around during *Dancing in the Dark*, so I was kind of aware of the stages, but I didn’t have any concept of how they would apply to our discussion or our project. And so, without any of that, we designed the project and said what we were going to do. And then the time came to do it and we had set ourselves on this path without any framework really. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)*

There is broad agreement about what should have happened, but less certainty about who was responsible for making it happen. Evelyn had expected Marina to facilitate these discussions, but Marina had not signed up for this. She saw herself as a resource person on this project but not the facilitator, and this is clearly supported by comments in the minutes and correspondence.

The processes described above take time—time that sometimes seemed like a luxury when there were only six meetings and a lot of work to do. As Evelyn said, “*We didn’t have time to collaborate*” (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005). Twiss (2004) reports that

(T)here were many times during our research team meetings when decisions were not made, when we chose, because of lack of time or energy or both, to defer the decision. Some members of the team were more comfortable deferring the decisions, perhaps noting that we will never agree, so why keep talking about it, or perhaps feeling that they needed more time for the idea to settle before they could agree. Does a group working collaboratively need to reach consensus most of the time, or is it all right to agree to disagree? We never asked this question, and we never got down to agreeing what collaborating meant to each of us. We simply moved along, respectfully, seriously, learning this new craft and reflecting on our own practice. (Twiss, 2004, p. 23)

The fact, that time was not spent on process issues was frustrating for some team members. For example, Jan says

And I think perhaps for me that was the difficulty with the way I perceived the last meeting; we didn’t have the opportunity to work through things on the spot. And for me that is key. Once I get there, don’t prevent me, don’t take me there and then not work through it. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

Bonnie gives an example of when it was important for some members to take the time, but not others.

And the time when I felt it was falling apart and there was no unity, was when we went back in the evening and we were looking at visuals (for the cover). That was one of the horriblest times I had with that group; I just hated it. And what was happening there, was we were oriented to finishing something and just getting it done. But it was a process that took time. (Bonnie, interview, September 13, 2004)

Even if They Cried: A Final Thought on Collaboration

In retrospect, everything unfolded as it should have. . . . We got it in on time, we stayed with our plan, different people wrote at different speeds and at that moment in time it might have been frustrating. But look, it happened. So I don't know if I can be that critical. You can't predict what everyone is going to say and what's going to be in their lives and not in their lives. I mean, ultimately the people that were involved were very committed, even if they cried about it. They saw it through. What more can you want from a collaborative group than to stay together? (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

This was Leora's response to my question about the low-points in the collaborative aspects of the project. Some may say she is being too positive, given the criticisms that have gone before in this section. But I also think she has hit the nail on the head: despite everything, the group persevered, met deadlines, and balanced their personal, teaching and research responsibilities. Why were they able to do this? It may be because, as some of the practitioners say, they committed to collaboration. But they were also clearly committed to each other. They entered the project *already in relation* with other team members and those relations continued when they left the project. So it is natural that they wanted to maintain those friendships and protect each other. In some cases, the only way they could do that was to back away from conflict, which in turn affected their ability to push each other, however gently, and to do effective group analysis.

Whoever or whatever they were committed to, they kept working together until the last meeting, the last presentation and the last email contact. They were also committed to creating knowledge in a way that made sense to them and contributed to their field—and that is what I will discuss in the next section.

Knowledge Creation

Our team had something important we wanted to say about our experiences in the field and we knew that if the message were to be taken up by a larger audience, it had to be a “respected” piece. (Excerpt from “The Research Pitch,” developed for *Hardwired for Hope* workshops)

This is an excerpt from “The Research Pitch” which was developed by the Research Team to include in workshops they presented about their project, designed to encourage other practitioners to do research. It makes an important point about their choice to do a formal research project so that the end result would be respected outside their field.⁵³ In this section, I will discuss the strategies they used to ensure that they engaged in “respectable” knowledge creation. I will draw on the definition of research provided by Marina Niks in her dissertation which studies collaborative relationships between university and community researchers (Niks, 2004). She articulates a “neutral” definition of research—one that is neither based in the university or the community—and identifies three requirements: (1) it must generate or uncover new knowledge, (2) the process must be rigorous/systematic, and (3) it must be shared. I will use these three criteria to frame my discussion of the knowledge creation process used in the *HFH* project.

Uncovering New Knowledge (And Documenting Old Wisdom)

During the second research team meeting, Marina asked: “How would you have felt if after 25 years, you found things that conflicted with your experience?” She was responding to a comment that new practitioners often make, “I could have told you that.” That is, they are already aware of the findings of a research

⁵³ For a discussion of how the practitioner research world and the university-based research world collide and intersect, see Chapter 7.

study—findings they have come to on their own by reflecting on their practice.

The *HFH* team was no exception, as this excerpt from a Research Team

discussion shows:

Jan: Sunday afternoon, I asked Don to read my rough draft [Don is Jan's husband and also a long-time literacy/ABE practitioner]. . . . He said: I am not surprised by anything I read here. What about picking out the differences? I shared this with Leora on the plane. Don's question really struck me. And Don said that 20 years ago he talked with Judy about the same things. And I ask, What's unique? What are we doing here? (Research Team Meeting Minutes, January 20-23, 2003)

Leora makes a similar point in her interview when she discusses how the team developed their interview protocol:

What we were attempting to do, I think, was to create our questions from our autobiographies and our journals. However, I don't know if I'm being too bold, but I think that we could probably have come up with those questions the first night we met. They were not earth-shattering questions. They were very basic questions that we'd all thought about. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

Marina's answer to that is that research is about a different way of knowing and a different kind of validity. In her dissertation, she argues that the "new knowledge" should be "something a group does not know or at least *does not know based on a research process*" [italics added] (Niks, 2004, p. 57). At a Research Team meeting, she made a similar point:

Marina: You don't know something with the kind of validity that research gives you but with other kinds of validity—25 years of experience. . . . So now you can back up what you say with both 25 years experience and two years of research. When you do the analysis and coding, you should not only look at what confirmed your hunches but what conflicts with it. (Research team meeting January 20-23, 2003)

But if a practitioner is uncovering new knowledge, but not collecting and analyzing data, she is likely a reflective practitioner (Brookfield, 1995; Jarvis, 1999; Schön, 1983; Steeves, 2002). In her chapter of *Hardwired for Hope*, Leora describes reflection as

thinking with depth . . . pondering, chewing, turning ideas over and making choices. Sometimes reflection is an internal process and sometimes it includes discussion and ruminating with others. . . . From (practitioners') words I could detect their clear thinking, their need to work towards intended outcomes, and their constant monitoring of their students' behaviour. What they did share were their thoughts concerning how they set the stage to work with students and the intentionality that they brought to their activities. (Gesser & Sawyer, 2004, p. 146)

It is the “ruminating with others” that turns this everyday reflective process into research. Most practitioners in this project confirm Niks' statement that “Reflective teachers do generate knowledge but unless this is done in a systematic way and it is shared, it cannot be called research” (Niks, 2004, p. 160). For example, Diana says,

I think this is different . . . because you put it into writing, because you have to put it into writing, you push yourself to a place that you normally don't go as a practitioner. . . . as soon as you start putting it into language and pushing it from those ideas into words, things have to make sense. When they are swirling around your head they might not totally make sense, or you think they make sense, then when you start to write it out you realize, that doesn't make sense, what is wrong? And you push and you think and you push it to a whole other level. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

When I asked Audrey Thomas about this, she made a similar point:

Well, I think we can all be reflective, right? We can practice and think about how the day went or whatever. You might put something in the journal, you might not. You might take a mental note that tomorrow, instead of doing XYZ, I'll do LPQ. But I think with the research, it has to be more systematic and you do some analysis and there is usually the writing involved or a product you can share with others. With reflective practice, there may not necessarily be a product and it might just stay within your own skin. (Audrey, interview, February 28, 2005)

When I sat with the group, listened to them on the phone and read their emails and their writing, I had a strong sense of being in the company of wise women. And that circle expanded when they brought the 17 interviewees into the discussion—17 practitioners with similar long, varied experiences in the field. The collected wisdom documented in *Hardwired for Hope* may not have revealed “earth-shattering” information for the researchers or even for other practitioners.

Instead, it validates their experience and, as Evelyn said (quoted in the introduction to this chapter), puts it on record, taking practitioners' voices to places they have seldom been heard, and thus contributing to the generation of "new knowledge." How they did that and the extent to which their process was systematic and rigorous, will be discussed next.

A Rigorous Process

The second condition for research, according to Niks (2004), is that it should be rigorous or systematic. She identifies two ways that this can happen: "First, researchers are meticulous in collecting data, analyzing it and organizing it to be shared" (p. 167). A second way is for the process to be purposeful and transparent (p. 169). I will look at each of these sub-criteria.

Collecting, Analyzing and Organizing Data

There is no doubt that the group was meticulous about collecting and organizing their data. All original data was saved online in a special section of Literacy BC's online conference system. The section where the data was stored could only be accessed by members of the team. Research team members sent their files in and they were organized by topic. All versions of the different data sources were saved—for example there were the original versions of the autobiographies, the autobiographies with responses from other team members, the essays based on the autobiographies, and any new versions of the autobiographies. The journal conversations and interviews were collected on tape and transcribed by a professional transcriber. Member checks were conducted at two stages: Interviewees were given the opportunity to check their interview transcripts before they

were used as data, and also to check any quotations attributed to them in the final report. Individuals took responsibility for making sure the instructors they interviewed were fairly represented in the data.

Team members have pointed out several places where data collection and analysis was not so effective—and so could have lead to a lack of rigor. For example, it has been noted above that data collected through journaling was not used in the final report, and generally, that journaling was not a positive experience. For Leora, this is because she did not understand the process.

It seemed nebulous at times, and not concrete. Like what am I doing, what should I be writing? . . . “B” was so illusive still, that maybe that was also the difficulty. And then of course the timing like I said was, you know people were just in a yucky, yucky situation emotionally. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

This “yucky situation” was part of the reason for journaling problems, but some practitioners argue that there was a problem with the way the journaling was done. Evelyn says it would have been more useful, “*if we knew what we were going to do with it in the end*” (interview, March 9, 2005), and Diana, who had had a very positive experience with journaling in a previous research project (Hoddinott, 1998), argues that they should have had guiding questions. In the methods chapter, she writes:

The material we gleaned from the journals confirmed some of the themes we found in the autobiographical pieces, but we ended up not using much of the data from them in the final analysis. There was something to be gained from capturing the moment, but upon reflection, I believe we would probably have been better served if we had more focused things to reflect upon and write about in our daily accounts. (Twiss, 2004, p. 29)

As she later explains, when the team members were raising questions and concerns about journal-writing, she did not identify the problem:

That’s one thing I just thought we gave up too soon. But again, in that moment, I didn’t know that. I didn’t know that was the problem. I just felt, I didn’t have as

big a problem dealing with it, or it was a problem but I could still hold my nose and type.⁵⁴ It was after writing the methods piece that I realized, if we'd had more focused questions, if we had decided on more direction, I think we could have done it. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

According to Marina, another problem with journaling might have been that it was not a good fit for practitioner research, principally because of the time it takes to perfect the method.

Typically researchers who journal would take a long time before the journal becomes a good data source. You have to be good at journaling; you have to take the time to become familiar with that space to decide what you are going to journal and how you are going to journal, and they are all so different. But because practitioner-researchers tend to take a few hours out of their day or out of their week or their month, that intimacy with the journal, with this technique, or with this data collection tool, may not have been a good fit. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

While time constraints prevented the group from developing experience and skills in journaling, it also meant that Marina was not able to provide as thorough an introduction to the process as she might have wanted. The group started writing their journals before the second team meeting (January 20-23, 2003), then had a detailed discussion about it at that meeting. There was more discussion at teleconferences and meetings that followed, but there was not enough time to discuss different kinds of journals or to workshop different approaches. As Leora and Evelyn's comments show, the product and process was not clear to everyone on the team, and generally it was not a satisfactory process.

For this and other reasons discussed above, the group decided to replace the journal-writing with telephone conversations, but Jan expressed concern that the telephone conversations did not yield as good quality data (interview, February 16,

⁵⁴ Diana is referring to the problem her colleagues had with writing in their journals when there were so many troubling things happening around them. See top of page 196 for discussion.

2005). Also, Marina suggested that the group should have created a different set of codes for the journals, instead of just adding a few to the existing codes used for the autobiographies. Sadly, time was a factor again; the group simply did not have time to spend discussing and collectively creating new codes.

There were also criticisms about the interviewing process. In the final report, Leora writes:

A closer examination of the interview process shows that not all the interviewers asked all the interviewees the same questions. Interviewers were instructed to take the core questions and probe in different directions according to the interviewee's responses. Therefore we did not end up with completely uniform interviews. (Gesser & Sawyer, 2004, p. 163)

Evelyn confirmed this in her interview:

And I feel like since we asked such a wide range of questions and since we asked the questions so differently from each other and with such different understandings of what the questions meant, that we didn't get very good comparative stuff. So I would be hard-pressed to say one major factor that drives a lot of ABE instructors is, for instance, a political point of view. It's not clear to me at all how many of those instructors we interviewed, if they came to understand what I mean by a political point of view, would agree that they had it. You know, because we never got to ask those questions clearly. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

Another potential weakness in data-collection, possibly related to rigor, was that, according to Evelyn, the group did not triangulate when they did their research.

Well, because as I understand it, you look at the same thing from different perspectives. And we didn't look at the same thing; we looked at three different things. And so we ended up with data all over the place and then we ended up writing about mostly one of them. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

She gives an example:

It wasn't clear to me what the connection was between what we said in our autobiographies and what journaling our daily practice was about. . . . In our autobiographies, we hadn't talked about how we teach. We'd talked about how we became teachers. We didn't elucidate the connections—I have no doubt they were there but this is a place where we didn't do analysis and could have—usefully. And so I ended up making the connections myself, and wondering what they would make of them. I'm still wondering. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

Marina agrees that the group did not triangulate, but she questions how important this is. I also don't think it is a big weakness in the process. If I had known more at the time, I might have introduced two metaphors that might have helped the discussion: Crystallization and Bricolage.

Laurel Richardson (2000) offers the crystal as an alternative to the triangle, which for her calls forth the image of a "a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object." Triangulation is based on the "assumption that there is a 'fixed point' or 'object' that can be triangulated" (p. 934). She argues that "crystallization" works better:

But in post-modernist mixed-genre texts, we do not triangulate, we *crystallize*. We recognize that there are far more than 'three sides' from which to approach the world. . . . Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities *and* refract within themselves. . . . What we see depends on our angle of repose [Emphasis in the original]. (p. 934)

I thought this notion would have appealed to the practitioner-researchers, and Judy responded positively when I sent out the draft dissertation for comments:

Crystallization is a really interesting way to think about the research instead of triangularization. It seems an authentic way to describe our work because we all bring our personalities and beliefs into the classroom in unique ways. So "facets" is an apt description and there could be any number of ways to be effective. (Judy, email, March 19, 2009)

I also think they would have liked the concept of "bricolage," a French term originally proposed by Claude Levi-Straus (1962). In a book review, Stephen Gorard (2006) describes some of the images that "bricolage" brought forth in his mind:

The metaphor of "bricolage" used throughout the book spoke to me of DIY and handiness. It suggested an approach to research based on self-reliance rather than recipe-driven solutions to problems of method. It suggested the use of a toolbox of methods into which the researcher could delve when faced with problems of method, perhaps trying out several tools before settling on the best available for the job in hand. It suggested a practical, getting the job done, approach

to research that leaves some part of education at least slightly better off as a result. Finally, it suggested an element of humour and mischief to enliven what might otherwise be a rather dull methods text. (p. 145)

I think this would have spoken to the practitioner-researchers on a few levels. They are all get-the-job-done kind of women, although they may not have had the confidence or time to experiment with different kinds of methods. Their experience with journals is an example of this. They are socially-conscious educators who are very aware of their social locations, so I think they would have related to Joe L. Kincheloe's and Kathlene Berry's (2004) comment that "the bricolage highlights the relationships between a researcher's ways of seeing and the social location of his or her personal history" (p. 2) .

The bricolage metaphor has been applied to many contexts, including educational policy formation (Ball, 1998) and to teaching (Reilly, 2009). The teacher that Mary Ann Reilly describes, although based in an elementary school, has many of the characteristics of the "effective instructors" described in HFH, and is a "bricoleur":

Mr. Krantzman acts as a bricoleur by continually cobbling materials together in the course of teaching. Such intellectual activity requires flexibility and the capacity to work with what is given while being responsive to emerging understandings. (p. 376)

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed concerns that team members had with the process of doing group analysis. This was a problem for collaboration, but, according to Evelyn, it might also have contributed to a lack of rigour. She pointed out that, when the group wrote their autobiographies, her colleagues wrote about their childhood and family backgrounds a lot more than she did. In contrast, she observes, she wrote about "*where you got your training and what background did you have that enabled you to work with*

these kind of folks, and so on” (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005). She felt that, though childhood experiences were clearly connected to effective practice, the group did not analyze this connection well enough to make a clear argument. However, she did use some of the family background information to develop her chapter on beliefs and motivations. She explained:

I knew I needed to support my points from every place I could find. I felt I could prove my point from things they had said, but I didn't know if that interpretation would sit well with them. I was quite anxious, I remember, presenting this to the group members, to see what they would say when they saw my interpretation of their writing. But we didn't talk about it! Nobody responded and it was one of those meetings where we didn't have time. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

In conclusion, the group made every effort to be meticulous and rigorous in their collection and organization of data, and, with the exception of the journals, they were successful. They sometimes encountered problems at the analysis stage, and particularly when they were doing group analysis. They get gold stars for meeting Niks' second criteria for rigour—being purposeful and transparent—and I will describe that next.

Being Purposeful and Transparent

The second way that Niks says rigour can be displayed in research—being “purposeful and transparent” (p. 169) is well-represented in *Hardwired for Hope*. First, they had clearly-stated research questions and a clear description of what they would do in their proposals.

Research questions:

1. What makes literacy instructors successful or effective in their practice?
2. How does a group of literacy/ABE practitioners design and carry out a research-in-practice project?
3. What support does a group of literacy/ABE practitioners require to carry out a research project?

Description in first grant application:

A core group of literacy practitioners from around the province will work collaboratively to define and examine the concept of effectiveness as literacy practitioners. Each of the five researchers will begin with an exploration of her own professional history and influences within the context of larger social issues, events and trends. Using reflective journals, the researchers will then explore their daily practice. At this time the research will include learner input. After this documentation process, the group will synthesize the materials with the goal of describing and defining effectiveness in literacy instruction. A research report will be written on this process and the findings. (Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program of BC Grant Application, 2002/2003)

Secondly, they taped and took minutes at all their meetings and teleconferences, and kept copies of all their emails. This meant that there was rich data for the methods chapter, which clearly documents the strengths and weaknesses of the project, and explains how they arrived at their choices. For example, in this excerpt, Twiss describes concerns about their decision to drop the student interviews as a data source:

The practitioner-researchers were initially concerned about cutting the interviews with students because we clearly said we were going to interview students and it was a piece the funders were looking forward to. More importantly, we all felt that students' voices were necessary and moral in some sense; we believed that it was not appropriate to describe the field unless students' voices were also used. (Twiss, 2004, p.30)

The combination of careful data collection and storage, shared analysis, taped and minuted meetings, saved emails and detailed methods chapter adds up to a well-organized project and a transparent process, all of which provides ample evidence that the process was rigorous. It also formed a rich source of data for this dissertation—for which I will be forever grateful.

Debating the Literature Review

The *HFH* team had some discussions about whether they should include a literature review. The implied question was: Is it necessary for a systematic—read, “real”—research project? As described in Chapters One and Four, this debate about

practitioners doing literature reviews started with *Dancing in the Dark* (Niks, et al, 2003) and “The Literature Review [They] Didn’t Write.” In that chapter they explain:

As we began writing this chapter, we realized that even if we had had the resources to conduct a literature review, we would have probably directed them to a different task. While the practitioners on the team were willing to put unpaid hours into those areas that we felt would be useful “to people we care about,” the perception was that the literature review would not improve the report or the research in a way that would benefit those we were hoping to reach. It would not help establish a conversation with either adults with little formal education or adult literacy practitioners. (Niks, et al., 2003, p. 8)

This report opened the possibilities for alternative ways to frame research—ways that did not rely on literature generated in academia—and set a precedent for other practitioner research projects. They describe how they tried and failed to “establish an in-depth conversation with the literature” and decided it was not a good use of their time. The authors felt that “the role of literature in research projects that involve practitioners as researchers may be different from that of more traditional research” (p. 7), and this is supported by an observation by Bonnie Soroke, who was one of their research friends:

As a graduate student doing research, I am trained to situate myself within the current literature—to explain my position and stance, to display how my research builds upon or challenges other research, and to show through the literature, how I’ve learned about my topic. In contrast, I saw how this group used their practice and their experience in that process. (p. 9)

I asked Audrey Thomas, who supported the *Dancing in the Dark* project, how she felt about their decision. With her long experience as a researcher, I had expected her to disapprove of the decision, but she surprised me. She questioned their assessment that there was no relevant literature on the subject, but, when she compared her experience as a researcher working alone with theirs as six very experienced practitioners working collaboratively, she supported their decision.

I would have liked to have seen something there, but that's probably the traditional part of me talking. . . . A lot of the research I did on my own and I was isolated, so I needed to go to the literature to find out something about the topic and to have a conversation in my head with those readers to lay the ground so that I knew what kind of questions I wanted to ask and to see where my results of research would fit. So I needed that literature for context. But . . . they've got each other's experiences and conversations that can be . . . a substitute for the literature. Because they were from different parts of the province, they were from different settings. Why couldn't that be just as effective for providing the background for the study? Instead of literature that might have been tangentially related, they are saying here we are, this is an experience that I've had, this is what I've noted, what did you note. And that sharing, in a sense, the conversation, becomes the literature. (Audrey, interview, February 28, 2005)

The *Hardwired for Hope* team wrestled with this issue. They had all seen *Dancing in the Dark* and, like their colleagues who wrote it, they had questions about the relevance of academic research to their field. Also like the *Dancing* team, they were faced with lack of funding.⁵⁵ As Evelyn said, “We have just taken interviews with learners out of the project [due to funding cutbacks]—I would rather spend time doing that than doing a review of academic literature” (Research Team Meeting, January 22). Another issue was that, like the *Dancing in the Dark* team, they were most interested in writing for other instructors, and it was not clear that a literature review rooted in academia would help them to reach this audience. There were a number of concerns and questions related to this, which I will illustrate with excerpts from the Research Team meetings.

First, does using academic literature imply a “better” way of knowing than what we know from experience, as practitioners? In this excerpt, Jan and Marina point out that knowing as a practitioner is different from knowing as a researcher:

Jan: I make statements because it's the truth, the truth as I know it as the writer of this document, just like as the researcher, I am now going to present this as truth.

⁵⁵ This will be discussed later in this chapter.

And we can find another truth that is exactly the opposite, and if people want to take issue with it—great, let them do that . . .

Marina: You know in a different way, but a valuable way, that that is what research is. I'm not saying it's better—to stop, look at things, systematically, analyze them and that is their source of knowledge. Your source of knowledge is having worked in the field. It's a different way, and I'm not saying one is better. (Research Team Minutes, May 31 - June 6, 2004)

Secondly, do practitioners really need literature to prove a point that they already know intuitively, or from experience? Is this insulting to practitioners? As this excerpt from a team meeting shows, some HFH team members felt that it was.

Leora asked if we had a source, and Betsy offered to find a reference, to support Diana's comment that there are more women than men in literacy [Twiss, 2004. p. 22]. This generated a lot of discussion about whether it is necessary to validate claims with research, when practitioners already know it. Some felt it devalues practitioner knowledge. (Research Team Minutes, March 1-5, 2004)

If a practitioner does decide to use literature, another question is, what role should it play? Should it lead the way, or set the scene for what is researched and how it is written about, or should be used to back up the practitioner experience and ideas? This excerpt from a team meeting shows how this question played out for Leora:

Leora and Marina reported that they discussed the literature this morning and changed their minds about how she [Leora] would use literature. They realized that it is not a problem of using the literature, but of writing as if the literature is driving her writing and analysis. But when she told Marina that she had read something that excited her and she felt was supported by her experience and the interviews, M thought it was worth including. For example, a piece about neuroscience made sense to Leora because she has been doing it for years, and because the interviewees talked about breaking something into pieces. So the literature is the third leg, not the guiding light. (Research Team Minutes, March 1 - 5, 2004)

If literature is a driving force in the research, it would seem to run counter to the spirit of practitioner research, and to the team's efforts to highlight the words and ideas of instructors. In her interview, Evelyn expressed opposition to letting the literature (produced outside the field) take the lead in practitioner research, with practitioner

knowledge being presented as “a bunch of data” to elaborate a concept or theory (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005). Here she describes her attitude towards “building on the literature”:

It's real clear to me that stuff that's written sparks my thinking, I don't have any trouble with that. But you know, what you and I did, where I wrote and then you went and found some other people who wrote about the same stuff, if that's using literature then it's sort of, it's all right. If somebody is serious about wanting to go off and read some more, we gave them lots of clues about what else to read. So if I talk about [Earl Shorris⁵⁶] in relation to some of my thinking then I guess I'm building on the literature. That's a sort of intelligent thing to do as far as I'm concerned. But there's going to be very few of those, because it's only every once in a while that we come across something that really shapes our thinking.
(Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

As I have already discussed, many practitioners share Evelyn's view that literature produced outside the field is not as credible as ideas and information from other practitioners—which could be passed on in research reports, curriculum documents, workshops or online discussions. On the other hand, the team also wanted their work to be respected outside the field and here Twiss (2004) explains why:

We all knew we were embarking upon new territory, an area of research that didn't have firm rules carved out for it yet. We were fully aware that there were people watching us from the sidelines, funders and other ABE/Literacy practitioners who have engaged in research, and we wanted their support if not their approval. (p. 37)

After some debate and accommodation of personal styles and preferences, the group did not write a literature review in a separate chapter, but did incorporate literature into their chapters to support their arguments. Evelyn drafted her chapter and then she and I found literature that supported some of her ideas. Leora and Jan did their own literature searches but also called on me for additional sources, and used the literature to support their ideas. Judy used the concepts of emotional intelligence and self-directed

⁵⁶ Shorris, E. (2000). *Riches for the poor: The Clemente Course in the Humanities*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

learning (Gardner, 1983, Goleman, 1995, 1998, Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1984, 1990) as a theoretical framework for her chapter.

My original research questions for this project included one that read, “How does Research in Practice challenge or disrupt traditional ways of doing research?” and I think the literature review debate would have been included as an example of a challenge. However, I changed my research questions, and I think I have also changed my attitude towards the literature review. Because in the end, the group did write a literature review, so the debate was not really about that. It was, instead, about how literature and how theory is used, as well as how literature is positioned in relation to practitioner voices. At a research team meeting, Evelyn put it this way:

Evelyn: [W]hat I’m interested in is us saying what we have to say in our way—us being the instructors in this province—and not having us be shaped or legitimized because somebody can find something like us in the literature. (Research Team Meeting, March 2, 2003)

The practitioners ended up using the literature in a way that worked for them—individually and as a group—and hoped that it would appeal to all their audiences. Twiss (2004) describes it this way:

Ultimately, because of time constraints and personal esteem, whatever we decided, we wanted to be clear in our choice. We didn’t want to just reject the idea because we were practitioners and didn’t feel that was part of our world. We didn’t want to read material just so we could toss it in to sound like we were “in the know.” We wanted the material to resonate with us, to speak to us, to engage us. (p. 37-38)

This discussion of issues related to literature reviews ends my description of the second condition for research: a rigorous, or systematic process. The final condition, and for some, the clincher, is that the research be shared.

A Shared Process

Marina Niks argues that the third condition for research is that it is shared. The team shared their findings through presentations and workshops, online conversations and the final report. Here I will describe these three strategies, some of the successes and challenges they encountered along the way, and their thoughts about what they produced.

Presentations

The practitioners made numerous presentations to diverse groups and events. Some of these were: presentations to the Deans and Directors of BC Colleges, the Adult Education Provincial Specialists Association, the Adult Basic Education Association of BC conference, a meeting of the Fundamental Articulation Steering committee, an ISSOTL conference and the 2003 Research in Practice Institute in Newfoundland (described in Chapter Four). This one deserves special mention because it was the only one the group did out of the province. Evelyn, Diana, Marina, Bonnie and I attended. Here is part of an email Diana sent to the rest of the group from St. John's:

We had our workshop yesterday, Betsy, Evelyn and I, with Marina and Bonnie in the audience lending support. It went well if I don't mind saying so myself for there was quite a bit of interest in the topic, process and finished product (whatever and whenever that will be.) Getting lots of ideas and learning a lot, but most importantly, making new contacts and seeing old friends. Tonight we go for a Newfoundland dinner with an evening of Newfoundland entertainment. On the way we are stopping at Signal Hill to have a look at the ocean and hopefully some whales and icebergs. (Diana's email to the group, June 19, 2003)

The group also worked together to develop a participatory workshop outline that was to be used with different groups of instructors, and then each presenter could adapt it for her particular group and situation. The workshop included scenarios based on the

report and lots of opportunities for small group discussion. This is where their expertise as instructors really shone through.

I was privileged to co-present one of these workshops with Evelyn to her colleagues at the Cowichan campus of Malaspina University College in Duncan. Here is an excerpt from the email Evelyn sent to the group, with my additions in bold.

The favourite part in everyone's evaluation was the small group work. they love having time to talk to others about situations in the classroom—we were right on of course with that. (Yup, and the discussion was very animated, in both the original small groups and the jigsaw.)

We had them in groups of 3 or 4 and did the jigsaw afterwards which they really got into. As it happened, given who was there I chose not to use Judy's piece and I'm sure it would have been as popular as the others. they all raised good conversation. In the feedback, question section, I was able to use the other quotes fairly successfully although it involves a fair amount of rustling around in the overheads to find what you want. (I think Evelyn did this brilliantly—showed a very good knowledge of the report as well as of the issues raised by participants.) There were actually very few questions by that time. (I think people were more interested in discussing the issues raised for them and also were probably getting a bit tired at that point.)

The research pitch was fine—they all took a copy home. (I felt like my delivery was a bit flat and the response muted—I wished Karen had not had to leave early, because she always talks so passionately about the value of doing research. But it was also a matter of being the end of the day.) (email, Evelyn and Betsy to group, October, 30, 2005)

The “research pitch” referred to here was developed by the group to encourage workshop participants to get involved in Research in Practice. So they were not only promoting their own work, but encouraging other practitioners to follow them.

Online Conversations

The group had two opportunities to present their work online. The first one was an online course at OISE on Research in Practice in the winter of 2005. Evelyn’s and part of Diana’s chapters from *Hardwired for Hope* were required readings. During the week,

the class discussed her chapter online; Evelyn acted as a resource-person. Here is a part of a posting made by one of the students, challenging the distinction made between a “nurturing” and “political” orientation to teaching:

Hi Evelyn

When I first read your chapter, I was taken with the idea of using the terms “nurturing” and “political” to describe two perspectives, recognizing that many people (as you write) don't work solely from one or the other perspectives.

Today, as I was re-reading, I found myself being nagged by the "nurturing" term. In your discussion of that perspective, you quote one of your colleagues who said: “I feel like I have to take care of my fundamental students—I feel like they're tender, and they need to be protected and encouraged and that's part of what I'm here to do” (pp. 71-72).

This quote seems to contradict your later discussion about “ABE/Literacy students are powerful, self-determined adults with the right to make their own decisions” (p. 81). (Email, Evelyn to group, March 23, 2005)

When I checked this section of the dissertation with Evelyn, she wanted to make it clear that this was not her perspective, and for her there is no contradiction. I agree.⁵⁷ I am including this email as an example of how the research was shared and the rich discussion that the *Hardwired for Hope* report generated.

The second online conversation was offered on the Hub in 2004. The Hub has a rich history of bringing in resource people to facilitate online discussions for a given period of time. This one was planned as a five-week process, with each practitioner facilitating a conversation about an aspect of the project that she was particularly knowledgeable about. She presented a scenario from her chapter and then asked questions to get a discussion going. For example, to encourage participants to discuss their classroom practice, Jan asked, “What do you do to support the whole person in your classroom? How do you utilize and build on the experiences your students bring into the

⁵⁷ See discussion of this in Chapter 4.

classroom? What are the risks of inviting the ‘whole person’ into the classroom?” The following week, Leora asked, “Do you often intentionally put your ego aside in classroom situations? How do you do that? Do you see yourself as the primary information giver in your classroom?” To facilitate a discussion about working with colleagues, Judy asked questions such as, “Have you ever been part of working in a highly skilled emotionally intelligent environment?” and “Can you describe the ‘magic’ that can happen?”

Sixty-nine participants registered for the online conference. These were people who were not regular Hub members, so needed special clearance to join. They joined from different parts of Canada, as well as the UK and Australia. In addition, practitioners from across BC joined the conversation as part of their ongoing participation in Hub activities. In spite of a lot of interest in the topic and the project, the team was disappointed with the level of discussion. During the second week, people were feeling discouraged and Evelyn initiated an email conversation about what was going wrong. She noted that it was unusual to have such a low participation rate, and Diana made a few suggestions about drumming up business. She also noted that at one point, 22 people had read a posting. But few were actually responding.

It was generally agreed that the problem was not with the facilitation, but with the timing: people were busy and distracted by other activities. Still, it was very discouraging for the presenters. Here is an email conversation about this between Jan, who was really new to online conferences and Sandy Middleton, Literacy BC staff and Hub manager:

Jan: It is mighty disconcerting to be putting stuff out there and not having any replies.

Sandy: *Yes, I know, it's very disconcerting and you feel quite vulnerable out there!!* (Group email, April 18 2005)

These practitioners were not the first to experience the challenges and uncertainties of online conferencing. Teachers and learners alike are often frustrated because they can't see each other and "read" the mood of the group, and they also miss the opportunities for informal networking. Problems with technology are also common, particularly if participants do not have up-to-date computers: Many community programs on a tight budget cannot afford to upgrade fast enough to keep us with the latest software.

In spite of these frustrations and a steep learning curve, the *HFH* team members, true to form, were willing to jump in, put themselves out there and try a new way to teach and share information. This was not only about sharing a research project but about modelling a way of being for other would-be researchers.

The Report

The third way the group shared their work was through the report itself. This was, by many accounts, well received: The group received several messages of appreciation and a favourable review in *Literacies* magazine:

Using hope as a backdrop, this research shines a spotlight on effective instructors. This illuminating study explores the characteristics, motivations, beliefs, strategies, skills, and styles of effective ABE/Literacy instructors. (*Hardwired for Hope: Effective ABE/Literacy Instructors* review by Pat Campbell, *Literacies*, 2005, p. 43)

One measure of its popularity and use is the number of times it was downloaded from the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) site. In October 2004, the first month it was on the database, it was downloaded more times than any other document (1500 times) and it was still going strong the following March when it was downloaded 1000 times.

I think we can safely say that the group did meet the criteria of sharing their research, by making presentations and workshops, facilitating online conversations and writing a final report. It is interesting that they chose to use fairly traditional methods, rather than innovative approaches like photography, video or websites. Those things were discussed, but not pursued. Diana argues that the report format was the best approach, given the circumstances:

I really challenged myself and tried to find ways to represent what we were saying, in ways other than a report. And really, how do you illustrate effective teaching? It is one of those things that needs words, the right words, the specially thought about words to describe what that was like. There are some things that lend themselves better to illustration, photography and such.

We didn't have money for video, although that was one of the first things we talked about, way, way, before we got to the proposal stage. A video of some of the major players in BC Literacy History talking about their experiences, sort of an Opening Doors,⁵⁸ in BC. Now thinking about it, if we had deeper resources and deeper talent, we could have used poetry, or written a play and performed some of the elements. But in the end, I do believe that the words, the fact that it was carefully thought about and written down, was what we needed for the literacy field. No one had done that before and had the courage to say what constituted effective teaching. (Diana, email March 9, 2009)

Concluding Comments

I'm just absolutely fascinated to see what you write, because I have no idea what we think in common, and that will be really interesting to find out. And I think the other useful thing will be to unpack this assumption about collaborative research. I mean research is one thing; collaborative research is a whole other thing. They don't sit together so easily, so it will be useful to have that unpacked. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

In this chapter, I have tried, as Evelyn says, to unpack the two issues of collaboration and research as a way to answer the research question, “What is the nature of Practitioner Research?” In this comment, Evelyn identifies a

⁵⁸ Morgan, D. (1992). *Opening Doors: Thoughts and experiences of Literacy Workers in Alberta*. Camrose, AB: Department of Continuing Education, Augustana University College.

contradiction between the *Hardwired for Hope* research and my research: while they were fully aware of all the data that was collected for their project, they were not aware of what each other had said about the project. She also points to the challenge of conducting research collaboratively, especially when the research project has limited time and finances.

The tools we use to do research are the same, whether we are located in the university, the community or the classroom: Most importantly, we use our intellect and experience to guide a combination of techniques and approaches that are especially chosen and suited to answering certain questions. We get better at it with practice, good mentoring and lots of exposure—whether we are located in the university or the field. Mary Norton challenges the notion that university research is qualitatively different from practitioner-based research:

I think that there are assumptions that work coming out of the university is going to be qualitatively different than work coming out of the field and I would challenge those assumptions. And I think that is where some of the support comes in to, because I think the research from the field is going to be differently criticized. . . . If you are in a support position, chances are we've had more opportunities to do research and more engagement with people in a more academic research area. (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004)

It is this aspect of support that I will move to next—and last. In the next chapter, I will discuss the conditions that need to be in place—including support—for RIP to flourish and grow.

CHAPTER SEVEN: “I’M GOING ON THIS JOURNEY WITH THEM”: CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTS TO RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

Research in practice has become a way for the work of ABE/Literacy to be better understood and more effectively conducted. We recommend that funders provide support to research in practice. (Recommendations, *Hardwired for Hope*, Battell, et al., 2004, p. 208)

In this chapter I will explore the conditions that need to be in place for Research in Practice to flourish, and it seems logical to look at what the practitioners themselves have recommended. The recommendation above from the *Hardwired for Hope* report is the cornerstone: that Research in Practice (RIP) is important and should be supported. Using this as a starting point, I will discuss the things that have challenged and supported Research in Practice. Throughout the chapter, I will continue to refer to the recommendations from the report and draw on the words of the practitioner-researchers and those who support them.

Other practitioners and researchers have written about this: Horsman and Woodrow point to the “need to recognize the value of knowledge held in the field and give practitioners sufficient time and support to conduct meaningful research” (Horsman & Woodrow, 2007, p. 12). In an earlier report, Horsman and Norton (1999) describe how experienced researchers can provide support through training, mentoring, co-facilitating research circles, and co-writing research reports, as well as by doing their own research about practice. This implies a respectful give-and-take between the practitioners and researchers, but descriptions of collaborative research projects in schools and the community (Barnsley, 1995; Goldstein, 2000; Schroeder, 1997; Tierney, 2000) indicate a distinct lack of respect on the part of academics, and describe practitioners’ views that

academics are opportunistic and out-of-touch. Allison Tom and Tom Sork (1994, p. 43) note that collaborative relationships can be jeopardized by power imbalances and different reward systems. For example, the university partner is often given the role of principle researcher with control of funds. In addition, university-based researchers often feel pressured to focus on university work and publish in academic journals if they want to get ahead in their careers (Cancian, 1996; Tierney, 2000). Tom and Sork also argue that the tendency to de-legitimize each other's work is in line with attitudes towards "the other" (part of our dichotomized either/or world) and is misplaced; we should rather recognize that "the other's" knowledge actually enriches ours.

But a lot of the literature above is written from the perspective of university-based researchers, who, while collaborative, are in control of the research agenda. This is incongruent with Research in Practice as it has emerged in BC, where practitioners have developed and controlled the process. At the same time, many practitioners have found mentoring and support by a university-trained researcher to be an essential part of their research journey. Horsman and Woodrow (2007) reported that practitioners across Canada said professional development and mentoring—preferably face-to-face—was essential, and noted that "taking on research and the researcher role are intimidating. One has to develop trust and build in extensive training" (Horsman & Woodrow, 2007, p. 15). In BC, the person responsible for mentoring and organizing professional development activities in the province has been the Research Friend in collaboration with RIPAL-BC. Here Diana describes how this was helpful to the *Hardwired for Hope* project:

We really leaned and depended on you guys a lot at the beginning, you know, to help us, encourage us, move us, validate what we were exploring, all that kind of stuff. . . . It's not a hierarchical thing, but you definitely had more knowledge about research than we felt we had at that time and you had a language and a

structure or ideas about ways to put this together. But the way you and Marina did it or taught us or guided us through the process, we quickly became confident in our own ability to ask and answer research questions. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

Other kinds of support have been written about and are confirmed by the *Hardwired for Hope* experience. According to Horsman and Woodrow (2007) a starting point should be more stable support for the ABE/Literacy programs where the practitioners work. Their list of items that need to be in place to support RIP starts with funding for all aspects of RIP and includes support for awareness raising, reflective practice as a precursor to RIP, research training, mentors, dissemination of research reports, networks, gatherings and resources. Along with others (Horsman & Norton, 1999; Jackson, 2004; Niks, et al., 2003), they argue that time needs to be freed up for practitioners to carry out research. Shifferraw and Burton (2008) found that the ABE teacher-researchers they worked with in Washington DC were “overburdened with their regular work and the demand of the research activities” (p. 112). Finally, while all of these are important, it is all for naught if the information falls on deaf ears (or ears that do not have time to listen):

It is wasteful when essential stages in the RIP process are neglected so that practitioners are inadequately prepared at the beginning, or unable to access, read, or reflect on the completed research. It is also wasteful if the field does not have the flexibility to change, to make improvements as a result of research findings. (Horsman & Woodrow, 2007, p. 13)

The literature, the *Hardwired for Hope* recommendations and the data I have collected all seem to point to three conditions that will support and nourish the Research in Practice movement, both in terms of what is in place, what is not in place and what could be in place. These conditions are:

- recognizing and valuing practitioners as researchers

- support for practitioners doing research and
- the development of a research-in-practice culture

As I will show in my discussion, the first two conditions need to be in place before the third one, but at the same time, the third condition, a Research in Practice culture, will support the first two. I will begin with the first condition.

Recognizing or Challenging Practitioners as Researchers

I really saw that we were pioneers in this, that it was up to us to make sense of it in a way that worked for us and worked in our world. . . . that's the responsibility that we were charged with. And we were going to be judged. The first level of judgment was us and our literacy world, and then hopefully it would make sense to other worlds and they would find value and respond. . . . I want them to see this and to value it, to find a richness that works for them, to read our methods and our approach, look at our data analysis, get new ideas and go in different directions. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

When the team set out to do this research, they wanted to document and celebrate the work and thinking of long-term Literacy/ABE instructors. These instructors were their primary audience, because, as Diana says above, this is their world. But she also expresses a hope that others share, and indeed that any new researcher shares, wherever she is based: that their work will be accepted by other worlds as well—in particular by university-based researchers and other professionals. When the report came out, it was largely met with approval, but before and during the project, the response from other worlds fell into two camps: those who approved, celebrated and supported their work and those who were more critical. (You will meet members of both groups in my descriptions below.) These mixed responses are linked to a central issue in research in practice: attitudes towards who has the right to do research and whose ideas have value.

My discussions with the practitioners taught me that the recognition comes in three forms: self-recognition, recognition by peers in the field, and recognition from outside the field. I will look at each of these.

Self-recognition: I am a Researcher!

When I asked Leora if she had participated in a research project prior to *Hardwired for Hope*, she said:

On an official level, I would say no. I've never been asked to do a research project. However, when we were doing the English course . . . I was asked to be a writer. And so I did a ton of reading about reading. And so inadvertently, I think I did do research, and it culminated in a course. Not in research. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

With this comment Leora shows that she found it difficult to think of herself as a researcher and several RIP reports show that she is not alone (for example, Battell, 2001; Horsman & Woodrow, 2007; Niks, et al., 2003). Without this self-recognition it would be difficult to expect recognition by others. In her work with practitioner-researchers in Alberta, Mary Norton found there was a shift with experience:

The whole thing about identity, I think, shifted for people over time. So as they did the research, they were able to start naming themselves as a researcher. . . . I think at first they wouldn't have or didn't . . . but by the end of their engagement . . . some of them clearly remember saying, you know, "I am a researcher." One of them came back from the Newfoundland conference and she still had her writing to do. . . . She said she put a little sticky on her computer saying, "I am a researcher." I think that was a struggle but by the end there was more a sense that, yes they could do this stuff. (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004)

These practitioners, according to Mary, did not say, "I am a practitioner-researcher." The practitioner part is a given. Like the practitioners in BC, these Alberta practitioners have a lot of experience as instructors, facilitators and administrators of ABE programs, so their identity as practitioners was not in question. But they were less secure, in the beginning, about being researchers, and I wondered if the *HFH* team members had a similar experience and a similar shift in identity. To find out, I asked two questions: What was your view of research before you joined the project? (Has this changed?) And, How did it feel to take on the role of researcher?

Diana did not talk about a shift. For her, “It was frightening. It was exciting. It was an adventure,” which she is keen to repeat. For Jan, there was apprehension when she started the project about whether she had what it took to be a researcher. She worried that

maybe it takes a special kind of mind to really analyze and critique and that kind of stuff. . . . Because I, quite honestly, bought into the myth too, that there are only certain kinds of people that can do research and they have big words you know, full of double meaning. And can I get below the surface to really pull it out and chew on it and break it apart and then write about it? (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

But this attitude changed as the project progressed. When she had completed the analysis for her part of the project, the writing went smoothly for her—in fact, unlike many practitioner-researchers (including this one) she said the writing was “fun.”

For Leora, who was sometimes critical of a process that was evolving at the same time as the project was, it was interesting to become comfortable with that process, and satisfying to gain confidence as a researcher:

I’m always interested in demystifying things, right? And the same thing happened in art school. There are ways that people know how to do this stuff. (chuckles) And well, you could learn them too! So that was the shift. I’m not saying I’m a PhD . . . but I definitely held my own and now know that I can do that. And research . . . has been demystified. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

Because Evelyn had had a lot of research experience there wasn’t really a shift in her thinking.

It’s not so much I was comfortable with it, because most of what I was involved in, I wasn’t THE RESEARCHER [emphasis in the original], I was just part of an advisory team. I mean, Jenny⁵⁹ had always told me I was a researcher as much as she was a researcher, but I never took her seriously. Because I never had to write it, I never had to do a literature search, I never had to do any of those things she

⁵⁹ Jenny Horsman, with whom Evelyn has worked on several projects, has researched and written extensively on Violence and Learning (Horsman, 1996, 1998, 2000) and Research in Practice (Horsman & Norton, 1999; Horsman & Woodrow, 2007).

did. When Marina suggested at the beginning that we might find doing research intimidating (that wasn't her term) I didn't have the sense to be concerned about being a researcher. I thought, OK, so I'm going to learn some new things and I'll do them and I'll fight some of them and I'll like others of them. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

So the extent to which there was an identity shift varied from person to person.

Sometimes the practitioner-researchers had been honing their research skills for other purposes—for example, both Leora and Jan talked about doing research in order to develop curriculum. They didn't always recognize it as research. Often practitioners do not recognize that they already have research skills. For example, in an early draft of the Methods chapter, Diana made the following comment:

The coding was tricky for us initially because we had no experience of the process of synthesizing our words into general concepts. (Draft Methods chapter, *HFH*, p. 23)

Evelyn responded: “I have experience of that. That is an activity that one does, it is not just for coding research” (Team meeting, April 6, 2004). Diana agreed, and changed the passage to read:

The coding was tricky for us initially because we had no experience with this research analysis strategy. (Twiss, p. 33)

Recognition in the Field

We hope that this research document opens up a way of seeing or gives new insight into what many of you experience daily in your work lives. We would like it to serve as a testament to what many of us have seen as our life work and as a legacy for future ABE/Literacy instructors to read and ponder. (Battell, et al, 2004, p. 1)

In this final paragraph to the “Letter to the Reader” on the first page of *Hardwired for Hope* the practitioner-researchers make it very clear that they are writing for other practitioners in the field. They want to celebrate, document and interrogate their peers' work in a way that would form a legacy for those who followed. And because of the

team's respect for their colleagues in the field, they were extremely careful about how they represented other practitioners. Jan describes the effect this had on her:

Once I had a bit of an understanding about what we might be doing, I was always concerned about taking information from colleagues and saying that they were saying something that perhaps they weren't saying. That always concerned me and that was something that I voiced, often, throughout. [But] knowing that we had promised and that we would give the words back for people in a context, so that they could see how their words were being used, that certainly lessened my anxiety a lot, because I never wanted to misrepresent. I think that for me was the big thing. I didn't want to misrepresent. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

I wondered to what extent this respect was reciprocated. Clearly, members of the *HFH* team were respected in the field as practitioners, but did other practitioners recognize them as researchers and value the contribution they were making? I did not survey the field for this information, but there is evidence that their work was noticed and appreciated. For example, they had to do a re-print of the report to meet demand, their report was downloaded a number of times from the NALD site, the report was reviewed in the *Literacies* journal and they were invited to do workshops or be resource-people (all discussed in Chapter Six). According to Audrey Thomas the field has responded enthusiastically to RIP:

I think the field has been excited, or that's the feedback I've got or picked up anyway, about seeing the products that have come out and being able to relate to them. It's not just the collaborative ones which may be where we've got the bigger snazzier report, so to speak, but there have been, you know, there have been practitioners across the province that have worked on their own in their own little situation and produced reports and so on. (Audrey, interview, February 28, 2005)

Recognition from Outside the Field

In 1991, Nelly Stromquist (1991) described a gap between academics and practitioners involved in adult literacy; the research questions that interested them were

“markedly different” and they had different assumptions regarding the nature, distribution, uses and potential of literacy. This meant that there was very little overlap between research interests and that “the two groups continue to act independently, with limited mutual support” (p. 3). She also laments:

The differences could be mutually enriching, yet the contributions that have been made by the two groups have not been communicated to each other. (p. 4)
Seventeen years later, what has changed? By some accounts, the gap is still there.

In their discussion paper on practitioner research, the Canadian Council on Learning (2008) reports a growing interest among academics in working in communities, but also notes that this usually happens when “academics decide that something in the world of the practitioner might add to the theoretical knowledge of the discipline” (p. 5). They also describe a gap between academic and practitioner research, and indeed between theory and practice:

Traditionally, practitioner research has been undervalued in the academy; it has been felt that it lacks rigour, since most community-based practitioners are not trained in research methods, and seldom work from a theoretical base. At the same time, many practitioners feel that academic research is elitist, inaccessible and isolated from their day-to-day practice. (p. 2)

Zeichner and Noffke (2001) describe similar academic criticisms of practitioner research and argue that it has to do with the criteria used for judging: Practitioner research “should be evaluated with criteria that overlap with, but that are somewhat different from, those used to assess the trustworthiness of academic educational research” (p. 299), and point out that how one judges “trustworthiness” will depend on who does the judging.

Speaking personally, I might judge research from two perspectives. As an academic, I might look at how finely crafted the argument is, how the research builds on

other research and how it links to theory. This could include the soundness of its theoretical framework, the way the writer builds on theoretical literature, and the theory that is generated as a result of the study. However, when I am wearing my practitioner hat, I regularly scour the internet, curriculum documents and professional journals for information and ideas that can help me to solve particular educational problems or develop new projects. Like my colleagues in the field, I look for research that is useful to the field (which may or may not include theory), and that links to practice (Niks, et al., 2003).

The two different ways of judging research described here reflect the fact that academic and practitioner research reaches out to two different audiences and strives to fulfill different purposes. But the reality is that academic research is usually considered to be superior and definitely has more influence. As a result, it is more likely to affect policy-development and to attract funding.

The *HFH* team hoped that their research would be broadly accepted, but they did indeed find that they were judged differently by different audiences. Here I will relate three ways that they found they were indeed differently criticized—not for what they had written, but at the earlier stages, for what they planned to do. There were three occasions when the *HFH* team was forced to address challenges from outside the field: when they wrote and negotiated funding proposals, when they defended their choice to use autobiographies as data and when one team member faced her ethics review board.

Funding Proposals

We found some funders did not accept research proposals in a non-academic style. We recommend that if those outside the universities are to do research, funders be prepared to accept proposals and reports in practitioners' language and style. (Recommendations, *Hardwired for Hope*, Battell, et al., 2004, p. 209)

This recommendation is phrased quite diplomatically, barely hinting at the struggles the practitioners went through to get their research proposal approved. The project was funded jointly by the National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada (NLS-HRD) and the BC Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) through their cost-shared program. Once that proposal was approved, the team was able to get matching funding from the Vancouver Foundation, but the process of getting that first proposal approved was arduous—and in the end they did not get all the money they had applied for.

When the proposal was submitted for comment, funders requested a substantial re-write. There was a point at which the group decided to give up, after receiving an email with a lot of questions and criticisms that would have steered the project in a direction that conflicted with the team's vision. These criticisms came from national staff, who, as Marina explained in an email, wanted a research framework and a literature review. It was suggested that they look at the literature on "Master Teachers," best practices and the like. In an email to the group, Audrey Thomas explained that, for such a substantial amount of money, funders required a clear idea of what they would get when the project was over.

The team acknowledges "Audrey Thomas for her vision and endurance in ensuring the project went ahead" (Acknowledgements page), and indeed Audrey's support was crucial. For example, she was able to find money for the team to meet once to plan the project and draft the proposal. But this project also needed approval at the federal level, and that is where most of the criticism came from. As a result, Marina Niks

and Bonnie Soroke agreed to re-write the proposal, adding the academic language and the references to literature that the funders asked for. Marina recalls:

They [the practitioners] thought that they had put together a good proposal, . . . some of the questions that they were asked to write about were interesting ones, but the funders wanted more academic presentation. . . . But that's what we have to deal with when we are applying to these funders. That's fine, that's the name of the game. But Evelyn was just ready to let go, anyway. So when Audrey said no, I think it should go, Bonnie and I wrote that proposal. Bonnie did the literature, sent it to me, I wrote, sent it to Bonnie, Bonnie wrote. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

In addition, the group got support letters from several people who were nationally and internationally recognized as university-trained researchers and leaders or supporters of RIP, as well as from a college president and the chair of Adult Basic Education Association of BC, a partner in the project. Some of these letters will be discussed below under “Defending the Autobiographies.”

The criticisms and demands were confusing given that previous RIP projects had not been subject to them (for example, Battell, 2001; Niks, et al., 2003). Some team members thought they were not just criticizing the research approach, but that there were deeper political issues at stake. Here are excerpts from two emails about this.

I can't help thinking that this response has more to do with the emerging news from the provincial government than it has to do with us and what we have submitted. The flavour of the month has changed. (Judy, email, January 27, 2002)

I think we challenge them [government bureaucrats and the then new government] because we do this classroom thing year after year and they don't. Most of all I think they know that our findings will be pretty potent in a direction not wanted by the new government. The new government doesn't want to know that good instructors succeed because they help people struggle for their rights and a decent life. (Evelyn, email, January 28, 2002)

As describe in Chapter Three, funding for adult literacy has changed over the years as has the process for obtaining it—often at the whim of the government of the day. Horsman and Woodrow (2007) describe how practitioners talked about “government fads that shaped literacy programming while deep knowledge, developed through diligent, long-term observation in practice, was discounted” (p. 12).

The research team often discussed this issue, commonly referring to it as “flavour of the month.” For example, these two comments were made at a Research Team meeting:

Evelyn: There’s now money to get together and do research the way there used to be money to do workshops. Like those instructors in Alberta are getting together to do research on their practice and getting money, that seems to be the Professional Development way. That’s where the interest is.

Jan: I see it too, money seems to be going in to Family Literacy now, that’s the THING, then it’s workplace. So is RIP the thing now? In 2 years when your dissertation comes out, will this be blasé? (Research Team Meeting, April 15-17, 2003)

Whatever the reason, the end result was that the practitioner-researchers felt frustrated and disrespected. Twiss notes that some team members were “insulted that we were encouraged and even courted to engage in practitioner research, but we had to make it look like ‘academic’ research in order to get funded” (Twiss, p. 15). In an email to the group, Diana writes,

Remember, we are literacy instructors, not researchers. They need to cut us a bit of slack here and be a little more encouraging, like a good literacy instructor would. (Diana, email, January 27, 2002)

Another difficult fund-raising experience was when they agreed to participate in an application to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) with two university-based allies, Shauna Butterwick from UBC and JoAnne Fisk, then at University of Northern BC. These women were interested in collaborating with the group

on a project that would examine the policy implications of the *Hardwired for Hope* research. When Shauna and Jo met with the research team, some exciting possibilities were discussed:

Jo: As you spoke this morning, I wrote a long list of policy implications related to your work. Our role would be to do some policy analysis related to what you say, bring it back you for consideration. One of our tasks is to write in academic journals. Or we could decide which journals you want to write for and other non-academic media as well.

Shauna: Why not disrupt the traditional way of doing reports? Write stories about real people. Jo and I can say, “This is what this means for policy.”

Leora: I believe this is part of creating a legacy to share with younger people in the field. Show how our practice changed in response to policy to change.

Shauna: That kind of documentation of things you already know within your bodies and your minds is really important. (Research Team Meeting, October 22, 2002)

I experienced this meeting as a gathering of equals. The fact that two university professors were interested in working with the team and applying for a SSHRC project shows that there was respect in that corner. And the practitioners were open to, even enthusiastic about getting involved, as long as the research was done on their terms and they would get financial support for their project. But the structure they were forced to fit into did not make room for or respect the RIP process. At the time, SSHRC required that the principal investigator and co-investigators be based in a university and the funding had to be administered by the university.⁶⁰ Also, funding would pay for a university-based research assistant (a graduate student) but not for the practitioners to attend meetings and work on the research. So it would not solve their funding problem. Finally, that the fact that the university-based researchers would be required to write in academic journals—which many practitioners do not read or trust—raises questions about how useful such a project would really be to the practitioners and their field.

⁶⁰ “Applying for Funding” SSHRC website http://www.sshrc.ca/web/apply/background/definitions_e.asp#1

For Marina, there was a deeper problem about working with SSHRC. She was concerned that the project remain a practitioner research project, and was worried that this would change if the group got involved with SSHRC:

I don't think I was able to articulate what my problem was until later when we were on the phone (and I used that quote in my dissertation). I think it was Judy who said, I don't care who does the research. And for me it was like, "OK, I do." But at the same time, I don't know if Judy would say the same thing today because it's like understanding that research is not just a process that anyone can do and you start at the same place and you finish with the same result. It's an understanding of what's involved in doing research and how much you as a researcher shape it. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

SSHRC approved but did not fund the project, so that aspect of the project never materialized. However, the fact that their project was under consideration at SSHRC made college administrators take interest, and Evelyn noted a change in attitude towards her when she brought money and recognition to the college, and how practitioners' status in general could improve when they did research:

I think that it's a way for ABE instructors to get some status that is grounded in the field, is to have done some research on their practice. And at the moment, there's no way to get any status in this business, other than to get yourself onto provincial and federal committees or to become an administrator, those are the two routes, and the first one is only impressive to a few people. I mean credentials at this point mean nothing. Some colleges insist on you having a degree in the subject you are teaching, which is a really narrow-minded way of going about things. I mean S (a colleague) does not have a math degree and he's an absolutely brilliant math instructor. Not because he learned math at university. (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

But the extent to which the colleges recognize ABE instructors as researchers was uneven: Leora said there was little interest in research at her college. "I'm the only one. No one knows [or cares] what I'm doing" (Research Team meeting, April 15-17, 2003).

These experiences, and the one described in the next section, show that there are ways of working as equals across institutions and across fields, but the structures that govern research do not necessarily value practitioners' ways of knowing and ways of

communicating. As a master's student who also worked with adult literacy practitioners, Bonnie could see the uneven recognition. She observed:

Because of my role as a master's student and the way I had to write, that it would have more influence than if a practitioner wrote it and came up with the same kind of conclusions. But it would have been in a different format because I had to be pushed to do it in a certain way. (Bonnie, interview, September 13, 2004)

Defending the Autobiographies

Twiss identifies three reasons for using autobiographies: to describe how early influences had led them to become effective instructors, to capture the rich ABE/Literacy history that her four team-mates had lived through and shaped, and to allow their voices to be heard.

We were interested in articulating the stories about coming to ABE/ Literacy and what we found there. The assumption we worked with is that there is something in our lives, how we became who we are, and how we interpret the world around us, that can lead to answers to the question about effective practice, and hence to effective instructors. (Twiss, 2004, p. 25)

This seems sensible, and in keeping with feminist research which is “based on the premise that the experience of all human beings is valid and must not be excluded from our understandings” (Reinharz, 1992). Ellis and Bochner (2000) say that it is common for feminist researchers to bring in a personal story, explain their connection to the project, or use personal knowledge, thus incorporating their personal standpoint.

However, while autobiographies proved to be a rich and interesting stage of the research, some people had to be persuaded that it was a valid strategy: starting with the practitioner-researchers themselves.

For this project, I think that the practitioners didn't think that it was a valid strategy. . . . They didn't want to do research on themselves. They said, Can we do that? (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

Next, they had to convince the funders. One program manager, in particular, felt that conducting autobiographies would be “self-indulgent” and that too much time had been allotted to that stage. She also said she was “*very uncomfortable with the focus on personal qualities and social background, and that social background should have nothing to do with good teachers*” (Email from Marina to the group).

In fact, practitioners were able to make clear links between their social backgrounds and their teaching experience and I discussed that in the previous chapter. But that was not the only purpose of the autobiographies. Evelyn explains in this early email to the group:

If we don't do autobiographies we are left with trying to figure out what makes us effective - we couldn't define it at dinner that night - we said “authenticity,” “belief in human spirit” “learner centered” “political understanding of economic, social gendered, racial reality,” “are all from the 70's,” etc. . . . How will we come up with themes or threads? That's what the autobiographies were for. (Email from Evelyn to group)

To arm themselves for the fight, they collected letters from educators and researchers who were nationally and internationally respected in their field and in turn had enormous respect for the group and the approach they had chosen. For example, Pierre Walter from UBC commented in his letter that the approach “shows their commitment first to reflecting on their own professional experience as teachers,” and Mary Norton wrote that autobiographical research “values the examination of personal experience in social contexts.” Jenny Horsman wrote:

I was delighted to see that the practitioner-researchers are proposing to use the life history method as a key investigative tool. I believe this underutilized (though well supported as an important new direction in ethnography, see for example Denzin's work) is an extremely rich tool for exploring complex interwoven, and perhaps almost invisible, elements. I think it is also an excellent choice, as it will draw on the researchers' well-developed skills as reflective, thoughtful and analytical practitioners, enabling these experienced practitioners to move quickly into a role as skilled researchers. From this place of strength they will then be able to move to learning practices of interviewing and data analysis in a research context. (Jenny Horsman, letter of support, January 31, 2002)

With this support, their own determination and some very persuasive writing, they won the battle and were able to make a rich contribution to the project with their autobiographical writing.

Facing The Ethics Review Board

We should not give up on this. It is about doing research with people who are marginalized in their community, and we should continue to go with it. This is a political process, having to do with status, etc. Their arrogant attitude and incompetence is data! (Email from Jan Sawyer to group)

Jan Sawyer applied to her college ethics committee for permission to interview students she had taught. In the end, this part of the research was dropped, so the application process could have faded into history like pages of unused notes. However, the excerpt from Jan's email above shows that the process was important to the whole team, and raises issues that are central to practitioner research. For that reason, I want to explore it in some detail here.

At an early teleconference, Jan reported that her application had been sent back with requests for changes. Okanagan University College had been setting up an ethics committee for about two years because they had recently become a university college.⁶¹

Up to that time, most if not all of the research that had been considered was conducted by

⁶¹ In 1989, Okanagan became Okanagan University College, and then in 2005 it split into two institutions: UBC-Okanagan and Okanagan College.

faculty in the university, so the application from an ABE instructor was new to them. They expressed three kinds of concerns, which I will discuss here: ethical, methodological and political.

The committee expressed concern on an ethical level about confidentiality and the risk that the ABE students Jan planned to interview might be academically threatened. These were issues the group was fully prepared to address. They were extremely conscious of power issues in and outside of the classroom, and Evelyn writes about this in her chapter (Battell, 2004, pp. 76-77). They were also very careful about making sure the research would not be exploitative. However, they felt strongly that they had a different relationship with learners than their colleagues who taught at the university level and would do a more effective and sensitive job of interviewing than an outsider who didn't know the students. This was something Jan was prepared to fight for:

Certain things I would not do though, and that was one of them. And that's why I offered to go and speak to them because they wanted me to go to another campus and interview students, and that was one of those battles I was willing to take on. And I went in and I spoke to the reason why. It was interesting. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

The committee also challenged the methods the team had chosen, feeling that it would not lead to "hard data." Here Jan described the reaction of an anthropologist on the committee:

I don't feel that he felt that what we were gathering was hard data. . . . Because I don't think he valued stories, which I think is interesting, because I would think in anthropology that's a key for so many . . . Well, I feel it should be. It wasn't seen as hard data, but soft and cuddly. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

The third concern, and the one that was met with anger and resentment in the team, was a political one: basically questioning an ABE teacher's right to do research. This was discussed at length in teleconferences and meetings, and I provide one excerpt from the

minutes here:

They [members of the ethics committee] were dismissive and arrogant. They questioned Marina's role and did not recognize Jan as a primary investigator. . . . Jan noted that her dean is supportive, but the committee is composed of people with a very traditional/scientific approach to research. Their nose is out of joint—"Who does she think she is?" (Teleconference minutes, December 17, 2002)

These questions about Jan's role and her "right" to conduct research show a lack of confidence in ABE teachers as researchers. The review board's need to specify a primary researcher (preferably with a PhD) demonstrates that the college was not ready to support practitioner research. In a collaborative practitioner research project, there is no principle researcher and experience in the field is more important than paper qualifications.

The *HFH* team discussed ideas for dealing with the issue. Suggestions included: finding people within the college who could provide political and academic support, providing references to support the methodology used, and sending them the cost-shared (or SSHRC) proposal to give a larger picture. They also discussed the possibility of avoiding the committee by working with students who were no longer in the college or interviewing students elsewhere. It was noted that, "People in college who value ABE don't necessarily influence ethics committees who are so tied into 'rigorous' research" (Teleconference minutes, December 17, 2002).

In the end, what worked was personal contact and perseverance. Jan was asked to re-submit with a lot of changes, and she worked with Marina to do this. She chose a tactic that would probably be impossible in a university situation: She requested, and was eventually granted, a meeting with the committee. This reflected her belief that "*they are*

just like us” (Jan, interview, February 15, 2005) and also Jan’s preference for, and skill at, face-to-face, colleague-to-colleague negotiation.

To my amazement, Jan described this process as a “wonderful learning experience” and in the end, she “appreciated the opportunity.” However, in spite of the positive outcome, she came away with a strong sense that her work was not respected.

I mean, I almost sensed that, “Now, now, isn’t that cute?” . . . I sensed that, and perhaps I’m feeling defensive a bit, but I felt that they were trying desperately to prove themselves and that they were as good as a university. . . . would our project taint them? (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

She was also not impressed with the committee’s efficiency: Although she met every deadline they imposed, they often did not respond when they said they would. At first, she blamed it on the inter-campus mail system. A few phone calls revealed that the committee “just didn’t get to it.” Was this another indication that the research was not valued, or just a group of people throwing their power around?

Jan and I were both left wondering why the committee eventually accepted the proposal. Perhaps it was due to her persistence—or perhaps because they felt the research was too insignificant to worry about:

And quite frankly, why did they pass it? I think that’s an interesting question. Did they because they just thought, “You know, . . . it’s not going to make any difference. This is so insignificant. She’s making so much noise. She’s calling the office every other day. Let’s just (whispers) get rid of her!” I would imagine that that might have been why they gave me a pass. They didn’t see it as a great threat, so after they had finally talked about it, asked for changes, I had made the changes. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

This section on recognition has largely focussed on the extent to which practitioner-researchers were recognized or valued for their knowledge and their research efforts. In the next section, I will look at what supports need to be in place so that the recognition can be linked to effective research.

Support for Practitioners Doing Research

ABE/Literacy instructors engaging in research need time to collect, analyze and write their findings. Therefore, ABE/Literacy instructors engaged in research need to be recognized as researchers. We recommend they be given the same time and support that academic researchers in their institutions receive to do their projects. (Recommendation, *Hardwired for Hope*, Battell, 2004, p. 206)

In Chapter Five, I noted that the process of conducting research is similar, whether it is done by a seasoned academic professional, a new grad student or an ABE instructor. The recommendation quoted here supports that idea: First, practitioner-researchers need to be recognized as researchers, and I have discussed that in the previous section. Once that is in place, they need time and support so that they can do research, and that is what I will discuss in this section, starting with a discussion of issues related to money and time and then looking at mentoring and professional development, with a special focus on the BC “Research Friend.”

Time and Money

[T]hey didn't have the time to do it . . . And it was very hard to find money, because they are expensive. Because they have seniority, they have very good jobs, and all of that. It's very hard to pay. . . . We have to be very careful that we don't price ourselves out with research in practice. And that's a challenge.
(Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

Like any other researchers, practitioners need time—time that is often not available to them for research because their job descriptions say they are teachers. In the previous chapter, I discussed how the collaborative process broke down at times, a problem that most team members attributed to lack of time. Marina supports this idea, and in the quote above, she points out that practitioner research can be expensive if

practitioners are to be paid what they are worth.⁶²

Horsman and Norton (1999) argue that working conditions and attitudes do not encourage practitioners to participate in research or think of themselves as researchers. Indeed, at a 2002 pre-conference on Research in Practice in Adult Literacy (RiPAL) in Vancouver, it was agreed that the practitioners who have successfully completed research projects can attribute their success to three things: a reasonable amount of financial support, good mentoring and/or team support and their own extraordinary dedication (Smythe & Soroke, 2003). Lack of time was a big reason the women who wrote *Dancing In the Dark* (Niks, et al., 2003) chose not to write a literature review. When I interviewed Mary Norton six years after she had completed the 1999 *Framework* (Horsman & Norton, 1999), she had completed three RIP projects and was planning another. She said practitioner-researchers face the same issues, “*except that I am more aware of how much time it really does take, and that generally it never gets paid for*” (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004).

The first step in most research projects, and one that seldom gets paid for, is the preparation of a funding proposal. In a university setting, professors do this as part of their job and it is factored into their job description. Likewise, in many workplaces, practitioners have time allocated in their job descriptions to write funding proposals. At my current workplace, many of us write proposals for annual grants such as the Community Adult Literacy Projects, and an instructor is assigned the job of supporting and coordinating this work. But the same is not necessarily true for practitioners writing research proposals. In an email to the group, Mary Norton suggested that there be a

⁶² Some university-colleges have special funds to give instructors release time to do research, but this option was not discussed by the group.

“phase one” to work on the proposal and wondered if “*the group has had time/support to work on the proposal or if it’s all being done in ‘free’ time*” (email, Mary Norton to Evelyn Battell, February 3, 2002). I am afraid it is the latter: Although Audrey Thomas was able to find money to support a preliminary meeting, the team, especially Evelyn, put many hours into writing and negotiating before any money was delivered.⁶³

As discussed in Chapter Five, all of the practitioners on the team had a lot of experience writing funding proposals and project reports. They do this well, and are able to find money in many different corners to support the innovative work they do. But, except for those who had done master’s degrees, they did not have a lot of experience writing research reports. So it was a surprise to them that funders did not accept a first draft of the *Hardwired for Hope* funding proposal because it was not framed in academic language. This, as Twiss argues, is an unreasonable demand, given that practitioners do not come from that world. She states, “Another alternative is potential funders realizing that quality research can come from proposals written by practitioners, from their practical perspective” (Twiss, p. 16).

Fund-raising was an ongoing struggle for this group. When the team heard that the National Literacy Secretariat and Vancouver Foundation would only give them half of what they had applied for to do the research, a sigh was almost audible over the internet. This was old news, another battle, and some wondered whether it was worth fighting. As Jan said,

⁶³In university, much time is also spent with sometimes no reward.

Quite frankly, my initial impulse is to say “forget it.” Who has the time or energy to look for further funds? Most of us have been fighting the “funding” battle for years within and outside our institutions, and this year has been one of the worst. (Teleconference, March 11, 2003)

The structure they eventually arrived at was very cumbersome, as Twiss explains:

This project was being administered out of three funding agencies and two community groups, and four colleges were involved in submitting bills and receiving payments. We operated on two different funding years, one a calendar year and one a school year. The two major funders had somewhat different interests in the project and, consequently, we researchers were coping with two sets of expectations. The allotted time for the coordinator was inadequate to dealing with this many players and this many expectations. (Twiss, 2004, p. 22)

This description of the structure gives some idea of the complexity of this project, and the stress placed on the coordinator whose job it was to make sure there was enough money and that the money was accounted for. The practitioner-researchers have a recommendation about that:

The role of the coordinator was vital to keep everyone on track, and to take care of the many details that are involved in research projects. We recommend that funding include adequate money for a coordinator’s position to make the role effective. (Recommendations, Hardwired for Hope, Battell, et al., 2004, p. 209)

Evelyn worked extremely hard to raise funds because, as she said, “*My concern has always been that practitioners get paid to do research*” (Evelyn, email, March 9, 2005). She succeeded to the extent that the *HFH* team were paid the same salary as they received for their work as instructors. As senior, unionized instructors this was very good money: \$60/hour in 2004. But this was also something that made fundraising difficult. As Marina explains, it would be unheard of for researchers to get this kind of money in academic settings. The university professor’s salary (which is admittedly a hidden cost), is paid by the university, but does not come out of a grant and research assistants at UBC are currently paid \$22 - \$25/ hour, plus benefits.

So if I worked in a funding agency that didn’t get the whole practitioner research

very well, I would say, “Here are people who have the expertise, they are training other people to do research, they can do the project in a year and deliver the product. Why am I going to spend three times at least the price to do it with people who are not researchers, who might not get it done?” . . . and because literacy practitioners have fought so hard to get to the point where they are at (in terms of job security and pay), they don’t want to let it go. And I completely see that, but in the world of research, that’s not how people get paid. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

In Alberta, Mary Norton was able to raise money to pay practitioner-researchers an hourly rate as well, but the practitioner-researchers were based in community programs where the pay was \$20/hour or less a the time. This is the same rate as community-based practitioners in BC, which adds another layer of complexity to the problem. If there were community-based practitioner-researchers and college-based practitioners working collaboratively on the same project, would they make different salaries?

Even within our research team, there were 3 levels of salary: the practitioner-researchers were making \$60/hour, Marina as Research Friend was making \$25-35/hour and Bonnie and I were working for free. There is some justice to this: The practitioner-researchers were the most senior in terms of years on the job and held a lot of expertise on the topic of our research. Still, it was a source of concern for some of the practitioners:

I struggled throughout the whole thing with us being paid—us being the five researchers—the amount of money that we were and Marina being paid, you know from this pocket and this pocket, and I don’t know how much she got paid but I know she didn’t get very much, and you and Bonnie didn’t get anything. To me we were doing exactly what we are saying is being done in universities—setting up two different stratas. And I sure would recommend that if people had the luxury of getting funding and if there is someone helping them, that they are paid, I felt a lot of discomfort with that. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

I entered the project with my eyes open and still feel fine about it because I learned a lot and had an amazing project to write about for my PhD. However, the work I

did in documenting their process and providing assistance with research was a hidden cost that would need to be factored into other projects.

Another way to pay practitioner-researchers is to provide a stipend for participating in research. Participants in the RiPP project⁶⁴ received a lump sum of \$3000 and in an Alberta project practitioners received \$3500 each. This is easier to raise funds for. But Marina admitted that the practitioners did not get enough money to actually pay for all the hours they worked. So unless they are doing it on top of their regular job, they would lose money.

According to Marina, the ideal situation would have practitioners taking time out of the classroom to do research. It would be possible to do data collection while at work, especially because they are doing research on some aspect of their practice. But for the analysis and writing, it would be much easier if they could have stretches of time outside the classroom. Marina points out that

Writing just stretches them so far from what they are used to doing. Even if they are good writers and they enjoy writing, this is different kind of writing. It's a completely different place to go and writing is analysis. So they need that time. And one day a week doesn't do it, two hours a week doesn't do it, I'm thinking like a term off. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

In addition to being paid fairly for their work as researchers, practitioners need practical and logistical support: travel to meetings, accommodation when they are away from home, technological support in the form of teleconferencing, access to email and online conferencing and, of course, administrative support. In some cases, training in grant and proposal writing would be useful. These were all things the practitioners agreed were important. But when I asked them what kind of support they most needed to do

⁶⁴ Researchers in Practice Project, the project Marina worked on after she completed *Hardwired for Hope*, described in Chapter 3

research, the first thing most of them mentioned was the Research Friend. That is what I will discuss in the next section.

Mentoring and Education: The Research Friend

In the previous section, I discussed the structures and financial constraints that most people doing practitioner research have to work within—including the mentors, coordinators and Research Friends that work with the practitioners. Given those structures and constraints, I want to explore what the Research Friend did and what she helped the group to achieve. The following recommendation from *Hardwired for Hope* identifies three ways the Research Friend was helpful to the team:

As many of us in the group were new to research in practice, the research friend worked with us and supported our ABE/Literacy research team by teaching us various research techniques, by helping us to make our research decisions and by making us aware of different options [emphasis added] that we may not have considered. ABE/Literacy instructors engaging in research need such support. We recommend that a team include from the beginning one or more members with research experience, perhaps in a “research friend” role. (Recommendations, *Hardwired for Hope*, Battell, et al., 2004, p. 208)

Here I will discuss how Research Friends (and other mentors) taught, helped with decision-making and introduced options to the group.

Teaching Research Techniques

I think of myself as an educator as much as I think of myself as a researcher, because for me research has the potential to be an education. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

Although Marina did not have a background in adult literacy, she had a strong background in education, and, as discussed in Chapter Five, the instructors in the project recognized and appreciated that. They also appreciated the way she shifted as a teacher, giving the group more responsibility as they gained skills and confidence. Diana and Judy spoke about that:

I knew when she was trying to pull away and she was pulling away from us, and we were going (panic in voice), “Marina, what do you think?” (laughter). And of course she was doing that purposely. (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

She was really like saying, “Get out of the house, you’re all grown up. You are asking questions, you are pushing it, and the fact that you are asking these kinds of questions is putting the rigour into it, you are not just sort of going with the first thing, you’re challenging . . . And just that beautiful pulling back till we were just all peers. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

There was also some discomfort with the process at times. Leora said,

I mean Marina shifted us, pretty quickly on. There were no answers. What do you mean there are no answers? We’re asking you questions, we want answers. Right, and there was that kind of discomfort. . . . maybe in retrospect, the process could have been outlined more, because it was very experiential. . . . We were starting at A and I didn’t know what B was. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

For Evelyn, it was frustrating that the process was “too open.” She thought the group should have had more parameters and information on what was acceptable in academia and where academic research stood. She felt she would be more comfortable with an approach similar to the one taken by the book, “A Traveller’s Guide to Practitioner Research” (Norton, 2008), because it was very specific.

But Marina pointed out that they were developing the process together, and it was not always her job to give answers:

Its not that I was hiding the end product from them. I’m going on this journey with them. And it’s very interesting to me, because I found [practitioners] tend to think that the research process is completely designed, and you just go from one step to the other, “Why don’t I tell them what to do?” That’s not how research is, especially when we are talking about this that is developing and we are trying to figure out what practitioner research is about. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

Mary Norton made a similar point about her experience with the Violence and Learning: Take Action (VALTA) project, where she felt there was a shift in practitioner thinking:

“So recognizing still that I had different experience with research, but not that my answers were all the answers” (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004).

Research in Practice, as many have said, is a new exciting field and demands equally exciting educational approaches. I will draw on comments made by the two experienced “Research Friends”—Marina and Mary—and the *Hardwired for Hope* team to describe how the teaching was approached and organized.

Teaching content and approaches

One image or metaphor that I use is that as a researcher you develop a third eye in your forehead, and I think you do. I don't think that you're born with it, it's a skill that needs to be developed, and I think that it can be taught. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

When asked what skills they felt practitioner-researchers needed to learn, both Marina and Mary mentioned things that are typical of any qualitative researcher: being aware of one's position, understanding the research method and that one method is not inherently better than another, but should be chosen to suit the research purpose, the ability to observe, to differentiate reflection from observation, and the ability to reflect.

Writing was not at the top of Marina's list:

I find it interesting that I don't say write. I need to explore that more. I know that writing is hard for me. I know that writing is very hard for the practitioners I've worked with. But I also know that there has to be another way of articulating thoughts, that is not in writing, . . . At this point, the way we're doing research, I think that it is a skill that you need, to be able to write your thoughts. But I'm wondering if it's an unfair set of skills, to put as a requirement, because practitioners share their thoughts in different ways. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

Marina and Mary had different approaches to developing the research question.

While Marina focussed on this early on in the research and pushed practitioners to zero in on their questions early on, Mary would let it happen later:

I encourage people to not be too worried about having a precise question. You know, it's the quantitative/qualitative thing, or the thing about having the question and the hypothesis and stuff. If people have a question, great, but also recognize that it might change. . . . You don't want to be so broad that you're all over the place but, you know, start with something and then, if you've got a

question great. In one of the VALTA projects, two women worked together on a writing group, and they sort of knew what they wanted to do. I think they started with the idea, what does it take to facilitate a writing group when you know about violence. And one them mentioned the question of how to create a safe space. And that came up because Judy was visiting and said, “Hey you’ve really managed to create a safe space in a really short time. How did you do it?” The person looked and said, “Well I don’t know,” so that’s what she ended up looking at. (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004)

Sometimes Marina taught by talking the group through a process. In this example from a discussion on coding, she is both explaining a process and reassuring learners trying something for the first time:

M: If you look at Betsy’s coding, and even if you look at yours and mine, you will see three different layers of coding. What you have done is very close to the text (except Diana’s, which seems to be another layer). It seems like there are at least three levels of coding that we have seen: 1. Very close to the words. Taking a word or phrase, close to the data. 2. Taking one word that says what the sentence is about. 3. Organizing the codes in categories (e.g. Betsy’s). So I am thinking, Judy, that if you went back for another round, you might get further away from your words and closer to the concepts. I see that as a process that has to go on. We cannot expect to do this the first time we go around. It’s like you learning to teach. So let’s lower the level of anxiety—you are all doing great. (Teleconference, December 4, 2002)

Throughout the talking and the mentoring, Judy points out that the Research Friend was also modeling ways of doing research and being in the research zone.

I thought in the beginning, especially in the beginning, she really kept kind of bringing us back and bringing us back and she modeled a lot of good responses and she was really good at modelling the way we are going to approach this. (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

In Chapter Four, I wrote about Marina’s approach to “pushing” and the way some practitioners responded to it. It needs to be repeated here, because it is an important aspect of teaching, both in academia and practitioner research. Bonnie describes this way:

It’s a way of guiding; it’s a way of moving people. When you push, you are moving something from one place to another, whether it’s the discussion or the person’s activities or their ideas. (Bonnie, interview, September 13, 2004)

For Marina, it was important to stress that pushing is about ideas, not people, and forces practitioners to go to a different depth than when they are teaching or reflecting on their practice. Leora talked about the pushing that happens on a more practical level, and this could be done by any group member:

It was very focussed when we got together, even though it seemed sometimes that it wasn't. I think we came away always with the next step. Someone pushed us on, whether it was Marina or Evelyn or towards the end, me. We ended up doing what we needed to do. (Leora, interview, April 20, 2005)

Mentoring structures

As described in Chapter Four, Marina has been involved in three kinds of interventions: workshops and courses for practitioners, support to individual practitioner-researchers, and working with group projects. The courses started in response to a request from Audrey Thomas. Marina worked with another graduate student, Colleen Reid, and in the beginning they had guidance from Allison Tom. Marina recalls:

We started the workshops in a very traditional way. . . . And we stuffed the first folder with articles and papers, academic papers that we read when we were doing our coursework at UBC. And we then knew that no one was reading them, it was a waste of paper. So as the time went by, we decided to, instead of making those copies, to put whatever we had left—we had quite a few left—or just put some and ask for whoever wanted a copy we could make copies for them. And it was clear to us, like no one was asking for the more academic articles. We also changed the agenda at the beginning it was so full. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

These were “free-standing” courses, not directly connected to a research project, but they served to draw practitioners into research and also to support those who were already engaged in research. For example, Evelyn attended one of Marina’s workshops before doing *Hardwired for Hope* and Diana attended one while she was working on *Literacy for Women on the Street* (Alderson & Twiss, 2003). As described above, Evelyn suggested that it would have been useful to start the *Hardwired for Hope* project with a

course similar to the ones Marina had been offering to the literacy community.

The RIP approach used in Alberta was different for two reasons. First, as discussed above, a university-trained researcher developed each project and then recruited practitioners to participate. Secondly, as Mary Norton explains, “*The research and practice component gets woven into learning about a topic*”:

Hardwired for Hope was collaborative around people doing collaborative research, right, but the focus was on the research. With the Participatory Practices and the VALTA projects there is a bigger picture that people could have participated in without doing any research. So you could learn about participatory practices and not do any research about it, you could learn about violence and learning and not do research about it. The research deepened your learning. (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004)

The first two projects that Mary facilitated started with a course offered in partnership between the University of Alberta and the Edmonton Learning Centre. Ten to twelve students participated: half took the course for credit and half went on to get involved in a research project. Both projects brought working practitioners and graduate students together, and taking the course for credit was optional.

The third project, VALTA, was slightly different because the university did not offer credit for the course. But the format was similar. First they taught an online course about Violence and Learning. According to Mary, although the focus was on the content, people were already starting to think about research projects. Then, over a six month period, the group met twice, first to talk about their research questions and plan data gathering, and second to focus on writing. Between meetings, Mary and a colleague were able to visit the practitioner-researchers and give them one-to-one support and advice.

I was intrigued by the project visits, which seem to be a luxury in our geographically challenged, cash-strapped land. They would help to provide the face-to-

face support that Horsman and Woodrow's (2007) research showed to be essential. I wanted to know what the mentors were able to do during these visits.

We worked with people, met with people, either by phone and then face to face. And I did a lot of work with people's drafts . . . Some of them I met with at the analysis stage and we actually worked on the analysis together. And sometimes it's a matter of just helping people move forward. [With one practitioner] we just sat down and worked through it, we just did it together. So I think that ongoing support is really important. (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004)

This system worked well because it accommodated a geographically dispersed group, similar to our situation in BC. However, practitioners still worked largely on their own:

The . . . challenge is keeping going when you're on your own. I think the meetings are really important. With the RIPAL network, we met a couple of times and then the people in Edmonton met every month. And there would also be, "I'd better look at what I've done so I can report to the meeting" But otherwise everything else happened alone. (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004)

Horsman and Woodrow's (2007) study "revealed the inadequacy of attempting to support researchers, especially newcomers to research, entirely online" (p. 15), and indeed the successful projects have all involved face-to-face contact. The *Hardwired for Hope* team stated a clear preference for meetings and phone calls, but still used emails and electronic conferencing very effectively (see "Collaboration" in Chapter Six). The *Hardwired for Hope* team made recommendations about both kinds of contact:

When work is collaborative, face-to-face meetings in a retreat style are a necessity for the whole team. This requires that the team, both practitioner-researchers and research friends, leave their home and work lives to meet day and night for a number of days. We recommend that funders consider it a priority to provide sufficient and appropriate funds for such meetings. (Recommendations, *Hardwired for Hope*, Battell, et al., 2004, p. 209)

Between meetings, communication keeps the energy and focus of the group going. We recommend that a potential group look for and budget for effective ways to communicate between meetings. One of these ways is using a conferencing system like First Class,

which was an invaluable tool for our team. (Recommendations, Hardwired for Hope, Battell, et al., 2004, p. 208)

Marina used the combination of face-to-face and online mentoring with all the projects she worked on. In a few cases, she was able to visit practitioners in their communities. Here she talks about working with Evelyn on *Naming the Magic*:

We worked over the phone a lot. She did the writing, but I edited quite a bit, like I helped her thinking about phoning people, what she would ask. I went to Duncan, worked with her for two or three days. And by that time we were already with Dancing in the Dark, because I remember that I worked with Kate as well that time when I went. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

One method that I had personal experience with was exchanging online journals. During a participatory action research project conducted with learners in Houston, BC, practitioner Dee McRae sent email journals to Marina and received feedback. A few years later, when I embarked on a PAR project with women at WISH, Dee became my Research Friend. This was amazingly effective, because she responded, not only as a practitioner-researcher who had been involved in four projects, but as a long time practitioner who had worked with similar groups of students. Dee wrote about this experience in an email:

The rather interesting piece of this is that I am now taking the same role Marina did with me, with Betsy Alkenbrack. For some reason, from this side of the project, reading the journal and making comments, all the messiness is just wonderful grist for the mill, nothing to stress about. It is like a serial novel coming out chapter by chapter and I get to comment and suggest and compare to the project I did with Marina as a research friend. I am learning so much. It is like a secret window into the downtown eastside of Vancouver and back into the work I did three years ago. I recently read somewhere about crossing and re-crossing the same areas and topics to gain greater depth and texture - that is what this is like. (Dee McRae, email to Helen Woodrow, March 6, 2008)

When Mary and Marina discussed their work with me, I got the impression they saw their role as one of colleague-to-colleague, working together, sharing skills, but also working towards the same goal with others on the research team. In contrast, instructors

who participated in another BC research project that involved practitioners working with a university-based researcher tell a very different story. Dee McRae described her experience with this project as “*being a rat in the maze and the Principal Investigator quite removed and definitely wearing the lab coat.*” When she began working with the team that produced *Dancing in the Dark* (2003), the difference was significant. In a nutshell, it was:

Marina!!! I think we always felt she was working hard to make it work and adapting to our needs constantly. There was no power line; no, “You do this while I bask in all the glory.” I think she and we all learned from the Circle what not to do. Marina may have had a roadmap for the project, but she was always open to questions and asking them herself about how we should go about things and what to do when. She was one of “us” and very accessible. She pushed us, but we pushed back. (Dee McRae, email)

As with all non-formal education projects, teaching infuses all the work the Research Friend does, and indeed overlaps with the other two roles the practitioners identified: helping them to make decisions and exposing them to different options.

Helping to Make Decisions

Decisions had to be made at many different turns in the research journey. Sometimes the practitioners were able to draw on their experience as educators, administrators or fund-raisers, but often the decisions required research experience. For example, during the first six months when their finances were unsure, they needed help with setting priorities. In this email, Evelyn lays this out for Marina:

Another piece I see needing you to do is figure how we can chop it up so we reach sensible end points while we are waiting for money answers. . . . What will we commit to doing before we hear about the rest of the money. If we get rejected by other sources, we need to be ready to stop, report and return the unused money. You'll have to help us be ready to wrap up and report at all these points. (Email, Evelyn to Marina and group, May 5, 2002)

Sometimes Marina facilitated discussions that lead to decisions, and sometimes

she provided information to help them to arrive at their own decisions. But in the end, the decisions had to be theirs to make. However, just as the group sometimes wanted a more cut-and-dried process for learning about research, Marina felt they also wanted her be more directive in when they made decisions. She resisted that, as shown in this comment about the journals:

It was putting something on to me that I never took on. I was there as a resource person. And if they had said to me, we want to drop the journals, I would have never said, "No you can't." It's more the role that they were assigning me than the one that I took on . . . And if they had said, "Well we don't care," I would have said, "Well, just record your decision. Make clear why you are making this decision and just put it forward." (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

The Research Friend also had to help practitioners make decisions while they were writing. Because each chapter was written separately in *Hardwired for Hope*, a lot of this work was done one-to-one. This is also the case with the projects Mary Norton worked on in Alberta. Both Marina and Mary wrestled with how much they should bring their academic training into this work.

Marina: I am so aware that I am used to writing about research in academia. I worry that I am shaping your thinking too much. I am trying to pull out how your thoughts go and how two ideas connect. There is no one way of writing academically, but I am influenced by how my supervisor works with me—she says, "Unpack, unpack." But that is me thinking and writing and the way I see the knowledge with others. (Research Team Meeting, March 1, 2004)

Part of the problem was that, as an academic, she was trained to write for academic audiences:

Marina: Is it about audience or is it about writing research that is different? I am really afraid of changing your voice and the idea of writing for "outside audiences"—clearly we have identified practitioners as the most important audience. (Research Team Meeting, March 1, 2004)

Mary had similar concerns, but pointed out that it is only through receiving feedback that writers learn. She says,

I've always been in such a quandary about that. And I know that I have a particular style of writing and a way of seeing things. But I also know if people haven't done it before, how do you learn, right? I sort of keep my fingers crossed and I have a great deal of trouble resisting suggesting quite substantive changes, sometimes. Particularly in organization. (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004)

Making Us Aware of Options

Having somebody who's been as accessible to them as Marina, you know, who has been struggling with her own research and knows a little bit about the field but has at the same time the wider perspective—because she didn't come from literacy per se but more from a social community perspective. I think that has really been useful. (Audrey, interview, February 28, 2005)

The wider perspective that Audrey talks about, combined with academic training, put Marina in a good position to introduce options to the group that they might not have had exposure to. The fact that she had also “struggled” with research made her more prepared to be supportive when practitioners felt insecure or panicky about next steps:

[She would say] “The way that researchers would look at this might be blah-blah or blah-blah.” [and also] “you might want to think about doing it this way, but this is yours.” And she kind of helped us move from the place we were at to become people looking at it from a different lens and that was great. I liked that. (Jan, interview, February 16, 2005)

The chapter so far has dealt with the conditions that need to be in place so that practitioners can do research effectively. But that is only one part of Research in Practice. Also important is the capacity of other practitioners to receive, engage with and make use of the research. That can only happen when there is a robust research culture, the third and final condition I will discuss.

Support for a Research Culture

ABE/Literacy instructors engaging in research benefit from being part of a research culture. Therefore, we recommend that funders continue to support and develop RiPAL-BC and national and international groups interested in practitioner research. (Recommendations, *Hardwired for Hope*, Battell, et al., 2004, p. 208)

With this recommendation, the *Hardwired for Hope* team recognized that doing research is more effective when it is part of a research culture. And the reverse is true: the

field is stronger when it has the capacity to benefit from Research in Practice. As a final set of supports, I will describe what needs to be in place for a stable research culture.

First, Horsman and Woodrow (2007) recommend “support for reflective practice as a precursor to RiP” (p. 18). In her chapter on ABE practitioner styles, strategies and skills, Leora argues that effective instructors are reflective in their practice (Gesser & Sawyer, 2004), and Diana argues that this is what separates many ABE instructors from other educators (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004). But this does not happen in a vacuum, and the team suggests ways to encourage this in the following recommendation.

We recommend that practitioners be provided with opportunities to reflect on their teaching practice. This can be done in a variety of ways, which may include team meetings, professional development, journal writing, discussions with colleagues and opportunities to do research on their practice. (Recommendations, *Hardwired for Hope*, Battell, et al., 2004, p. 206)

Second, there needs to be opportunities for practitioners to gather and share their research and reflections—and to reach out to other practitioners (their most important audience). This can happen through gatherings such as the three national ones described in Chapter Four (Edmonton, 2001, Vancouver, 2002 and St John’s, 2003). They can stand alone or “piggy back” on university conferences, which is what happened in Vancouver, where a pre-conference was held for practitioners before a university conference on language and literacy, and practitioners received extra support to present their research at the main conference. Using another approach, RiPAL-BC initiated a number of roundtable discussions at university conferences (CASAE, 2005, 2007). While these have been valuable ways to promote RIP, they only really attract those with the resources for and interest in attending an academic conference. More promising, perhaps, was RiPAL-BC’s support for practitioners who presented at a seminar focusing on community-based

research, a close cousin of practitioner research (Conversations on Community Based Research, Douglas College, 2008). This kind of conference seems to be more appropriate than an academic one, because it attracts practitioners who may be from different fields but are addressing similar problems and/or working with similar populations. The focus is usually about working with, rather than studying or theorizing about, the issue or population group. So they have more in common with each other and can exchange ideas that they can use on Monday morning.

Another approach, used in the UK, is to hold gatherings that specifically promote exchanges between practitioners and academics. Mary Norton describes how this works:

I've been interested in what happens in the UK. My sense there is that, like RAPAL, compared to what we are doing here, has been bringing researchers and practitioners together to engage. My sense there is that until recently a lot of the practitioner-researchers were people doing master's degrees. And I think they have just recently been getting funding to support people to do the research. (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004)

Another way for practitioner-researchers and their audiences to “gather” is online. This can work when geography prevents frequent face-to-face meetings, but the participants must be confident and comfortable with using the internet. It can fail miserably when over-worked practitioners see joining an online discussion as chore rather than an opportunity.

A third way to support a research culture is to make sure practitioners in the field are able to receive and make use of the research their colleagues do. In their 1999 study of ways to support Research in Practice, Horsman and Norton (1999) point out that RIP is not only about doing research, but can also include reading and responding to research, reflecting on practice in light of research and applying research findings to practice (p. 2).

However, these activities are not easily available to every practitioner. After conducting a review of NLS support for literacy research, Ralf St Clair (2005) was impressed with the diversity and value of the research projects, but concerned that the findings and implications were not getting out to the literacy community.

While some manuals and other pragmatic materials were produced as a result of the projects, very many had no products beyond the final report to the NLS. This was unfortunate given the scope and the depth of insights offered by the research programme as a whole. (p. 70)

If practitioners are going to read, respond, reflect and act on research, they need to have easy access to it. This brings up the issue of dissemination, and there are two excellent resources available in Canada: the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD), which houses practitioner research along with other kinds of research, and the *Literacies* journal, which describes itself as “a national forum that includes university-based researchers, program-based researchers, policy-makers and program workers,” and does a wonderful job of reaching out to practitioners and encouraging them to share their ideas in print and online. Sadly, the journal is in danger of closing down, as described in a recent editorial:

How quickly things change! A few short years ago the National Literacy Secretariat consulted the field about the best ways to support adult literacy research. NLS saw that, as a federal body that cannot fund direct provision of education, one thing it could do was to support research. Under the current Office of Learning and Essential Skills, interest seems to have evaporated. The call for proposals last fall did not explicitly support research and, as far as we can tell, no project submitted under that call has received funding. Is this a case of death by neglect? Well, we’re still breathing! (Atkinson, 2008b)

But we need to keep in mind that disseminating research will not work if practitioners do not have time to read it. Here practitioner-turned-research-mentor-turned PhD student Sheila Stewart observes:

Like other teachers and front-line workers, we deserve time to reflect. We need time to read at work—in between the demands of intakes, groups, tutor trainings, board meetings, and so on. Research can only help the field if we find time to read it, discuss it, talk about it, argue with it and think through how it might change the way we do things. I'm sure I'm not the only literacy practitioner to have shelved a few research reports and never found a moment to pick them up again. (Stewart, 2003, p. 22)

Another, seldom discussed way to support a research culture is to support the mentors or Research Friends who work with practitioners. When talking about her work, Marina expressed anxiety around always being placed in the role of final arbitrator or supreme expert, and she would have liked to have had a place to go for support.

I don't know where to go for support, because sometimes I've noticed that with you and with Bonnie and the group, you say, "Is that OK?" Well, yeah, I think—I mean we are all trying to figure it out as we go. . . . I'd like to know more. Like I haven't heard Mary talking about her challenges in doing this kind of work, and I'd love to—I'd like to have a place where we could talk about it. What strategies did she try, what worked, what didn't work. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

These research friends do not necessarily have to be university-based. As described above, they could be practitioners who have a lot of experience in the field and a few research projects under their belt. They can support other practitioners and also serve as inspiration to those who might want to try it but are plagued by self-doubt: "But I'm not a researcher." Well, you could be.

This section started with a recommendation from the *Hardwired for Hope* team that RIPAL-BC and similar organizations be supported. RIPAL-BC has helped to facilitate all the supports described in this chapter, and has networked with other RIP groups across Canada and internationally. Sadly, its project funding has come to an end, and its future is uncertain, as is *Literacies'* future and that of other organizations such as the Festival of Literacies, based in Toronto. The enthusiastic response at RIPAL-BC's

closing conference in the spring of 2008 gives me hope that other organizations will take up the torch and RIP will live on. Or maybe this is a dream.

Concluding Comments: So What?

In this chapter, I argued that recognizing practitioners as researchers is a necessary starting point for promoting Research in Practice, and described some of the challenges the *Hardwired for Hope* team faced in that regard. I then discussed two other things that need to be in place if Research in Practice is going to flourish and grow: support for practitioners doing research and support for a research culture.

But even with these in place, it is unclear whether practitioners will be heard or continued to be overlooked. Tannis Atkinson, from *Literacies* magazine, comments:

When we released our brief discussion paper about *Learning Literacy in Canada* and *Reading the Future*,⁶⁵ we quickly discovered that our comments had struck a nerve. Adult literacy learners, and many practitioners, are frustrated that they are routinely ignored by policy-makers. Despite daunting odds (Horsman & Woodrow) practitioners work hard to provide quality programming. Yet their voices are rarely heard and their experience is routinely overlooked. In public debates and discussions about literacy, who are the recognized spokespeople? How do they get to be the spokespeople? Do literacy practitioners, and students, feel represented by these spokespeople? (Atkinson, 2008a, p. 1)

Will practitioners become the spokespeople on literacy issues or continue to be represented by people who seldom set foot in an ABE/Literacy class (except, perhaps to do academic research)? And what is the future of Research in Practice? Is it a passing fad that has run its course or is it here to stay? In April 2008, funding for RIPAL-BC came to an end and practitioners from across BC—those who had participated in RIP, those who had supported RIP projects and those who had read and used the reports—gathered to recognize and discuss the future of RIP. As Marina, one of the organizers, explained:

⁶⁵ See Chapter 4.

We knew that since we first got NLS funding in 2004, we had facilitated and fostered good research-in-practice work. We had facilitated workshops, supported practitioners who were writing and submitting proposals and secured funding for projects. So what? Had the work had any impact on the field? On practitioners' work? On learners experiences? (Niks, 2008, p. 52)

This gathering gave me hope that RIP would continue in some form, because the people in the room wanted it to and had the energy to make it happen. It was also a time of high spirits, humour, incredible creativity, and collaboration between university and practice-based RIP supporters. As an example, I give you this RIP RAP by Shauna Butterwick from UBC and Nora Randall from the Reading and Writing Centre in Duncan, BC.

RIP RAP

by Shauna Butterwick and Nora Randall

Research in Practice	Research in Practice
Tells it like it is	It's quite a heavy load
Research in Practice	Now the funding's ended
At the end there's a quiz	What the hell to do?
Research in Practice	Research in Practice
Lots of things to share	We're sad, so sad boo hoo
Research in Practice	Research in Practice
Join us if you dare!	How to carry on?
Mobilizing knowledge	Research in Practice
What the hell is that?	We'll sing this RIPPING song
Research in Practice	It's fun this looking inward
It's like herding cats!	It also hurts a lot
Research in Practice	But now we're moving forward
Get it on the road	What can I say? We're HOT!

What can I say? With talent like this, how can the movement go wrong?

If Research in Practice has a future, those of us who attended the RIP event, other practitioner-researchers across the country and our allies need to make sure it happens. In the next and final chapter, after I summarize the main themes in the dissertation, I will make suggestions about how academics can support RIP.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

[T]here are always new spaces opening up for change in academic culture and research... nudged on by academics and university outsiders with a sense of social responsibility or social justice. Cracks appear in the institutional foundation, a bit of dirt blows in, small plants take root, flowers bloom and are quietly watered. They grow large and beautiful and soon a whole garden of brightly coloured flowers appears. People stop to admire the garden and begin planting flowers themselves. Eventually, the wild garden is the norm, and between the carefully tended rows of straight monoculture research begin to sprout the healthy and beautiful roots of research in practice. Our job is to fertilize these roots. (Walter, 2003, p. 4)

Chapter Four begins with a description of the *HFH* project as an idea that “took root and grew” and here one of our academic allies comments on the importance of nurturing those roots. I like Pierre Walter’s description, above, of RIP moving in from the margins, and in this final chapter I will suggest some ways that movement can be supported—and why it must be. But first, I will summarize the *Hardwired for Hope* story, using my Research Questions as a guide, and also discuss the story using the lens of the sensitizing concepts introduced in Chapter Two.

Conditions that lead to the Development of RIP and the HFH Project

The authors of *HFH* were a group of five practitioners who had worked in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Literacy field for over 100 years, collectively. Some of them had grown up in the profession, and at the same time contributed to its development as it “grew up.” They all identified strongly as ABE practitioners. Their teaching had taught them many things, as had other practitioners and the thousands of adult learners they had worked with. They were in love with their work (although that was tempered with a love-hate relationship with the institutions, funders, and policies that change with governments). And so they wanted to give back by doing ground-breaking

research that would be both a legacy of their experience and a guiding light for new practitioners.

The timing was perfect for such a project. RIP had taken root in communities across Canada, especially in Alberta and BC (Jackson, 2004) where already 15 projects had been produced (for example, Holt Begg, 2002; McRae, 2006; Niks, et al., 2003; Norton & Malicky, 2000; Park, 2002; Pheasey, 2002; Steeves, 2002; Still, 2002). This stands in contrast to a policy context that did not favour vulnerable populations (Butterwick & White, 2006; Horsman & Woodrow, 2007; Walker, 2007) and forced many practitioners to struggle to keep their programs afloat. But, perhaps because this group of practitioners was up for a challenge, and in fact jumped at the chance to try something new, or perhaps because they worked from the relatively secure base of colleges and had so much experience to share, RIP seemed to fit well in BC. So the *HFH* team set sail in 2002.

It wasn't smooth sailing at all. The team was challenged by funding shortfalls, internal tensions, methodological glitches and a timeframe that did not fit easily into their busy professional and personal lives. They also had to do most of their work by distance, meeting only eight times, and communicating the rest of the time online or by telephone. They were faced with challenges to their right to be researchers and "knowers" (Code, 1991), both from within and outside the field. Some of the things that helped them to overcome these problems were their own indomitable spirits, a skilful coordinator, mentoring by three Research Friends, and encouragement from BC practitioners—the audience they most cared about.

Their goal was to uncover the elements that make up effective practice in ABE/Literacy. Their methodological plan was to start with their own experience by writing their autobiographies, then look at their classroom practice through daily journals and finally to interview 17 other practitioners. Some of the methods worked better than others. The autobiographies set the stage for the research by encouraging each practitioner-researcher to think deeply about her practice and her life and by providing a platform for the team to get to know each other and exchange ideas about their work. The interviews were, hands-down, the most exciting part of the research, and yielded the most data for the report. The journals were judged not to be effective, and even after substituting telephone conversations, they did not produce data that was useful in the report.

The result of their research was a 216-page report composed of six chapters, each one written or co-written by a member of the team. *Hardwired for Hope* discusses effective instructors' characteristics (Rose, 2004), beliefs and motivations (Battell, 2004) and strategies and skills (Gesser and Sawyer, 2004). It also has a detailed methods chapter which could serve as a map for future practitioner-researchers (Twiss, 2004). They workshopped the study with colleagues, presented at conferences, distributed the report far and wide, and made it available online.

Hardwired for Hope has a different focus from most other RIP reports: The team did not have an itch they wanted to scratch or a burning question, as other practitioners often do. Instead, they had a point they wanted to prove. They knew what made a good instructor, and they wanted to find support, from detailed study of their own practice and that of other practitioners, to prove their points and put it on record. As evidence, I will

draw your attention to an excerpt from an email quoted in Chapter Four: “*I don't want to try to prove this—I want to take it and go from there*” (email from Evelyn to Marina, September 27, 2001).

Gender and “The Field”

When one works in the ABE field, attends conferences and reads articles by other practitioners, one can't help but notice that we are mostly women, and this is also true of practitioner-researchers. To try to understand the implications of that gender reality, I turned to the work of Wendy Luttrell (1996) who points out that adult literacy work is devalued—in the same way as “women's work” is—because it is not considered to be intellectual or political. Linked to this, and equally discounted, is the care-giving that is so important in our work.

The *HFH* team recognized that the field was devalued, and the balance between politics and caring is a focus of Evelyn Battell's *HFH* chapter on instructors' beliefs and motivations. She draws on her own experience, the research data and the work of Dan Pratt and John Collins (Pratt, 1998; Pratt & Collins, 2002) to describe two perspectives on teaching: “political” and “nurturing.” Instructors who have a political perspective are

motivated by understanding the society in terms of large social institutions and influences (and) understand that individuals are limited and shaped and allowed by what is dominant and which groups have political power.” (Battell, 2004, p. 76)

If we link this to Luttrell's (1996) argument, this political perspective would be seen as more valuable because it draws on intellectual and political skills, while the nurturing perspective emphasizes soft skills which often go unrewarded due to the “twisted gender relations” in our society (Luttrell 1996, p. 348; also see Pratt, 2002). But the *HFH* team

members know the nurturing is essential. Battell describes the need for “a safe, trusting environment where learners can take risks . . . and a relationship with the instructor that is both caring and challenging” (Battell, 2004, p. 71); Judy Rose describes how practitioners have a high level of emotional intelligence, as well as team-building and mentoring skills (Rose, 2004); and Leora Guessier and Jan Sawyer (2004) discuss teaching holistically, creating effective physical and emotional learning environments and balancing the job. There are several examples of educators who link the two perspectives. This excerpt from an interview in *HFH* with Sandy Shilling MacKelir is one of them:

Consequently, . . . I became deeply involved in women’s initiatives as it was called at that time, trying to get some support for women in abusive relationships. . . . it was triggered by working within the college realizing I cannot begin to talk about adding fractions to somebody who’s in an abusive relationship and there’s no services in Grand Forks. They have to leave. So that was the impetus to basically spearhead with other interested parties the services for women and children in violent situations. (Battell 2004, p. 97)

I want to examine how Bourdieu’s (1977, 1985, 1989, 1993) notions of “capital” link to these ideas. The practitioner-researchers who participated in this study, and others like them, possess a range of different types of capital as described by Bourdieu and others (Carrington & Luke, 1997; Maton, 2005; Reay, 2004). First, they are located in colleges, and paid well to do their work. This was not always the case—in Chapter Five, some of them talk about the insecurity and lay-offs they endured in the early days—and many of their colleagues in community-based programs still live with insecurity and low pay. Other practitioners across Canada are faced with program survival issues that make it difficult to focus on professional development and research (Horsman & Woodrow, 2007). Learners, too, are faced with challenges, such as program requirements and government policies that do not take account of their difficult lives, educational needs or

life goals. As described in Chapter Four, these challenges weigh heavily on practitioners' minds and affect their ability to teach and do research.

The instructors have social capital in the form of strong social circles and they often play leadership roles in their communities (for example they sit on community boards or volunteer for political groups). Institutional capital is another issue. While three of the HFH team have graduate degrees, it is very common for ABE practitioners to come to the classroom through the “back door”—not through the traditional tertiary education route. In the past this lack of Institutional Capital was not an issue because their professional experience and compassion for learners was thought to be a better qualification than any piece of paper could offer. However, the fact that literacy work did not require specific qualifications could be seen as adding to the devaluing of the field that is so common (Luttrell, 1996), and this attitude seems to be winning out as standardization looms and graduate degrees are becoming more important than experience. The extent to which this will actually improve the quality of learning is questionable.

Bourdieu (1993) also describes struggles within a field, arguing that those who have been in the field for longer tend to defend “orthodoxy,” while newcomers use more subversive strategies. I had direct experience with these kinds of internal struggles before I came to BC, and I have no doubt that they have happened here. But the idea of old-timers defending their territory does not fit with my experience with practitioners or with the research team. In fact, I have found that the most established, long-lasting practitioners are often the most revolutionary in their thinking and their projects. Perhaps they are more secure in their jobs so they can take more risks. Also, notions of solidarity,

cooperation and mentoring infuse the discussions and writing of my research participants and practitioners throughout the field. Perhaps, too, their seniority means they are more secure in their jobs and can take more risks.

In some ways, the story of this project is also a story about the hegemonic influence of university-based research. That idea links to both the notion of “field” (Bourdieu, 1985, 1989, 1993) and to the role that gender plays. Bourdieu describes the field as multi-dimensional, with agents drawing on their social and cultural capital to negotiate with other agents and other fields with different levels of power. That was certainly true for the practitioners. They had to learn to “play the game” and develop new forms of capital, as evidenced by their struggles with the funding proposal and the ethics review. In some cases, this was because, as Flannery (2000) points out, certain epistemologies are privileged. She explains that:

Which knowledge is canonized and seen as normative, as well as how and to whom knowledge is disseminated—these phenomena are symbolic and structural and have to do with relationships of power. (p. 134)

The extent to which this is a gender issue is a question for me. As I have already mentioned, women play strong leadership roles in the ABE/Literacy field and in RIP—as they do in education departments at universities. So when we think about challenges to women being “knowers” (Code, 1991, 1995), it is not necessarily about who is doing the research but what kind of research she is doing. As Lorraine Code argues, feminist research challenges traditional ways of doing research, and the *HFH* team had to justify the approach they took in what is still, after all, a male-dominated world.

Relational Aspects of Collaboration

In Chapter Two I referred to Danielle Flannery's (2000) description of relational views of gender, which "address and legitimize the connection with self and with others that so many women live and value" (p. 61). She notes that relational theorists view development as "the struggle to stay connected, to care responsibly for oneself, and to care responsibly for others" (p. 62), and I think the story of this practitioner research project has many examples of caring responsibility. The group made every effort to take care of each other—through any life and professional struggles. For example, they tried to accommodate different paces of work and did not lay guilt-trips on colleagues who could not put as much work into the project between meetings. Another example is the decision to switch from solitary journal-writing to "telephone conversations with intent," which resulted in support for each other during a very difficult time.

On the other hand, they had great difficulty giving feedback to each other. As I described in Chapter Six, the group members already had established relationships with each other, and I assumed that their difficulty stemmed from the desire to protect each other and in some cases to avoid exposing their vulnerability in the group. Judy confirmed this when she read the draft dissertation:

I was struck when I read about the challenges of working collaboratively in Chapter 6, at how much I remember that part of the process . . . I see now when I think back that we wanted to support each other, protect each other, protect ourselves against the others, avoid conflict that would break down our fragile process. All those things were happening at once and in the end by writing our own chapters we were able to manage it all. (Judy, email, March 19, 2009)

The challenge of participants entering a project when they are already in relation, and intending to leave with those relations intact, is an important issue that must be considered when planning any peer collaboration project.

Some practitioner-researchers found it easier to receive feedback from the Research Friends (for example Leora, interview, April 20, 2005). This calls into question the idea that instructors relate best to other instructors. It could be easier and less stressful to take feedback from a perceived “expert” who, although part of the team, was positioned differently.

These are some of the conditions that surrounded, supported and challenged the development of the RIP and the HFH project. I will now move to the relationship with academia, and the supports and challenges that practitioner researchers experienced.

Collaboration and Communities of Practice

In all forms of action research, the quality of inquiry practice lies far less in impersonal methodology, and far more in the emergence of a self-aware, critical community of inquiry nested within a community of practice. (Reason, 2002, p. 172)

Like the community of inquiry that Reason describes here, the *HFH* team was nested within other communities of practice, principally the adult literacy/ABE community that they had been active members of for decades. There was no doubt in my mind that the ABE field could be described as a “community of practice.” It met the three requirements that Wenger (2004, p. 2) specified: There was a “shared domain of interest,” they “engaged in joint activities” and had developed a “repertoire of resources” which they promoted and shared through workshops, newsletters and provincial meetings. Now, as

practitioner-researchers, they have developed a repertoire of research approaches suited to their field, and are sharing it through reports.

Their domain or joint enterprise was a shared commitment to a) interrogating and celebrating the work of effective practitioners and b) contributing to improved educational practice through c) research. The approach they took to this research was a specific one, suited to their way of work and to the other practitioners they were writing for. According to Wenger, the joint enterprise involves negotiation, and Lave and Wenger (1991) distinguish between “talking about” and “talking within” (p. 111) as a way to learn. The former involves stories and community lore, while the latter involves exchanging information needed to get a job done. The *HFH* team participated both ways: They “talked within” as they worked their way through the research project and “talked about” when they completed the final report.

The second criteria on Wenger’s list is that the community engages in joint enterprises, which for the *HFH* team, was the planning, production and distribution of a research project. And finally, they have made a significant contribution to the shared repertoire of RIP approaches and techniques, building on the work of previous practitioner-researchers and providing inspiration and concrete strategies to future ones.

It is also a distributed community of practice, as defined by Wenger et al. (2002) as, “any community of practice that cannot rely on face-to-face meetings and interactions as its primary vehicle for connecting members” (p. 115). While the team’s favourite way of working was face-to-face, it wasn’t possible for it to be the primary way and often it was not the most efficient. They worked together very efficiently by email and through telephone calls, but with different comfort levels. Jan, for example, was clear that she

preferred face-to-face interviews over telephone interviews, and Leora seemed to enjoy working by phone more than by email. They used the internet to reach out to other practitioners, through the online conference and by making the final report available online. Although the conference was plagued by difficulties with timing, technology and other common problems linked to teaching from a distance, it was a tribute to their skills as educators.

A common outcome of working in a community of practice is that participants form and develop their identities in relation to other members of the community (Flynn, 2004; Pratt, 1998, 2002). The *HFH* team members already had well-formed identities as literacy practitioners with a particular perspective on learning and social justice, which they developed over decades of teaching and participating in the ABE field. As they participated in the project, their identity as researchers also developed—although less so for those who already had experience and identified as researchers. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), this is linked to the relationship between newcomers and old-timers:

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Learning in Community of Practice

The practitioners already had many of the skills and attitudes required to do research: for example, they observe, reflect, and document as part of their everyday practice as instructors. Like good ethnographers, they are constantly building relationships. And, as Diana said, they welcome the way research “pushes their thinking”. In this sense, they were already researchers when they joined the project. But by most accounts, they gained skills and confidence as researchers during the course of the

project, and I want to explore the role that “legitimate peripheral participation” played in that. For Lave and Wenger (1991), Legitimate Peripheral Participation means

participation as a way of learning -- of both absorbing and being absorbed in -- the 'culture of practice'. An extended period of legitimate peripherality provides learners with opportunities to make the culture of practice theirs. (p. 95)

The practitioner-researchers did indeed absorb the culture, engaging in the research at different levels of intensity, depending on the stage in the research. I struggle with the word “peripheral”, because I observed that the practitioners were central to the process—never on the periphery. They were, however, peripheral to the wider research culture, but gradually became more involved and respected – more “legitimate” and less “peripheral”— as they participated in RIP workshops and more mainstream conferences, wrote articles and reports about their project and participated in online discussions and university-based classes. Sometimes the practitioners initiated these activities, and sometimes the Research Friend did. Either way, they gained an understanding of the research culture, and an increasing comfort level and feeling of belonging, until they were able to say “I am a researcher!”

In their observations of apprenticeships, Lave and Wenger (1991) noticed that the apprentices did most of their learning through interactions with other apprentices— particularly more senior apprentices—and that social engagement was key. This is what led them to coin the term “community of practice”. There were no obvious “senior” researchers within the HFH team: while some had had more research experience than others, they were all clearly there as learners in the beginning. And there was an enormous amount of learning through their interactions with each other: group discussions, online collaboration and co-writing were most often given as examples.

Responsibility is what separates researchers in practice such as the HFH team from the legitimate peripheral participators that Lave and Wenger describe. From the beginning, the practitioners were responsible for raising the money for the project, reporting to funders, and making sure the project was completed on time. Their names and reputations were on the line and the project would succeed or fail due to their efforts. Also, as with any collaborative project, they were responsible to each other.

The Research Friend helped with all of this, by advising, motivating and working with the (practitioner) coordinator to make sure the project ran smoothly. She also taught and modeled research techniques. This and other aspects of her role will be discussed in the next section, along with other issues related to challenges and supports from academia.

Relationships with Academics: Supports and Challenges

Often when I think about the challenges that these women and other practitioner-researchers face, a conversation comes to mind that I had with a feminist scholar that I really like and respect. We were at an international adult education conference, and I was telling her about my plans to do a study on practitioner research. She quickly responded: *“Oh yeah, what THEY call research.”*

I do not want to imply that this response in any way represents the view of academics. On the contrary, practitioner-researchers have enjoyed very respectful, colleague-to-colleague relationships with researchers based in the academy. The person quoted at the beginning of this chapter is one example, and there are examples in other chapters: Academics have participated in RIP events, acted as mentors, helped to write

proposals in academic language and provided “academic clout” in the form of reference letters. They have been true allies in the RIP cause.

Perhaps because of these positive exchanges, the negative comment quoted above was a shock for me. I thought to myself, This is the response from a “progressive”—I might even say radical—feminist, who has worked with numerous community groups and written about them in a respectful way. What kind of challenges will my participants face from other, more conservative forces? And sure enough, there were many challenges, starting with various degrees of personal insecurity about whether or not they could do “this thing,” to challenges to the way they wrote about their research, shock that they would ask to get paid for their work, and institutional barriers that were reluctant to admit researchers that do not fit into academic norms.

Other, more practical challenges were largely focussed on time: There was never enough time at Research Team meetings for practitioners to have the kind of in-depth conversations that could really push their thinking and enrich their analysis. When practitioners were back in their workplaces, the time demands of their jobs often encroached on time they needed to set aside to do research. In addition, they experienced a range of family demands and personal health issues that are typical of middle-aged women.

But they succeeded—I would even argue that they triumphed. So how did they do it? What helped them to get through? The short answer is “inspiration.” They were, first of all, inspired by each other and the opportunity to work collaboratively. Second, they were inspired by the practitioners they had worked with over the years, had a deep curiosity about how they taught and what made them “effective” and a strong desire to

celebrate that work. Third, they were inspired by practitioner-researchers further afield, whose reports they had read and whom they had met at three national RIP conferences and numerous provincial workshops and meetings. And finally, they were inspired by their Research Friend, Marina Niks, who brought her skill as an educator and researcher along with a respect for them as teachers and thinkers.

The Research Friend

The Research Friend was their main link to academia, and by most accounts, the most important support the group had. Other types of support, especially financial, were discussed but they kept coming back to the Research Friend when I asked them about essential RIP supports. In Chapter Seven, I describe how she supported the group by teaching and modeling research techniques, helping the group to make decisions and exposing them to options. I also describe different ways of organizing that support, drawing on examples of RIP projects in BC and Alberta. Like the educator described in the “communities of practice” literature, she facilitated participation (Smith, 2003), “brokered” between perspectives (Flynn, 2004), and provided opportunities for practitioner-researchers to get absorbed in practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However in this project, the practitioners themselves facilitated this process, taking on more and more responsibility for it as they gained experience.

Nyhoff-Young (2001) offers the useful metaphor of a scaffold to describe the supportive group process in teacher research (and it could also be applied to the teaching in an ABE classroom). It seems particularly relevant to the *HFH* project, because practitioners described clearly how Marina “pulled back” as the group gained strength—just as a scaffold is pulled back.

Knowledge Production and Theory–Practice

Through my interactions with the literature I have learned that as a practitioner my lens directs me to approach research and write about research in a particular way. . . . I need to feel that the research is connected to or leading to action. It isn't enough for me as a practitioner to only have reflection or knowledge. I have to see the connection between this conceptual thinking and hands-on doing. Perhaps this is why I have had greater success in being informed by the work of other practitioners in the field rather than by academic literature. (Docherty, 2006, p. 6)

The research strategies described in this dissertation are very similar to research strategies used by university-based researchers, and in Chapter Seven, I described those strategies using Marina Niks' (2004) three criteria for research as a framework: it revealed new knowledge, it was rigorous and it was shared. What may make practitioner research different is the audience and presentation. Most practitioner-researchers, including Ann Docherty (quoted above) and the *HFH* team, are interested primarily in exchanging ideas with other practitioners, and this exchange could happen in the form of a research report, a workshop or a staff meeting presentation, but not necessarily in an academic journal or book.

There are academics who share this passion for action oriented research. The Canadian Council on Learning (2008) reports that a growing number of academics are beginning to do research in the community. The authors note that, while it may be new to some disciplines, educational researchers have been doing it for a long time. However, the report also notes that this “can be a difficult place for academics to inhabit if this type of research is less acceptable to their post-secondary institution or faculty” (p. 3).

Another thing that makes this form of knowledge-generation different from university-based research, also hinted at in the quote above, is the relationship practitioners have to theory. As discussed in Chapter One, Usher,

Bryant and Johnson (1997) describe a “theory-practice divide,” with theorists claiming professional superiority to practitioners, whom they say are too influenced by common sense and not enough by theory. Zeichner and Noffke (2001) argue that teachers are not “less theoretical” than academics, but carry out theoretical discussions differently (based on Threatt, 1994, cited in Zeichner and Noffke p. 233).

Theory is only useful if it helps us to do our job, and it seems that academics find it more useful—given their location, institutional requirements and agreed-upon frameworks for making sense of and reporting on research—than practitioners do. For practitioner-researchers like Ann Docherty (quoted above), it is perhaps more important for literature to be directly applicable to their work in the classroom or the community. In both cases, there is a layer of interpretation to do, so that the information is accessible to their peers, and one source of tension is the judgement regarding what is accessible. In this excerpt from a research team meeting, Evelyn touches on these issues as she describes her encounters with the literature related to her chapter on practitioners’ beliefs and convictions:

Evelyn: I had a strange, but not surprising experience with this [literature recommended by Betsy]. I ordered some of the materials, and realized I had already read some of them. I read Mary Norton’s chapter about sharing power, saw that she had good ideas and was a clear writer, but had no idea what I would do with it. Also read Deborah Barndt’s, which was fascinating, and I wanted to apply to classroom. Then I remembered that I was not reading it as a teacher, and again was not sure what do with it for this project. Then I read Ira Shor, and got bored because he writes in such academic language, but he is saying the same things as we are. So, I loved it when Betsy told me about the good ideas, but when I had to read it, particularly in academic language, I didn’t know what to do with it.

Diana: it really speaks to a different culture. Evelyn, in Newfoundland, you asked me, “Why is it so important for you to do it?” and you really made me think. We

need to think and talk, but I like the fact that we are exploring it. (Teleconference minutes September 18, 2003)

Those who are comfortable using academic literature to frame their research may criticize the *HFH* team and other practitioner-researchers for what could be seen as a traditional understanding of literature reviews. Reading what has been written already by other researchers about a topic can provide access to a larger conversation, and a sense of how others have approached similar problems or issues. However, these larger conversations are usually happening in academia, talking about practitioners and their work rather than to them. And, as has been noted in Chapters One and Seven, practitioners do not feel included in these conversations, either because of the language that is used, the perspective of the authors or because it is not something they can use on Monday morning.

The “different culture” that Diana refers to does not mean different research, but a different approach to research. And while it is important to recognize those differences, it is also dangerous to emphasize a great divide, or a continuum with academic research at one end and practitioner research at the other. Diana remembers the first seminar she went to on practitioner research, where she got a strong sense of polarization. This was intimidating for her, so she was relieved when she started working on projects with Research Friends who didn’t focus on the differences:

When I really started working with Marina . . . you and Bonnie, I got a sense, not that this camp has this, that camp has that, but Hey! This is new, let’s explore it, what’s it mean, what’s the language that’s gonna be used? And so that was really important, so I could come into the process with as much to offer, as an equal partner, not feeling inferior. (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004)

Marina agrees that this is a false dichotomy, and argues, as she does in her dissertation (Niks, 2004) that academic research follows certain traditions that were developed to

support the needs of academia. They are not necessarily requirements of all research and academics need not be the only arbitrators of what is acceptable.

I don't think that there's one universal way for university to do research. You have very different kinds of research done in university and very different kinds of research in practice projects as well. And that's fine, as long as we all agree on what we are calling research. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

She gives the example of peer reviews, a process that most of us take for granted in university. But is there another way to do it? Marina suggests:

Get the practitioners to review their own research so that would be something that I'll accept. Peer review has to be peer review [emphasis in original], not just review by the academics peers. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

Another thing that makes *HFH* and other collaborative projects different from academic research is the fact that it involves collaboration among, and is lead by, peers. In contrast, most academic research is conducted by individual faculty members who decide the research questions, choose the methodology and do the analysis. While these projects involve co-investigators and employ research assistants to conduct field work, the level of collaboration among peers at all levels of the project, as exemplified by the *HFH* project, is not typical of academia.

On a practical level, a big difference between university-based and practitioner-based researchers is that academics **MUST** do research, while practitioners (at least at this point) are not required to do it. In most job situations, they get no time or resources or recognition for doing research, a challenge identified by almost all the BC practitioner-researchers. In some cases, this is because institutions where they work do not recognize their role in conducting research and thus do not include time and resources for it.

In light of those and other challenges, I move on to make conclusions about how RIP can be supported to rise above them and thrive.

Research in Practice: Share the Dream

Having described what happened in the *HFH* project, I now turn to the question of how to support and develop the RIP movement in the field of literacy and as a field of inquiry that will be respected by academics. I will begin by describing the elements of an ideal RIP culture—a dream—and then make recommendations to ABE practitioners and academics.

Let's dream for a moment. First, imagine if you will, a field of well-paid practitioners who know they will still have their job next year, can spend most of their time working with learners rather than writing funding proposals and have the time and practical support they need to engage in professional development on a regular basis. Then imagine national or provincial RIP resource groups, staffed by experienced practitioner-researchers (and possibly university-trained friends), who also have secure jobs and are not dependent on constant grant-writing. Their job would be to lobby for and promote RIP as valid research that can inform policy, and to set up structures for practitioners to engage in RIP projects. These resource groups would be directly answerable to practitioners, with university-based researchers acting as advisors or partners.

In another scenario, those academics who are committed to conducting community-based research that leads to action might invite a community or practitioner friend to join their projects to help them stay grounded in the reality of their fields, or to work with the academic as a peer researcher.

In both cases, ABE practitioners would have the opportunity to engage in research in three ways: by reading and responding to research, by reflecting on and applying research findings to practice and by doing research about practice (Horsman & Norton, 1999). They would participate in networking and training events at the local, provincial and national level that would promote exchange and learning about research and about the research topics that most need to be addressed.

Instead of struggling to meet perceived academic requirements when they do research, practitioners could develop methods and approaches, and use language that makes sense in their world. For example, instead of only reviewing literature that emerges from the university, they could draw on the growing library of RIP reports, or do “field reviews” that would involve talking to or observing other practitioners. If they decided to engage in a “peer review” process, the review panel would be peopled by a combination of practitioners, academics and other interested parties--in short, their peers.⁶⁶ Also, their funders would happily accept alternative ways to report on their research: through art, photography, video, digital stories, websites, podcasts, poetry, reader’s theatre or short articles, to name a few examples.

And finally, imagine that the many years of experience and skill that practitioners have built up is listened to and applied to policy, that they are respected as practitioners and as researchers.

That is the dream. And now, back in the real world, I want to suggest some ways that practitioners and their academic allies can benefit from, participate in, support and promote RIP.

⁶⁶ This is the approach that *Literacies* magazine uses.

Practitioners: Jump in!

I have described the research participants in my study as women who have “jumped at the chance” to participate in this project. What was in it for them and why should others jump in? Here I will name a few benefits, drawn principally from the HFH project. I’m sure other practitioner-researchers could add to this list.

RIP has given practitioners a chance to work together with like-minded colleagues on something that is very familiar, but also a little bit different from the every day—exactly the kind of challenge that experience practitioners are looking for. As Diana said many times (echoed by others), “It pushes our thinking” (Diana, interview, December 17, 2004). The *HFH* groups’ clear preference for meeting face-to-face was an indication of the sparks that can fly when great brains and great hearts combine. It gave them a place to reflect from a distance, and for those who were nearing the end of their careers, a chance to reflect on a lifetime of work. It was also, for some, a political act, because it is a way, not just to improve practice, but to make a difference in BC. And, in spite of the challenges from different spheres, many practitioners have said that they felt recognized and respected as thinkers and knowers. Finally, RIP has provided a vehicle for advancing issues and supporting learners through research that, hopefully, someone will pay attention to.

Both *Hardwired for Hope* (Battell, et al, 2004) and *Dancing in the Dark* have detailed discussions and recommendations for practitioners who want to get involved in RIP. Both teams recommend that, because RIP is so beneficial to practitioners and their programs, it should be looked on as professional development and funded accordingly. As more colleges in BC make the transition to university-colleges and

full-fledged universities, their research agendas are likely to get stronger and practitioner-researchers based in colleges should be well placed to take advantage of this. For example, some colleges already offer release time for doing research during the term and most educators in colleges get six weeks, separate from their vacations, for professional development--time that could be spent conducting research or writing up the report of a project.

There are two caveats to this suggestion. First, it would be dangerous to the instructor and the institution if research is simply added to an existing teaching and/or administrative load, because it would reinforce the notion that research is something practitioners do "off the sides of their desks". Second, the different options do not necessarily apply to community-based practitioners, which is why government funders still need to be pushed to support RIP. Such funding needs to take account of time, geography and logistical requirements that are described so well in both *HFH* and *Dancing*. On a sobering note, the *Dancing in the Dark* team point to some of the personal sacrifices that some must make when they say:

Practitioners considering engaging in research should evaluate the impact such decision will have on their lives and assess what would be the best compromise for their own particular situation." (Niks, et al, 2003 p. 86)

They also advise would-be practitioner-researchers to make sure that program administrator support is in place, to find a topic they feel passionate about and to choose a mentor who combines knowledge of research with being "flexible and willing to challenge traditional academic requirements" (p. 86). I will discuss the role of this mentor below in more detail.

As described in Chapter Six, there were several issues around collaboration that need to be considered when planning a RIP project. For example, keep in mind that practitioners may have established relationships with team members that may affect how they work together. This needs to be planned for. Also, the group should work early in the project to develop a guidelines for giving feedback. The *HFH* report (Battell, et al, 2004) says that groups should expect the feedback process to be stressful and tiring, and provides this recommendation:

We recommend that a research group use pieces of writing early in the process, not merely as drafts or springboards to thinking; rather, they semi-finalize some early pieces in order to experience the process of providing and receiving feedback. (p. 208)

The *HFH* report also says that practitioner-research benefits from being part of a research culture, as do other practitioners who choose not to engage directly in research. This is why structures such as the electronic conferencing systems, websites and blogs need to be supported so that geographically-dispersed practitioners can share ideas with each other. Meeting face-to-face is even better, and this does not need to be at big national seminars, though they are extremely nice to have. Such sharing can also happen at get-togethers modeled on the "philosophers' café," where practitioners get together and discuss research and innovative ideas with each other. This would be even richer if there was a regular, high-quality RIP journal that spoke to practitioners, challenged them to think and share, and built bridges with academics. Oh, by the way, we already have that journal, and it is called *Literacies*. We need to support it so it continues to support us.

Academics: Join in!

I think there is great potential for sharing of ideas and support for RIP practitioners and academics committed to doing community-based research getting together. They have much in common – both struggle against institutional misrecognition and devaluing although the location of these struggles is different. (Shauna Butterwick, email, March 27, 2009)

This comment is important because it stresses the commonalities between university-based and practitioner-based research and those who engage in it. As described earlier in this chapter, practitioner-researchers already have friends in academic places, who guide them, help them apply for grants and interact with them as colleagues at conferences and RIP events. They have a similar commitment to research about practice that leads to change and do this kind of work within their own research. Also, they have in common is that they do not emphasize a big divide between researchers, but instead focus on building bridges. The following suggestions are for other academics who have been convinced by this dissertation that they should get more involved.

There are several ways you can support RIP, and I will start with the one that was mentioned so much by the practitioner-researchers in this study: becoming a mentor, or Research Friend. The ideal Research Friend comes to the table as a partner, working with practitioner-researchers, rather than above or below them. For this reason the requirement that there be a university-based “Principle Investigator” is not viable, because it denies the leadership that practitioners need to take.

A more supportive approach may be provided through SSHRC’s Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) grants, for which community organizations and university research units apply together, or through their Aboriginal Research grants. However, an emerging body of literature records frustrations with CURA projects. For

example, a study of Community Based Research projects in Canada, including CURA projects (Flicker & Savan, 2006) describes how a history of mistrust still taints university-community collaboration and how academics on the “publish or perish treadmill” (p.24) find that the collaboration process slows down the research process. In a CURA project in Waterloo, Ontario, the start-up structure included a faculty-dominant board that of course meant community “partners” had little say over research products (Lederer & Seasons, 2005). As some BC colleges make the transition to universities, there might be more possibilities for instructor participation and control in research projects. However, as Jan Sawyer’s experience with her ethics review committee shows, not all instructors are equal within the college system.

Research Friends do not promote a view of practitioner research at the bottom rung in a ladder leading “up” to academy-based research. Emphasizing the great divide can be intimidating, and, in the long run, will encourage notions of “us” and “them”—not at all helpful in partnership-building. Also, it does not reflect what is really happening in the two fields: both university-based researchers and ABE instructors are “practitioners” who want to reach out to colleagues in their field in the most appropriate way—whether it be an ABE journal, a workshop or an academic journal. Instead of this dichotomy, it is useful to think in terms of different kinds of knowledge, and to recognize that both ABE practitioners’ knowledge, and academic knowledge, gained from particular contexts, can make equally important contributions.

At the same time, practitioners expect to benefit from the academic skills that Research Friends can provide. It is necessary to find a way to provide both the academic options and rigorous approach without forcing them into academic molds that don’t work

for them. Here are three opinions about that:

The struggle has been . . . how do you have it still research on one hand and authentic to the practice on the other hand? (Evelyn, interview, March 9, 2005)

How do you get this group to go on to the next, to move on, to produce what they needed to produce, and to still have it rigorous and to honour what we had set out to do? (Judy, interview, December 17, 2004)

I think one of the challenges of doing the work that I do with these groups is trying to translate what researchers typically do to something that practitioners want and are good at doing. And it's not getting from one to the other, it's thinking of what they could design themselves to do. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

When I worked with the *HFH* team, I helped with finding literature that was applicable to their research. However, as described earlier in this chapter and elsewhere, this literature is often written in language aimed at academic audiences, which some ABE practitioners find inaccessible and alienating. A possible role that a Research Friend can play is to “translate” these materials into more friendly, accessible language.

An important consideration for academics acting as Research Friends is authorship. The *HFH* decided, after some discussion, not to credit the Research Friends in the final document. As I put together my list of publications, this is a disappointment for me, but I also understand that it was their project and they had the right to make that decision. In *Dancing in the Dark*, the research team chose to give Marina Niks first authorship because they recognized that this would be more important for her career than for theirs. Whatever approach is used, it should be the practitioner-researchers' choice, but it is an issue that academics have to think about in light of career demands. If a university-based researcher is concerned about issues of authorship, she would be wise to negotiate this with practitioners at the beginning of the project.

Research Friends also need to be clear about expectations regarding the size and scope of research projects. Practitioner-researchers, after all, have full-time jobs in addition to doing research (unless they are very lucky). As Mary Norton says,

I guess I would say that in terms of Research in Practice and people's learning, it is important . . . to recognize that there is a difference in what we can do in our odd moments in our work and what we can do if you've got a year off to do a dissertation or . . . a grant to do research. And it is not to say that people in the universities or other places don't have a ten million other things to do too, but I think when you make it your life, then you hold skills in a different way than when you do a project. (Mary, interview, December 16, 2004)

As in any group, collaborative projects have their own set of challenges, and Research Friends need to think very carefully about the role they will play, particularly when there is strong leadership within the group already. Also, as described in Chapter Six, it is important to prepare new researchers for the challenges of peer feedback and to find ways to support them to engage in this process in meaningful ways.

If you choose not take on a mentoring role, there are other ways you can support the development of a research-in-practice culture. You can join the RIP gatherings—as equal partners—read and promote practitioner research, invite practitioners to share their expertise in university classes and forums, and by help practitioners to gain access to resources, conferences and professional development opportunities.

Finally, you can provide political support for RIP in two ways: by challenging funding requirements that say there can only be one principle investigator and he/she must be university-based; and by using your academic clout to encourage employers--whether they be colleges, community groups or school districts, to provide practitioner-researchers with paid time off to do research.

Final Thoughts

The title of this thesis—“From Practitioner to Researcher and Back Again”—speaks of my experience and that of my participants. All of us put on new hats—research hats—when we came to the *Hardwired For Hope* team meetings. Mine was slightly different, because I was researching the researchers. But like the practitioner-researchers I studied and studied with, I went back to the classroom when the research was over. However, the title is a bit misleading, because we never make a complete switch. When we are working on a research task, our teaching and our students inevitably infuse our thinking. And of course, our experience with research means we will always view our practice through a new lens that will enrich our classrooms, our collaboration with colleagues and the field as whole. But most of all, we hope the research leads to an improved experience for our learners.

In Chapter One, I expressed the hope that “this study will help to bring practitioner knowledge to the table and promote their experience, voice and perspective.” The practitioners are more than capable of speaking for themselves, but, through this dissertation, I hope that their perspective and wisdom will be shared with different audiences. Whether these audiences will listen and act on what they have learned is a question yet to be answered.

For those who make the decision to listen to the voices of practitioners and become part of, and learn from the Research in Practice movement, the benefits are huge, and I will give the last word in my dissertation to one who had chosen to follow that path:

I get so much out of it, at different levels. I think better when I think with other people, and I'm pushed into places that I'm not typically pushed in if I'm thinking on my own. With this one, I was able to articulate things about research that are useful to me as a researcher and when I work with others. And I also learn about

literacy. And I make friends; very strong connections. I really enjoy it. (Marina, interview, August 18, 2005)

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APPENDIX A: ACRONYMS

ABE	Adult Basic Education
ABEABC	Adult Basic Education Association of British Columbia
CBR	Community-Based Research
CCL	Canadian Council on Learning
CCLOW	Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women
ESL	English as a Second Language
HFH	Hardwired for Hope
IALSS	International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey
ISRS	International Survey of Reading Skills
Lit BC	Literacy BC
MCL	Movement for Canadian Literacy
NALD	National Adult Literacy Database
NLS	National Literacy Secretariat
RIP	Research in Practice
RIPAL	Research in Practice in Adult Literacy

APPENDIX B: CONSENT LETTER

Department of Educational Studies

Mailing address:

2125 Main Mall

Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Tel: 604-822-5374

Fax: 604-822-4244

<http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca>

From Practitioner to Researcher and back again: An Ethnographic Case Study of a Research in Practice Project

Dear (participant)

Thank you again for giving me permission to conduct research with your collaborative research group. This letter will explain the purpose of my research, how I will conduct it and how I will ensure that I represent you and your ideas correctly. At the end of this letter is a consent form which I need you to sign.

The purpose of my doctoral research is to study practitioner research in adult basic education (ABE). My research questions are: (1) What is the nature of practitioner research? (2) How does practitioner research challenge or disrupt more traditional, university-based forms of research? and (3) What conditions help practitioner research to mature and thrive?

To conduct my research I will be doing an ethnographic study of your group. That means I will be asking for your permission to do three things:

- participate in and observe your group meetings
- review the documents you have produced (the minutes and tapes of your meetings, the reports you have written and your email correspondence)
- interview you about your experiences in the project.

The activity that will demand the most time on your part is the interview. I anticipate that it will take 1 ½ to 2 hours. I may ask for a follow-up interview if there are additional questions or issues to discuss. With your permission, I would like to audiotape the interviews.

I want to explain how I will make sure your identity is kept confidential if you want it to be. I will transcribe all the tapes myself and will keep them and the transcripts in a locked filing cabinet. Computer files will be password protected. You will have a choice either to be identified by name in my dissertation or to have your identity kept confidential through the use of a pseudonym. You can revisit your decision regarding the pseudonym at any time during the study. You will have the chance to read the transcript(s) of your interview and sections of my dissertation that refer to you, so that you can make sure I do not mis-represent you. Also, you are free to withdraw from the research at any time.

Please indicate your consent to participating in the research by signing the form below, returning it to my attention in the enclosed self-addressed envelope, and keeping the copy for your own records. If you have any concerns about this study before or after the interview, please feel free to call me or my supervisor, Kjell Rubenson. If you have concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8498.

Thanks again.

Betsy Alkenbrack,
PhD Candidate/student researcher
Dept. of Educational Studies
TEL: 604-324-6702

Dr. Kjell Rubenson
Principal Investigator
Dept. of Educational Studies
TEL: 604-822-4244

Consent form. Please tick the items you agree to.

- I consent to being interviewed.
- I consent to the interview(s) being tape recorded.
- I will allow Betsy Alkenbrack to participate in and observe activities related to our practitioner research project.
- I will allow Betsy Alkenbrack to review the documents related to our group's research (minutes, tapes, reports and correspondence)
- I understand that I will be given the opportunity to review the interview transcripts.
- I understand that I will be given the opportunity to read sections of the dissertation that refer to me and to make sure that I am not mis-represented.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the research at any time.
- I have received a copy of this consent letter for my own records.

Signature

Date

Print Name

Telephone Number

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THIS STUDY

Background information

1. Tell me a bit about your background in ABE/Literacy.
2. Tell me a bit about your background in Research-in-Practice.

The Research Project:

3. Tell me about how you got into the project. (How did you hear about it? What did you expect when you joined the project? What were your goals for this research project?)
4. What knowledge, experience or special skills did you bring to the research project?
5. Can you describe the different stages of the research and tell me how you felt doing each of these steps?
6. What were the high points of your participation in the project? (What was the most interesting? What did you enjoy most?)
7. What were the low points in the research? (least enjoyable, most difficult, most challenging?)
8. What have you learned from participating in the research? How did you benefit?
9. If you had the chance to participate in another research project, would you? Why or why not?

Collaboration in the Project

10. Can you tell me about how the group collaborated? / What collaborative structures did the group put in place?
11. What role did you take in the group (facilitator/leader/challenger/listener, etc)?
12. Can you describe a time where the collaborative process was particularly successful or effective? What do you think made it work?
13. Can you describe a time where the collaborative process broke down or didn't work? Why do you think this happened? How did you deal with this problem?
14. In general, do you think the group collaborated well?

Research-in-Practice

15. What was your view of research before you joined the project? Has this changed?
16. How did it feel to take on the role of researcher?
17. Do you see your participation in this research as a political act? Why/why not?

18. What does Research-in-Practice mean to you?
19. How do you think it benefits the field?
20. How does it relate to university research?
21. What kind of support systems need to be in place for Research-in-Practice projects to be successful? (logistical, financial, policy, partnerships?)

My role as a researcher:

22. How did it feel to know I was researching your project?
23. How does it feel, now, to be reflecting on the HFH project?
24. Do you have any advice or suggestions for me as a researcher?

APPENDIX D: LIST OF THEMES INDENTIFIED DURING THE ANALYSIS

Practitioners' Background

- ABE experience
- Research experience
- Identity as researcher
- Motivation for doing project
- Contribution to project

History of Project

- Beginnings
 - o Bringing group together
- Funding Proposal

Research Process

- Steps
 - o Coding
 - o Literature
 - o Dropped Data Source
- Purpose/Motivation
- Product
 - o Budget
 - o Copyright
- Challenges
 - o Time
 - o Confidentiality
- My Role

Collaboration

- Commitment
- Strategies
- Experience
- Successes
- Challenges
- Distributed Expertise
- Communication

Broader Research Culture

- Challenges to researchers
- Politics
- Relationships with Academia

Support

- Research Friend
 - o Role
 - o Skills
 - o Process
 - o Relationships
 - o Academic influence
 - o Benefits
- Respect
- Time
- Money

APPENDIX E: THE *HFH* TEAM'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING

This is a list of the unpublished autobiographical pieces written by the HFH Research Team, listed by author.

Jan Sawyer

Abe Years
Challenged
Church
Identity
Kingswood
Lytton
Musgrave

Diana Twiss

Good Teachers I Have Known
Looking For Themes
My Beginning Part I
My Beginning Part II
Reflections On Teaching
Teacher's College

Leora Gesser

Becoming Empowered
Community
Despair
Racisms

Judy Rose

Emerging Themes
Mentoring
The Collegial Model And The Work Family
What Makes Me An Effective Instructor?

Evelyn Battell

Branching Points
Health
Storytelling
The ABEABC Years
Women

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND FACE SHEET USED BY THE *HFH* TEAM

Introduction

Brief description of project in general terms, without giving away the “content” of the codes or the “answers” to the questions we will be asking. Something like: I am part of a group of five ABE and literacy instructors who have been involved in the field for between 6 and 25 years. We have designed a research project to describe, reflect, analyse and define our practice from a research perspective. Through our experience we have found that we can sometimes be highly effective and sometimes we are not. We are interested in these concepts. What is happening between the learners and ourselves that makes us feel effective? What does effective mean in the ABE/literacy context? And the times when we feel ineffective, what is going on in the class, between the learners and ourselves? What does that look like? We want to know what and how effective instructors work. During the last year our team has been writing about our history in the profession and have also journalled our daily practice. We want to hear from other instructors in the field.

(We may want to have a few synonyms for effective to explain ourselves better: ideas?)

Discuss consent and permission to tape. Agree on their interest in receiving a copy of the transcription, being named, etc. *We need to develop either a shared consent form or at least a list of things you need to cover before you start with the questions.*

The interview will be divided into roughly 7 sections although some answers may fit in more than one of the sections.

LIFE BEFORE ABE

Can you tell me when you started teaching ABE?

As they describe you will need to pay attention to see if you are getting a picture of the career path that we can then “contrast” against the ones from your autobiographies. If there are “pieces” missing from their account, you may want to ask.

A probing question might be: What were some important influences that made you decide to be an ABE practitioner? Did you get there by choice or by accident?

THE JOB

What is your work assignment this term or year?

Can you please describe the scope of your job? What all different activities and responsibilities does your job entail?

Listen to what they say and based on that you may want to probe with: the teaching? Administration? Side of your desk? How are these parts of your job? How are they not?

What part of your job do you enjoy the most? Why?

What is important for you as an instructor? How would you describe yourself as an instructor?

How would you describe a very successful teaching situation?

What do you find are the challenges? How do you address such challenges in your teaching?

Can you think of times in the classroom when you are doing the kind of teaching that you really enjoy? How would you describe those times?

STUDENTS:

Tell me about the students in your classes. Probing questions: their characteristics, their purpose, their makeup, their socio economic status?

What do you notice about this these groups of students compared to other times or places. Probing: this year's student population compared to other years? BC's students compared to other places you worked? How is this group different or similar compared to other groups you have had?

Why do you think there are these differences/similarities?

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

How would you describe yourself in terms of your personal characteristics? What adjectives they would use to describe personal characteristics? *This question may need to be explained a bit. Maybe give them hints: do you think of yourself as patient, caring, emotional, etc. but we may want to wait to see if they come up with something first and take it from there.*

Which of the above or other characteristics you think come out most in the classroom? And when interacting with students outside of the classroom? With peers? With administration?

How and when do you reveal your "true" self in the classroom?

LEARNING ENIRONMENT

Describe the classroom learning environment you try to create for your students. (Do not go into detail at first about emotional, physical, etc – probe if they do not go into that).

Probing questions:

You have just described the physical environment you try to create. Is there any other aspect you look at /pay attention to when creating your classroom?

What does that look like? What do you mean by “safe” (*or other words that they may have used and are too abstract*)? Can you say more about that? How do you know when you have succeeded? How do you know when you haven’t succeeded?

How do you create the environment that you have just described?

Some people have mentioned . . . Is that important to you/ Do you agree?
Again the problem with this topic is that we will only be able to query if our interviewees give us an opening/key entry. If they mention/imply words or sentences such as "connectedness", "safety", "team", "community inside or outside of the classroom"... we should see this as an opportunity to probe and move on to community.

COMMUNITY *this section could be merged to the previous one as long as we intentionally probe into the community aspect of the learning environment. That would give us 6 sections instead of 7 which seems like too many.*

Statement:

You mentioned that “. . .” is important to you.

Question:

Why is it important to you?

Can you say more about it?

How do you create “. . .” in the classroom . . . or . . . in the institution . . . or . . . in the ABE community or in your local community?

What does it look like once you have created it in the classroom . . . or in the institution . . . or in the ABE community or in your local community?

POWER & POLITICS

What do you see as your responsibilities? In the classroom? In the institution? Which ones are/are not in your job description?

In what areas do you feel/know you have enough influence or power to do the things you want to accomplish? In what areas are you lacking power to do the things you want to/need to do?

How do you use your power as an instructor? How do you think others use power in your institution?

How do you think the issue of social class plays out in the classroom?

What do think of the statement "teaching is a political act"?

How has the current political climate affected your students? What have you noticed?

Has the current political climate affected the way you do your job?

INTERVIEW FACE SHEET

Although it is called face sheet, we may end up asking these questions at the end or throughout. Some we may not need to ask because we know the answers to the questions and we just fill them out ourselves, other answers may come up during the conversation.

Date of Interview:

Name of Interviewee:

Interviewer:

Interview Site:

Time of Interview:

Method of Recording:

Transcriber:

Demographic Information of the Interviewee:

Pseudonym (wants?):

Address:

Phone Number:

Age:

Gender:

Cultural Background & 1st Language: want these?

Education:

Institution they work at:

For how long?

Classes they teach:

Admin Position:

Participation in the ABE field:

APPENDIX G: UBC RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL



The University of British Columbia
Office of Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
Suite 102, 6190 Agronomy Road, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z3

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL- MINIMAL RISK RENEWAL

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Kjell Rubenson	DEPARTMENT: UBC/Education/Educational Studies	UBC BREB NUMBER: H04-80417
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT: N/A Other locations where the research will be conducted: N/A		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Betsy Alkenbrack		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: N/A		
PROJECT TITLE: From Instructor to Researcher and Back Again: An Ethnography of a Practitioner Research Project		
EXPIRY DATE OF THIS APPROVAL: July 23, 2009		
APPROVAL DATE: July 23, 2008		
The Annual Renewal for Study have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.		
<p>Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board</p> <p>Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair Dr. Ken Craig, Chair Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair Dr. Daniel Salhani, Associate Chair Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair</p>		