Extending Practices... Building Networks

An Institute on Research in Practice in Adult Literacy

St. John's
Newfoundland and Labrador
June 17-21, 2003

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Brother T. I. Murphy Learning Resource Centre
Community-Based Literacy Network
Literacy Development Council of Newfoundland and Labrador
Memorial University of Newfoundland
National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada
RiPAL Network

TABLE OF CONTENTS

REPORTS

Courses
Workshops
Inquiry Sessions

Courses

Getting Started on Research in Practice with Marina Niks

Rapporteurs: Sally Crawford, Joanne Green

This course offered an introduction to research in practice. Marina began by asking people to articulate their assumptions about what research is and who researchers are. The first day provided an overview of research.

Research has three elements: the goal is to develop new knowledge; the process is organized, reflective, and systematic, includes recording what one is doing and documenting one's findings; and the findings are shared. A good researcher is someone who keeps asking questions and seeking answers. A good researcher can work collaboratively with others.

What is research in practice? (from Horsman and Norton, 1999)

- Reading and responding to research
- Reflecting on practice in light of research
- Applying research findings to practice
- Doing research about practice

What makes research in practice?
Research in practice is primarily involved with practitioners and their practice. It is defined by

- who does it (practitioners, or collaboration with others)
- where it is done (as part of practice)
- how it relates to practice (research that informs practice)
- what questions it answers (ones that come out of practice)
- what kind of knowledge is produced (knowledge gained from practice)

On the second day, each participant talked about research that they wanted to do, and any questions they had about their research project. In addition, Marina led the group through several activities.

In the first activity, participants discussed workshops they had attended the previous afternoon. People shared their impressions and talked about which part of the research process was addressed in the workshop. Finally, people talked about how they were able to establish a "conversation" between their practice and the research.

The second activity was looking at a picture book, *Zoom* by Istvan Banyan. The book provided a good way to think about how we frame research questions. As researchers, we need to ask, what is it I need to know about this? Why? How much detail do I need to include? Who is the audience? How can I

connect the detail with the large picture? The story reminded participants that no one picture says it all: the larger the frame, the fewer details. Finally, it reminds us that there is no "better" or "best" research question–only the one that grabs your passion.

For the third activity, participants watched video clips from "Road to Avonlea". We were asked to record the events we observed, but also our feelings, thoughts and interpretations, as well as any observations of ourselves. This activity allowed us to separate what we see from what we feel or interpret in a situation. As researchers, we need to be aware of how we observe through the lens that is our self, and to continually ask how our perspective affects the research.

On the third day, the group discussed questions which arose as we described our research ideas. Some of the issues raised were

- Boundaries
- Reciprocity
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Products

We also tackled a few big questions:

- How do we maintain and sustain support and build interest in research in practice?
- Do all practitioners need to do research?

Glossary:

- action research: research that is connected to an action. Action research usually involves doing something, then reflecting on what was done. Often the action is an attempt to change something
- case studies: studying a particular situation in detail
- collaboration: working with a group of people to examine a question
- comparative: comparing different things
- ethnography: studying a group of people
- longitudinal studies: following the same group of people over a long period of time, usually more than three years
- narratives: telling a story as a form of research. The narrative could be a collaborative effort between learners and the researcher
- participatory: research which involves those who are the focus of research. Participatory research is oriented towards social change
- quantitative research: research focussed on statistical information
- scientific: this research is considered rigorous because it uses methods which can be reproduced by others

What are the steps in research?

Step 1 Ask the question/Choose the topic
- Refine the question (a million times)
- Look to see if/how question has been asked before and how your question fits

Step 2 Make a plan to answer your question
- Who will take part: participants, researchers, funders, resources, skills
- What type of research will be done
- Who are you doing it for
- Indicators/Outcomes: What is the overall objective? What are the expected outcomes? What are the indicators? What does success look like?
- Ethics: how to deal with ethical issues, not just permission slips and confidentiality.How will you share your findings? Who your audience is will influence how you will share your findings.

Step 3 Gather data and analyse it
- Discuss results, write them up in some way
- Statistics if valid and necessary

Step 4 Make recommendations

Step 5 Share your findings through workshops, conferences, and the journal

Step 6 Evaluate your content, process, and product.

Suggested resource:
Horsman, Jenny and Mary Norton. *A Framework to Encourage and Support Practitioner Involvement in Adult Literacy Research in Practice in Canada*. Edmonton: The Learning Centre Press, 1999.

Available from The Learning Centre, 10116 105 Avenue, Edmonton, AB T5H 0K2.

Literacy Practices with Mary Hamilton

Rapporteurs: Janet Isserlis, Elsa Auerbach

Participants in Mary Hamilton's course were asked to prepare a case study of a literacy event before they arrived. The course allowed time for each person to delve more and more deeply into their case studies.

Mary began by talking about how literacies are inferred from observable "events" or "moments" and are patterned by social institutions and power relationships. This approach encourages us to look beyond texts themselves to what people do with literacy, with whom, where and how. Events and moments can be documented; they are specific. What can people do? What are the actions around literacy? In what ways do people use the artifacts of literacy?

This view is an alternative to the view that literacy is specified, measurable practice. Assembling the evidence to make this assertion secure has big implications for policy and practice. If enough people buy into it, policy change can occur and ideas can change.

Social practice theory includes the following building blocks

- activities
- settings
- domains or institutional spaces
- resources
- participants

Mary said she hoped participants could pull out aspects of the social practice approach from their case studies. She asked them to notice, write them, and reflect them back.

Over the four days, participants worked on creating posters which documented their case study. The posters were a way of sharing their findings with other participants at the Institute. They will be available on the RiPAL website (www.nald.ca/ripal).

Case Studies

- Tracy Defoe explored a situation in which a worker asked for a visual rather than a written set of directions for assembling something. In response, someone questioned whether this worker could read.
- Audrey Gardner's project documented a literacy awareness and sensitivity workshop she facilitated at a YMCA.
- Helen Balanoff's case study documented the first trip to a doctor by a pregnant woman in the NWT. Her case study focused on the Aboriginal woman's encounters with institutional literacies.
- Sheila Stewart documented the literacy practices surrounding the abduction and murder of a ten-year-old girl in Sheila's neighbourhood.
- Bill Fagan is the editor of a community garden's newsletter. He documented the community garden as a literacy event.
- Jan Greer Langley documented the experience of using stick-on tattoos as a writing event with a group of learners.
- Bill Day works in a school in which students are invited to share with others once a week. His case study documented one student's sharing.
- Janet Isserlis examined literacy events entailed in the aging, hospitalization, death and dying of her great aunt, Lil.
- Mary Hamilton is working on several case studies, including wedding literacies and the literacy involved in a campaign against the stench from an incineration plant. She is also documenting how people are interacting with the war reporting in the British press.

In discussion, the participants identified many common themes. They explored what the themes might mean

for literacy workers?

for literacy learners?

in the context of each of the case studies?

Three themes that infused all the case studies were:

FEELINGS

DIVERSITY

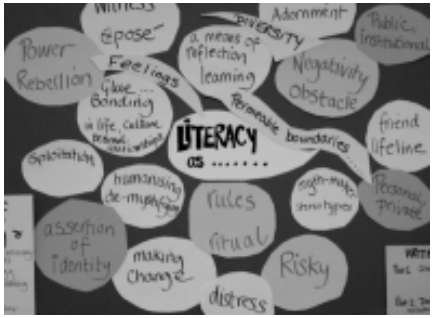
PERMEABLE BOUNDARIES (between literacy and other practices)

Literacy as.....

POWER	Rules Ritual Daring, risky Legacy Demystifying Reminiscence Lifting the veil
GLUE	Bonding, community process, community building, culture, life, connection Personal relationships Friend Lifeline
IDENTITY	Stereotypes Adornment Accessory Display Assertion of identity Private/personal A window on institutional culture and expectations

Participants also identified some methodological tensions in carrying out the case studies:

- How to connect the local and the global; moving between complexity, detail, data and simplicity, analysis, and themes
- Individual research process and public, collaborative meanings and interpretations
- Focusing on literacy vs. focusing on broader social practices within which literacy is taking place
- Telling the whole story and telling the smaller story within the whole
- Process and product—giving different weight to each
- Insider, outsider and other roles of researchers (as teacher, participant, resource person)
- Different purposes for research
- Holding the different perspectives together—data—researcher's perceptions—theory—other participants
- Systematic vs. intuitive analysis



Writing up the case study

Mary suggested that people use the following framework to write up their case study

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Part 1 Context: how you chose a literacy event
What? Why?
Your own relationship to this context
Data you collected

Part 2 Description. Possible formats include:
mapping grid
narrative photo story board time line

Part 3 Taming the data: discuss what you noticed from your data: What is it about?
Identify <u>themes</u> (from the group discussion, from your experience, from reading about literacy as social practice)

Part 4 Reflect on the method
What worked well, what was difficult, strange or uncomfortable.
Ethics, confidentiality, relationships with others

Part 5 Relevance
What might happen as a result of the research you have done?
Who wants to know about it?

Feminist Approaches with Jenny Horsman

Rapporteurs: Judy Bernstein, Sandy Middleton, Anneke van Enk

The goal of the course was to tap into feminist and post-structuralist theory to find empowering and critical ways of approaching research. Participants were to "puzzle" with the questions as well as the insights and experiences we each brought to the course. We were also encouraged to play.

The group brainstormed words that were part of the specialized language of research as well as concepts associated with feminism. Jenny introduced the notion that language shapes our reality and then asked us to consider "realities" from which we were excluded through language. In small groups we discussed what linguistic features tipped us off that we were not part of a given version of "reality" and moved on to consider how we were challenged in the literacy field to work with people whose language and reality were often quite different from our own. We noted how quickly we could be brought to feel we were "outsiders" and thus without power, but we also attended to other "inside/outside" dynamics that make people feel powerless.

On the second day, participants were asked to play with identity and the multiple ways of seeing who we are. We each chose an object from a table and then, in a round, spoke to the object in a loose way, by saying something about what our choice of object said about us. This activity highlighted the fact that who we are and how we name ourselves are loaded. We make different choices about how we represent ourselves: it is a complicated, not a straightforward, process.

We moved on to discuss the phases of research. The goal was to get a sense of what the research process looks like, understanding that often these phases blur together. Seeing it as a structure with phases is partly about funding but it is also a way to gauge where one is in the process.

Breaking into small groups, one group for each phase, we "troubled" some of our assumptions about what happens in each of the following phases of the research process.

- Questions/problems/issues phase
- Data collection phase
- Analysis and interpretation phase
- Reporting/action phase

The third morning began with a discussion of values, and how they relate to research. Jenny shared that she came to her way of doing research, a post-structuralist approach, because of her values. When doing research, she heard many contradictions in her taped interviews. None of the traditional theorists could explain them. She began to read about discourse and realized that the "contradictions" were in fact differences in discourse. Jenny then invited the group to consider their own values. Through rich discussion, we came to see how important it is to be aware of oneself and one's values within the research process.

On the final morning, the theme was: finding power and joy in doing research. Jenny spoke to two threads in the discussion: post-structuralism and evidence-based research.

The term "evidence-based" is used in ways that try to claim that only one thing is evidence and therefore only one decision or outcome is reasonable and a rational decision.

What counts as evidence? Where does evidence take you? One alternative to this view is to explore and make meaning together, to expand how we think about our research problems or questions and our data collection.

Post-structuralism is the idea that one meaning is as true as another. There is nowhere to say "this is the truth." But if there is no truth, is anything ever wrong? Where can we stand to disagree? James Gee suggests we use the following two ethical principles of human discourse:

- That something would harm someone else is always a good reason not to do it.
- One always has the ethical obligation to illuminate social practices that advantage one group over another.

The experience of this course was summed up by one participant who said, "I'm taking away a stuffed suitcase and only I will be able to unpack it."

Moebius Strip

One "product" of Jenny's session was a Moebius strip made of multi-coloured paper. The idea behind using the Moebius strip was that it could stand as a metaphor for feminist research because:

- there is no "in" and "out" (referring to exclusive and inclusive discourses that affect research)
- it is a metaphor, not a "fact" (there are alternate ways of documenting experiences)
- it is not a report, but a patchwork of personal core thoughts (there is no way to provide a complete picture)
- it is endless (research is time-bound and the same research at a different time might look quite different. Also, this refers to natural cycles and the fact that change is a constant.)
- it is not fixed and objective. Research is a composite of many different facts, truths, perspectives, opinions, values
- there are multiple truths, depending on how you perceive things
- it is a mental puzzle
- when you cut the strip in half lengthwise (go to a deeper layer of research) the strip doesn't get cut in half, but turns into a larger circle with more twists and turns

Here is what we wrote on the Moebius strip:

The journey is the destination Keep track of your values and keep checking how they affect your listening Hope Play, prod, puzzle, mull, muse, and find the joy in the research process Balance Be strong to what you believe Holding the tensions Centre Puzzling Personal power, power within Feminist researchers dancing in the light!! Hold strong to your values Try to make visible how meaning is constructed Take time to reflect Research is making meaning Don't let words leave people out Be humble Certainty and ambiguity Thinking the best of the individual, while recognizing the worst of the system Research is only one option for responding to story - there is also humbled silence in the face of what you cannot know or understand, a recommitment to justice, action for change, respect for the power of story and experience

Arts-Based Research with Joe Norris

Rapporteurs: Tamara Levine, Phyllis Steeves, Caroline Vaughan

Participants in this course were invited to explore arts-based research: what it is, how it is applied, examples of various forms of arts based inquiry, and how its use can inform practice. Both participants and presenter asked, does this type of work give us a body of knowledge and/or credible data?

Arts-based research means using various forms of the arts as the lens through which one can re-search (re-look at, or re-view) ideas. The data which emerges from such an inquiry is often rich in acculturated text, offering a depth which isn't possible through more static, academic research. Data collected from such an inquiry has ongoing value to both the learner and the practitioner researcher.

Joe opened the session by introducing a few key concepts. First on the list was liminal, defined as the space between reality and fantasy, or the period between wakefulness and sleep, or a place where each individual can go to collect new meanings. Magi, magic and imagination followed, along with conspire ("to breathe with") and soulfulness.

These terms set the stage for an exploration of the "plausible versus the actual" in relation to research.

In each of the four days, participants explored various activities as forms of meaning-making: concrete poetry, colour interpretation, body sculpting, collage and musical storytelling. Participants were encouraged to either

- start with a concrete idea or question and apply the activity, or
- start with the pure activity and develop the idea from the data which emerges.

We all recognized the ways in which art can be used in community inquiry and as a means to reveal depths in static text, but ultimately only some of the participants were willing to identify arts-based inquiry as a recognized form of research.

Here are a few comments and questions drawn from the group discussions from this course.

- Different approaches to data collection result in the collection of different data.
- Have we lost ways of communicating?
- Find the art form most evocative to the culture.

- Make the meaning from the doing
- What is collected? Data? Meaning? Information?
- How are findings disseminated? Using words? Music? How is it made accessible?
- Does arts-based research mean controlling and manipulating traditional cultural practices?
- If you need to add text to explain the products of arts-based research, aren't you undermining and invalidating the artistic or cultural practice?

The discussions clearly revealed that researchers bring a range of views to arts-based research practices. The course provided prompts and opportunities to reflect on some of these practices. It also provided a range of activities that could be used by researchers in the field as well as instructors in the classroom.

> Quotes offered by Joe:
> "He who defines me negates me." *Kirkegaard*
> "If I could put it into words, I wouldn't have to dance." *Martha Graham*
> "All we have are stories. Even the statistics are stories." *Laurel Richardson*
> "I've been framed." The Three Little Pigs by *A. Wolf*
> "Play is the work of the young child." *June Cottrell*

Suggested Arts-Based Activities

Collage

- work individually to create a collage of words and images from magazines that represents your research, and paste your collage to Bristol board
- share visual stories in a poster gallery

Percussion instruments

- choose a percussion instrument
- in pairs, take turns playing the instrument to describe a day in your life using sound and rhythm
- the person who has listened to the aural description talks about what they experienced in the sounds

Body Sculpture

- write a word on a card that represents the theme of your research
- in pairs, one person sculpts the other person to represent the word
- the rest of the group calls out words and phrases to describe the sculpture. These words "amplify" or help to re-conceptualize the word on the card. For example, the word inclusion evoked open, welcome, inviting, receptive, embracing, vulnerable, which made the researcher reflect, "The gates of inclusion can expand or retract, there is vulnerability within inclusion."

Workshops

Blurring the Lines between Research, Teaching, and Action

with Elsa Auerbach

Rapporteur: Tamara Levine

We started by looking at a photograph of Laotian immigrant children standing beside a chain-link fence in California with a warning sign about cancer-causing chemicals in the area. We were asked to look at the photograph as a teacher, as a researcher, and in any other role. How would each interact with the photograph?

A teacher could

- discuss the photograph with literacy learners without reference to the words
- pick out the word "Warning" and unpack it
- lead a discussion about what the photo is saying, especially about systems that put immigrant children into danger
- give the group a camera to take back to one's community, consider taking photos, writing letters to the mayor etc. as part of a political action strategy

A researcher could

- translate the sign into Laotian
- explore why the children are in danger
- look at the history of the housing project, why these families live there, what chemicals are involved, what action is needed
- look at any other impacts

As a whole group, we talked about these different roles. We concluded that teachers want to transform, researchers have questions but not an obvious audience for their answers. Both want to help make change. The link between research and practice is most valuable when it contributes to changing the lives of participants. Here are some of the highlights of the discussion:

- We need to ask: who is the research for? What will it accomplish?
- Approaching something as a teacher, researcher or activist leads to a different place on the same circle
- We need to look at how literacy links to so many other aspects of learners' lives (e.g. poverty and violence). These can be barriers to learning, but they also provide a wealth of material for curriculum content in a social justice model of education.

Learners can play the role of researchers if we are willing to "hand over the tools of production".

Possible activities include:

- community mapping
- family literacy surveys
- literacy logs (where, when, with whom, what, why, in what language do you use literacy skills)
- family trees
- interview grids
- discovering generative themes

In other words, you can use a seemingly neutral tool to "mine the issues". We divided into groups and each group tried out one of these tools.

The final discussion covered the following:

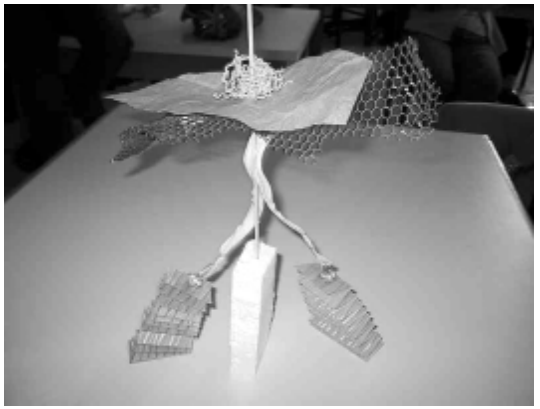
- Points of resistance (authoritarian contexts, peer pressure to maintain the status quo, fear of imposing an agenda)
- We need to build in an understanding of the difference between personal and social problems: what can I/we do to address this?
- Often, institutions and employers have a narrow definition of literacy. We need to work together to expand the definition to include social change.
- Social change pedagogy can include looking at the literacy skills we need to accomplish the range of tasks in our lives as they link to systems (e.g. Employment Insurance, Worker's Compensation) so that we can understand the systems and work for change.

Doing Freedom: Ethnography of an adult literacy centre
with Bonnie Soroke

Rapporteur: Anneke van Enk

Bonnie opened by explaining that her zipper sculptures actually began as two-dimensional photocopies of zippers arranged to represent a frustrating experience in an educational environment. Then one day, she brought actual zippers into a conversation while literacy tutoring to illustrate how she saw certain power issues in schools; the person she was speaking with took them up in response, and an entire exchange took shape using not only words but zippers. Bonnie eventually sewed wire into the zippers so that they could be "sculpted" instead of just lying flat and she began using them as a learning/teaching tool. She uses the zippers in her thesis work, too. She now uses the zipper sculptures not only as a tool for gathering data (for example, she used them to communicate with student interviewees at an adult learning centre, and invited them to use the zippers as well) but also for reporting on her findings. Bonnie believes the zipper sculptures are a strong reflective tool. They help with "what feels like a five-dimensional process."

Bonnie then invited us to make sculptures of our own using the materials she had brought in (zippers, of course, but also all sorts of recycled bits and pieces, from slices of styrofoam pool noodles to ends of vinyl tubing). When we were done, the sculptures were placed on a table. We viewed them one by one and were invited to call out what we saw ("something small and delicate and just as big as anybody", "the health care system", "mardi-gras self assurance", "someone carrying a canoe"). The sculptors spoke about what they had made ("an iceberg that is delicately balanced; a piece entitled "walk strong with your wings wide open"; a city park in a neighborhood where a child was abducted; a window being pushed open by some and slammed shut by others; a balancing piece just for fun, a black wall representing barriers and blocks). Some of us began by deciding what theme we wanted to represent and how, while for others themes emerged as they simply played with the materials. One participant commented on how strangely moved she felt working on and looking at the sculptures, to which Bonnie added that she experiences much the same in her own process: "It's very powerful. It can draw out a lot and it's important to be aware of that and to exercise care and respect when using it with others."



Letters Home from South Africa
with Betsy Alkenbrack

Rapporteur: Sandy Middleton

Betsy introduced the workshop by describing how she lived and worked in South Africa from 1990 to 2001. Beginning in May 2000, from South Africa, she began writing about her life and her work in "letters home" to literacy practitioners on The Hub, the BC literacy electronic network. These letters were posted online for a year and published by Literacy BC in an illustrated booklet.

Betsy found writing these letters a wonderful opportunity to reflect and have an audience. She did not, at the time, think of them as a research tool. However, she has subsequently thought about letter writing as an alternative method of documenting practice.

The workshop began with an open discussion about using letters in research. Discussion points included:

- Letters are personal, thoughtful and add an element of purposefulness to writing. Having an audience and "knowing" your audience facilitates the process.
- Finding your voice and being concerned about the welfare of the reader matter.
- Letters can be a way to have a private conversation.
- Email has changed what counts as letters. Email is used in different aspects of research, e.g. to collect information, work though analysis —it blurs the lines between these different activities.

Participants then had an opportunity to visit "stations" Betsy had set up. Each described a different aspect of literacy in South Africa and her experiences there. At each station, participants were asked to reflect on what interested, excited, or disturbed them. They had the opportunity to write their comments. The stations were:

- REFLECT (Regenerating Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques): Combines ideas of Paulo Freire with Participatory Rural Appraisal
- Teachers and Teacher Education
- Voter Education
- Research and ABE Exams
- Learners
- Personal and Professional Stories

After visiting the stations participants returned to the larger group. Betsy handed out stamped envelopes and invited participants to take a few minutes to write a letter that she would mail.

Finally, participants competed to win a copy of *Letters Home* by answering "skill-testing" questions about South Africa and Betsy's life there!!

The Myth of Objectivity: Whose knowledge is it?
with Nancy Jackson

Rapporteur: Elsa Auerbach

This workshop allowed people to explore what is meant by objectivity, and why it is such a powerful notion in relation to research.

Everyone has different concepts of objectivity, but most people think research has to be objective. Scientists use the word "objectivity" to mean a particular way of looking at things or analyzing an object and suspending judgement. This way of looking is unbiased, uses established procedures, can be verified, and is observable and reproducible and therefore valid.

The alternative, non-scientific research, aims to be systematic and transparent rather than "objective." It can

- be based on assumptions or make one's assumptions visible
- allow room for the unexpected, and for multiple perspectives and interpretation
- resist cutting things up artificially
- make explicit connections between data and interpretation
- be explicit about what we do with the data

Nancy encouraged people to think about how research is done. First, she reminded people to declare what they don't know, and to make public all the definitions, usages and vantage points they are aware of. Second, she suggested that people reformulate their question into one that starts by assuming that there are multiple perspectives and questions. Finally, ask the participants, those being researched, how to examine the issue. What does the insider start with? What does the outsider start with? How is research different depending on the positioning of the researcher? Whose knowledge is valued?

As we discussed these questions, new issues emerged:

- Do different kinds of knowledge serve different kinds of purposes?
- Is policy influenced by outsider knowledge, and practice influenced by insider knowledge?
- How to challenge the validity of empirical / evidence-based research?
- How can we systematize local knowledge?

"Objectivity" doesn't give us the "neutrality" it promises. Transparency, which reveals one's choices, limits and assumptions, can replace objectivity. The difference between the two is in how each deals with the complexity involved in understanding the social world. We need research that doesn't abandon this complexity.

Practical Research Approaches for Communities
with Barbara Burnaby

Rapporteur: Sally Crawford

This workshop provided a practical overview of the steps involved in setting up a research project. Barbara reminded us that research should generate new knowledge. If it is set up to "prove" an answer that you already know, it is not as strong as research that surprises you.

Every research project begins with a question. The first step in research is posing the question. The question can be a hypothesis—something that can be answered yes/no. The question could be exploratory, for example an issue such as youth at risk. The question could be more grounded. It can also be just asking, why? A useful term in working out a question is praxis, which means the ways in which research, reflection and practice inform each other.
(research ← →reflection ← → practice)

Research must also be clear about who the participants are. Participants in research are the source of information. They can be involved in the research or the subject of it. Participatory or collaborative research is difficult, but highly valued. There are many concerns about participants: are they accessible? How will they feel? Can you get the data needed? Relationships with participants raise lots of questions about power dynamics. This is especially true when the researcher has a different power status from the participants (for example, they also teach the participants).

A good source about qualitative research is *Methods from the Margins*, by Kirby and McKenna. It discusses the differences between researching up (with participants who have a higher status than the researcher) and researching down (with participants who have a lower status).

When you design a research project, you need to consider who the audience for the results is. At the same time, community researchers have to deal with lots of power issues. Funders are looking for outcomes, and may be perceived as biasing the results. Where can you get support to do the research you want to do?

Another issue Barbara raised is the time frame. Because questions always lead to more questions, it is often hard to end the research. When you plan research, make sure to allow some time for unexpected things, or for "screw-ups". Everyone plans how to set up their research, but should also plan how the research will end.

Most research projects start with a proposal. It is essential to think through your project beforehand. Make sure all steps and contingencies are included in your proposal. Remember, too, to allow for changes in plans. Nothing is written in stone.

The group discussed a few research projects that participants were planning. They considered different ways to pose the questions and structure the research. This led to some discussion of a few issues:

- What is the continuum from very specific to the local situation to "objective" information? If I am doing work in my location, is this just a case study? Will this research or these findings apply anywhere else?
- How can you make the evaluations understandable and usable?
- How do you pose the research question?

Suggested resource:
Kirby, Sandra and Kate McKenna. *Experience Research Social Change: Methods from the Margins*. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1989.

Process of Empowerment: A struggle of strategy

with Bill Fagan

Rapporteur: Sheila Stewart

Bill described the struggle of a low-income community in the St. John's, NL area in trying to have a government agency overturn a decision not to fund a literacy project. The project, L.E.A.R.N. (Learning, Empowerment, Action, Reflection Network) was a framework of 10 education/literacy projects, and included such activities as learning how to edit a community newsletter, developing computer skills, or learning how to help children with their school work. The community consists of 155 families, about half of whom are headed by single parents. Of approximately 135 school age children, about half are not successful in school, and are dropping out in their early teens; there have been no graduates from grade 12 in a three year period.

Two community representatives struggled for eight months to have the government agency reverse its decision not to fund this community education project. Bill kept a journal and was able to identify nine strategies within the empowerment process. Five of these were strategies used by the agency, the empowered, to block or disempower the community: delays, linguistic mazes, us and them, paper trail, and dependence. Four of the strategies were supports that the community used: identifying a target audience, conviction, stamina or persistence, and enlisting support. Implications for dealing with these strategies were discussed. Unfortunately, the community was not successful in its struggle for funding.

Key words:

power
empowered
disempower
strategy
literacy
low-income

Reading Our Work: Implications for practices from researching literacies as social practice

with Tracy Defoe

Rapporteur: Caroline Vaughan

Tracy presented research from a study of four workplaces that will be published in late 2003 by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. This research examined the place of literacies in work culture including examples of where literacies are intermeshed with relations of power within the workplace among interacting groups, and how communication is enhanced or distorted by these interactions.

Tracy then gave a detailed ethnography of literacy use within one of the workplaces studied, "Metalco". Behaviours often ascribed culturally as characteristic of certain groups were noted, not without some well-intentioned humour—for example the engineers within the workplace who defined Tracy's work as a "communication system quality audit". More seriously, however, social behaviours influenced some of the greatest breakdowns in communications. For each distinct, natural grouping within the workplace, a particular directive could have multiple meanings.

Tracy described the technically detailed work at "Metalco". Teams of engineers work alongside machinists and others who each have defined parameters of exacting precision ("To 1/10th of a thousandth of an inch"). When applied to the broader workplace, however, the ethos of exacting precision, with authoritative and sometimes unquestioned directives, allowed for communications breaks and barriers between groups. Various groups operating within the workplace could apply differing interpretations, and one word within a memo was able to change the entire meaning. Often, the source of a system problem was miscommunication, not a lack of technical or fundamental "literacy" skill on the part of the worker or worker group.

Some of the research techniques detailed in the session included:

- Seeing literacies in the weave (i.e. practice where people are, not in the "classroom")
- Getting past the surface (Looking beyond skill to social relationships, greater work environment, etc.)
- Looking back; seeing the 'filters' in past practice (i.e. using a language of assessment in reviewing past practice)
- Reading a workplace (not just what kinds of notes did people take, but what did things mean there)
- Multiple, local meanings
- Paying attention to resistance, expect and honour it (valuing the work)
- Recognizing the value of each distinct group, and their applied knowledge

Finally, the information which emerged from the research converged around new ways of viewing literacy in the workplace. Beyond the traditional view of functional language skill sets, *Reading Our Work* describes the complexities of literacy as a social practice and how it is embedded in workplace knowledge, culture and action.

Suggested resource:
Belfiore, Mary Ellen, Tracy A. Defoe, Sue Folinsbee, Judy Hunter and Nancy S. Jackson. *Reading Work: Literacies in the New Workplace*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003.

Reading Policy
with Zoe Fowler

Rapporteur: Phyllis Steeves

This workshop provided an analysis of the assumptions behind current literacy policy. Zoe's interest in policy comes from her interest in rhetoric. Zoe gave an overview of literacy policy in the United Kingdom (UK). Discussion followed, raising questions that included: Why has the government made literacy a priority? What kind of research informs policy? What is omitted? How is a problem framed and defined? What is the impact of power held by international bodies such as the World Bank, United Nations, European Union, and OECD? Is the rise of literacy on the policy agendas of different countries a result of international pressures and agendas?

Zoe then turned to Canadian policy, and asked participants to look at "Federal Literacy Facts: an update on literacy-related developments at the national level" issued by the Movement for Canadian Literacy in June 2003. It is available online at www.literacy.ca. The document highlights some key recommendations / policies of the Canadian government in relation to literacy. Participants broke into small groups to look at the language and metaphor used in this document, and to consider how Canadian language and rhetoric compared to those in documents from the UK. A similarity of terms and discourse was apparent and suggested a common starting point.

Back in the large group, we discussed the value, impact, and meaning of other terms such as "knowledge economy". Some of our questions were: Who is the text intended to address? Who is "we"? What are some of the alternatives to the current policy speak? Does the language of solution used by various governments place blame? Does the language used by various governments reflect practitioner / researcher beliefs; do practitioners / researchers truly believe that individuals with lower levels of reading and writing skills have as much to offer as highly literate individuals?

Finally, discussion turned to solutions. How do literacy practitioners / researchers manoeuvre within and help to shape policy? Participants talked about needing to engage more with various stakeholders, and to deflect blame for literacy issues away from those living in poverty.

Supporting Inquiry Work: What do we know? what do we do?
with Janet Isserlis

Rapporteur: Tannis Atkinson

State literacy resource centres (SLRCs) came into existence in 1991, when US federal legislation funded and developed adult literacy resource centres. In 1994, a resource centre was set up in Rhode Island. The state director of adult education heard about action research and worked with the SLRC to support those projects. Janet's predecessor, along with a reading specialist who worked with educational research, helped support the projects; in 1998 the state expanded the time allotted to projects from two or three months to the entire academic year.

Janet is now the resource person for Rhode Island. Each year, she works with a group of practitioners who want to explore research in practice. The number of practitioners who participate each year has varied from seven to 18. Practitioners have clearly stated that their involvement relies on support in the form of money and time to do this work.

Janet described the process she uses. The group meets at an initial retreat in October. Each month, they have an assignment. By January, each practitioner has designed a project and begins to collect data. The practitioners meet monthly. Group members share the results of their research online in June.

The following is an outline of the process Janet leads people through:

- The first step is to form a question. Janet asks, "What's your itch?" She encourages people to make the ordinary extraordinary. She recommended an interview with Stephen Brookfield at www.ntlf.com/html/pi/9601/v5n2.pdf.
- Janet feels her role is to help people think about what they're doing. She works with them to explore critical analysis. She encourages them to articulate their assumptions. The process of critical analysis means to continually surface, examine and challenge one's assumptions.
- Janet also encourages people to use the following inquiry process:
  - Plan
  - Act
  - Observe
  - Reflect
- To help people prepare to collect data she encourages people to consider a number of data gathering processes, including sociometry, especially work by Jean McNiff.

After data is gathered, Janet encourages people to do categorization exercies (seeing the information in different ways), and to separate fact and opinion. Each year, the participants' reports are available online.

Janet also outlined some of the ongoing issues for this work:

- Money is always an issue. The budget for this work in Rhode Island includes funding for Janet's position, $700 per participating literacy worker, and some money for a retreat.

- Very few of the 200 state-funded literacy teachers work full-time. This makes it difficult for people to connect, or to stay in literacy work. Janet is considering a different model of support, such as study circles, so that she can work with more people.

What feels hopeful is that practitioners are getting together because of cuts and changes to government funding and exploring a range of approaches to and uses of research in the contexts of both funding parameters and classroom practice.

Suggested resources and links:

Brookfield, Stephen. *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995.

McNiff, Jean. *Action Research: Principles and Practice*. London: Routledge, 1992

Rhode Island State Literacy Resource Centre:
www.brown.edu/lrri/inquiry.html

Violence and Learning: Taking Action (VALTA) Learnings from the Changing Practices Project

with Fay Begg, Heather Ward, Janet Bauer and Mary Norton

Rapporteur: Joanne Green

The aims of the workshop were to:

- give an overview of the VALTA project
- provide a taste of the approaches to teaching/learning used in VALTA
- share learnings from three Changing Practices Projects
- invite people to relate VALTA learnings with their practices and experiences.

Participants were invited to settle into the session with a guided stretch and relaxation activity. Then, using materials provided, they drew, wrote or sculpted a response to the question. "What brought you to the session?" Responses were shared in small groups, with key ideas being reported to the whole group. These responses provided a context for sharing information about the VALTA project.

Through the VALTA project, literacy and adult educators in Alberta have been learning about the impacts of violence on learning, and ways to address them. The project is rooted in research and practice about violence and learning (see references), in the experiences of the Alberta RiPAL Network project, and in research and practice about using art, movement and music to invite women into learning.

Following a twelve-week online course and workshops in the fall of 2002, seven VALTA participants initiated "Changing Practices Projects," aimed at introducing and learning about program practices that might enhance learning. Heather, Fay and Janet each provided a brief overview of their projects and research approaches, and shared insights about what they had learned.

Some of the questions they explored were:

- How can literacy workers help learners develop positive self-concepts? (Heather)
- How will exploring different ways of learning and knowing help me understand other adults' experiences in new learning contexts? (Fay)
- How can I create safe environments for women learners? (Janet)

Workshop participants then met in small groups to discuss whether and how the learnings from the VALTA project related to their own practices as literacy workers. Due to time limitations, participants may not have been able to explore the issue and possibilities in any depth.

In keeping with the intention of using various approaches to learning, the workshop ended with a song. A publication about VALTA and the Changing Practices Projects will be available in 2004.

Suggested resources:
Horsman, Jenny. T*oo Scared to Learn: Women, Violence and Education*. Toronto: McGilligan Books, 1999.

Morrish, Elizabeth, Jenny Horsman, and Judy Hofer. *Take on the Challenge*. Boston: World Education, 2002. Available online at:
www.worlded.org/docs/TakeOnTheChallenge.pdf

Voice Activated Computer Literacy Project
with Bill Day

Rapporteur: Nancy Jackson

Bill works at The Balmoral Centre for Adult Studies in Thunder Bay, Ontario. This session reported on research undertaken with students of the Centre to explore the use of computer dictation software as a tool to "inspire literacy" and assist in development of writing skills.

The project used dictation software called Dragon Naturally Speaking. It allows students to talk into their computers rather than typing. The students' speech is transcribed onto the screen, and the student can then work with the text to develop proper punctuation, sentence structure and other writing skills.

Two groups of students were represented in the study. The first was people experiencing learning disabilities, whether physical, mental, emotional, or social. The second was advanced ESL learners. All students were reported to benefit from the program, but those with difficulty in English pronunciation face the most barriers with the software.

The project identified the following seven benefits of working with dictation software:

- identifies areas for improvement in language skills
- assists with pronunciation and oral language development
- gives instant, non-judgmental feedback
- provides a variety of tools for skill development
- reinforces correct spelling and grammar
- improves self-correction skills
- encourages self-confidence.

This research clearly identified both the potential benefits and challenges to making good use of this software. The instructor must be thoroughly comfortable with the technology and become fully conversant with the software

well before attempting to work with students. Students will also need to develop considerable comfort with using a computer and microphone before they can benefit from this program. For some students, this will be an added incentive; for others it will be an added barrier. Bill stressed the technical requirements for hardware and software, and the technical support required in the teaching environment. It took nine months to set up the environment for the research being reported here.

The full report, including the curriculum developed and used in the study, and a CD documenting the outcomes of the experience for one student, are available from The Balmoral Centre in Thunder Bay.

To order the report, contact:
ldepiero@lhbe.edu.on.ca

What Makes Literacy/ABE Instructors Effective in Their Practice?

with Evelyn Battell, Diana Twiss, Betsy Alkenbrack

Rapporteur: Janet Isserlis

This workshop described a research project underway in BC, which is trying to answer the question, "What makes a good instructor?" The project is a collaboration between five instructors and three research friends who are graduate students.

In the first phase of the project, everyone wrote an autobiography, then read it through, looking for themes that represented major influences and concerns. The eight common themes that emerged were:

- personal characteristics
- ideas about teaching
- learning/classroom environment
- community
- power and politics (power or politics)
- students
- adult basic education career path
- life before adult basic education

Each participant pulled out material connected to these themes. The group worked by electronic conference, and each person added their material to a folder for each theme. One person read through all of the material for one theme, and wrote a summary of the findings.

In the next phase of the project, each person kept a journal of their classroom work for four weeks. Not all of the researchers could make time to write, so some researchers spoke to one another on the phone, and then transcribed their conversations. In this phase, the following common themes emerged:

- the job (philosophy, style and strategies)
- learning / the classroom environment (collaborative or facilitative approach to instruction)
- students (power, politics, other)

The final phase of data collection will be interviewing 18 other instructors. By November of 2003, the group will move onto writing up their findings.

So far, major issues that have arisen include:

- if we find out what "effective" means, would we train teachers to do these things?
- does useful research really tell us what to do?
- one of the values of this work is that it has allowed us the opportunity to take conversations to another level of analysis
- there is not enough time: we are all "working off the side of our desks"
- switching from teaching to the work of analysis is huge: it feels as though we need more time to get into that mental space
- we are discovering that there are many things we don't agree about, which we assumed we understood in the same way. We need to find a way for the final document to include a range of agreements and disagreements.

Inquiry Sessions

After the Institute: Staying connected

Twenty-one people attended this meeting. Participants began by talking about their interest in staying connected. Then people described the networks in place in different parts of the country (Alberta, BC, Manitoba and Ontario) as well as RaPAL in the UK. What emerged was a desire to have more networking over a wider area.

The network will only be as strong as the most isolated people feel we are. What do people in NWT or Labrador, for example, or who are isolated—what do they need or want? How can be as inclusive as possible, not just serve large urban centres?

How can we connect?

- We should set up collaborations with organizations that want to do more research and that have resources. For example, MCL has a good reputation in the field, with practitioners, politicians and bureaucrats in Ottawa. Can we collaborate with other organizations like MCL?
- Big money is coming through the Canadian Learning Institute (CLI). If we can formalize ourselves as a group and build on our momentum, we could have input. After today, we are the research in practice consortium in adult literacy. We need to strategize how to be the voice that informs CLI policy.
- This could be an emerging network, but we can't speak for others—this network is incomplete. What about Aboriginal, francophone and deaf programs?

Ways we could stay connected include:

- Setting up a listserv through NALD
- Using the discussion forum on the Literacies website
- First Steps is a national project looking into the feasibility of a single national electronic network
- Pay someone to keep the website up to date
- Including regular updates in coalition newsletters about research websites

Why stay connected?

If we keep information flowing, working through provincial coalitions, we can help encourage support for research.

Electronic Conferencing as a Tool for Research: Youth literacy—what works

with Diana Twiss and Sandy Middleton

Rapporteur: Caroline Vaughan

Diana and Sandy are facilitators on The Hub, the BC literacy electronic network and conferencing system. The Hub is a project of Literacy BC and Capilano College.

This session looked at electronic conferencing as a tool supporting research in practice: the how and why of conferencing, what conferencing tools are available, and what initiatives, websites, and projects support electronic communication about research. In particular, the presenters described an electronic conference that took place on the Hub. Youth Literacy: What works? was an example of how this medium can provide a useful and interactive exchange of information and ideas about research projects and issues.

The Youth Literacy: What works? electronic conference on The Hub (January to March 2003) was based on The New School @ Surrey, a national research and demonstration project co-funded by the National Literacy Secretariat and the Crime Prevention Centre, and partnered by Surrey School District and Literacy BC. The project is developing a new and effective educational alternative for high school students who have great difficulty reading and writing. The model focuses on multiple intelligences and engaged learning. It combines lectures with group discussions and paired and individual work, emphasizing the use of technology, arts activities, and hands-on experience.

The electronic conference was moderated by Heide Wrigley, the senior researcher at The New School. The aim was to stimulate discussion of critical issues related to youth dropping out of school. The conference was made available through a specially developed conferencing web site. Approximately 125 participants from four countries registered for the conference. Participants included youth literacy educators, secondary school teachers and principals, and people engaged in policy development. The conference format included two weeks of introductions and questions, and six weekly discussion sessions, each focusing on a specific question.

The conference was a success. Participants checked in, read and responded to messages, and downloaded materials. Some of the learnings from the conference about how to effective use electronic conferencing include the need to:

- Have an active moderator who can engage participation online
- Provide continuous updates, or summaries, for those who do not sign in every day.
- Respond quickly to any technical problems. This is critical, as participants will quickly drop off if they do not get the support they need.

A handout developed by Diana and Sandy listed best practices of online communities:

- Online communities are intentional communities. They need to be facilitated, accessible and pay attention to both process and content.
- Establishing protocols for discussion helps to define the online community in terms of: safety, respect, tolerance, diversity, and values. Protocols also help conference participants under stand the "rules of the road", for example, the importance of brevity online.
- Participants need and benefit from shortcuts. Technical tips, which take full advantage of the technology, are important.

Suggested links:
National conferencing project:
www.nald.ca/firststeps/
The RiPAL network:
www.nald.ca/ripal
Literacy Research Database:
www.nald.ca/crd/
Literacies journal:
www.literacyjournal.ca

Ethics in Practitioner Research
with Nancy Jackson

Rapporteur: Phyllis Steeves

The workshop began with each participant sharing information about their workplace or research interests. The range of needs and interests expressed provided an excellent springboard for a discussion of ethical practice. Ethics for research in practice were simply framed using seven points: information, understanding, respect, risk, power, anonymity and confidentiality, agreement.

Much of the thinking and most policies related to ethics are affected by the issue of legal liability. The federal government's Privacy Act, the Yukon Territory's Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and Alberta's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act are examples of legislation related to the gathering of personal information and how it is used, stored and disseminated.

Researchers working collaboratively with and / or receiving research funding from educational institutions, non-government organizations or private corporations or foundations, must also consider various internal policies in addition to federal, provincial or territorial legislation.

Many funders are concerned about the possibility of being sued by research participants and have, or are working towards, developing policies and procedures as one way to minimize the risk. Central to this is the idea of 'informed consent', whereby the researcher works to ensure research participants understand in advance and agree (usually in writing) to the aims and processes of research.

With the weight of legal liability in the forefront of most institutional ethical procedures, other issues related to ethical research practices can easily be overshadowed. Clearly the informed consent process itself raises questions—there is so much potential for unethical practice. Questions related to power also need to be considered and addressed. Research 'findings' are given special authority and thus power in our society.

What do researchers do with this power and what forms does its abuse take? Who selects the few that speak for many? Whose reality will be reflected in the research?

Legal liability and concerns related to power and responsibility are just two areas that researchers need to consider to help ensure their research follows ethical practice.

Suggested links:
Federal Privacy Act:
http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/P-21/93543.html

Yukon Territory's Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act:
www.atipp.gov.yk.ca/

Alberta's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act:
www3.gov.ab.ca/foip/legislation/foip_act/index.cfm

Is Literacy Viewed As an Accessibility Issue Among Community Services That Do not Have a Literacy Program?

with Audrey Gardner

In this workshop, Audrey described her research as part of a community development project. The Connecting Literacy to Community (CLC) project encourages community services to think about how accessible they are to people who do not read and write. For CLC, Audrey asked service providers to think about whether print or other literacy issues get in the way of providing good service. A report of the project will be available in the Fall of 2003.

The research findings identified two major literacy barriers within community services.

- Perception barriers include:
  - Public perceptions that literacy is only something that happens at school, and it is all about the ABC's.
  - Individual perceptions. Most people, even those who have difficulty reading and writing, don't see literacy as one of their issues.
- Invisibility. This is by far the biggest barrier. Literacy is assumed, which makes it difficult for community workers to think about how it affects their work.

Audrey encouraged community services to find ways to reduce these barriers. She encouraged service providers to think in new ways about literacy. By using the Literacy Audit Kit and other activities (such as workshops on literacy sensitivity, verbal communication and plain language), she helped community services engage in organizational change to improve services for people who struggle with reading and writing.

In this project, Audrey encouraged organizations to find out how to better serve clients. Rather than simply referring people to literacy programs, community services need to first explore what barriers exist in their organization, and find ways to eliminate those barriers. She encouraged supported referral, where service providers learn more about the program that the person is being referred to, helping with filling out forms, getting to the location, etc.

Service providers need to be educated about literacy. One way is to do an

awareness workshop, which can include the following:

- What do you know about literacy? Discuss.
- Watch the video, "Literacy Matters". Ask participants to think about what stood out for them.
- Build strategies for making your program or service more accessible.

In asking people to think differently about literacy, Audrey draws on the New Literacy Studies. She encourages service providers to see the multiple literacies people use, and to consider the strengths of diverse ways of handling print, rather than assuming a deficit model. She encourages service providers to see the social, cultural and political aspects of literacy and to focus on community capacity building and not just on individual skills.

Suggested resources:

Devins, Susan and Anne Scott. *The Literacy Audit Kit: Tools to Help Make Your Services More Accessible*. Calgary: Alberta Association for Adult Literacy, 1997.
(includes 15 min. "Literacy Matters" video, 1 video guide, 1 text and 17 handouts)

Gardner, Audrey. *Connecting Literacy to Community*. Calgary: Bow Valley College, 2003.

The Role of Academically Trained Researchers in Research in Practice

with Anneke van Enk and Marina Niks

Rapporteurs: Judy Bernstein and Janet Isserlis

Both presenters are doctoral students interested in research and practice. They are aware that they are being trained to be part of the academic research culture and are sensitive to this. They want to explore the role of academic researchers in alternative practices for making knowledge. They thought the Institute would be a good place to open the topic up to others. The workshop was a discussion which drew on the experience and insights of those present. The following are some of the issues and questions which arose in the discussion.

When a community/academic team work together, the issue of ownership becomes important, both in terms of the process and the product that comes out of it. If people are not involved in designing the project, they don't get what they need out of it or feel any ownership. How does ownership move back and forth and get negotiated?

How aware are people of the power they have in different contexts and structures? The key thing is how reflexive each academic researcher is—how do they make use of their power and position.

The National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) sees research as very important and is interested in who is shaping research and how. Research informs policy. The NLS also has a role in communicating the findings of major research projects like IALS; what is its responsibility in explaining the assumptions that underlie such research?

How can we make it easier for practitioners to find out about what's being published? They don't have the time or resources. Could academic researchers help select or filter "good" research that's worth reading?

Given the common perception, both inside and outside the academy, that there is a "right" way to do research, perhaps academically trained researchers have the role of a buffer—trying to convince both sides that there are many different ways to do research. What counts as knowledge? Another part of the role is to encourage academics to value what practitioners know and learn.

Practice is doing; documenting is another job. Don't you need to do something different than your everyday practise if you're a practitioner doing research? What is the line between being a researcher in practice versus being just a reflective practitioner?

The group had a long discussion about literature reviews that touched on a range of questions. What kind of literature review would make sense for practitioners? What would it take for academics to create literature that takes practice into account? Why does knowledge have to be screened through the eyes of academia in order to "count"? From another angle, what would have to change so that academics would review a body of practitioner knowledge before they did their work? What could academically trained researchers produce, that had coherence, rigour, theoretical seriousness, but also took up questions of practice and resonated with literacy practice?

Literature reviews are about engaging in a conversation with what's already been written—to say what you agree with and don't agree with. In practice, we don't necessarily need to link to the academic literature. What would be more interesting would be to review knowledge relevant to what we're doing, tying questions and learning into broader discussions happening within social movements. Maybe practitioner research needs to connect, in different ways. We need to find alternatives that serve our needs.

The discussion then shifted to whether research in practice would create its own literature and whether that literature would be cited in other literature reviews. Does the act of practitioner research create its own literature? Will views shift?

We don't want to fall into the polarity of academics versus practitioners. But how can we support the production of things that can be referred to as building a conversation? How can we help people use knowledge that hasn't been acknowledged?

Other topics touched on in the discussion:

- Does SSHRC (the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) mainly fund the academy to watch practitioners do research? SSHRC funds academically shaped research and so requires the presence of an academically trained researcher in the partnership. The criteria need to be challenged. We should be proactive; we need to move it forward, make it better, and be open about what we're asking for.
- Does research in practice produce interesting research, or is it an object of research?
- Academics have the philosophical clout to tie interest in practitioner research to debates within academia about what counts as knowledge.
- Academics have the luxury to fight battles about the foundation of knowledge. We need an academic voice to link up debates in the literacy field to issues in the academy, to make arguments about the legitimacy of practitioners' voices that even SSHRC can listen to.
- One model of research was used in health projects, which were mandated to do research and also translate the findings into documents for

consumers and fact sheets for doctors. SSHRC is interested in the gap in knowledge, in seeing that a larger part of each initiative tries to overcome this divide. We should trust our experience in the field and trust that we can address the problem.
- Transfer journals are in place so that knowledge created in the academy can be disseminated. How do we shift that thinking to recognize that knowledge is made in lots of different places? The journal, *Literacies*, aims to include material that comes from different places in the field and to frame it all as legitimate knowledge.

Finally, we returned to our original question.
- The funding process is not supporting research in practice. SSHRC funds academically shaped research. The criteria for funding have to be changed.
- NLS has more flexible funding criteria, but their projects do not have the same credibility in the academic sector.
- We need to link practitioner researchers to the debates going on in academia about the foundations of knowledge.

Sharing Research and Reflections: The journal needs you!

with Tannis Atkinson and members of the Editorial Committee

Rapporteur: Tamara Levine

The vision for the journal is that it will foster communication, connections and challenges, both in print and online. People are invited to submit a range of types of articles. The list of possibilities is outlined on page 20 of the first issue. The journal hopes to include new voices, and to find ways to encourage new writers. They also want to encourage alternative formats for writing: conversations between instructors, dialogues with learners, e-mail discussions, creative work, and digital photographs with captions.

Literacies is a critical development in building the Canadian literacy community. Some comments:

> "It will be so important in isolated areas."
> " I'm thrilled with the alternative format and the possibilities it presents."
> "My experience as a practitioner was a 'disconnect': it will be great to have cross-Canada and cross-viewpoint communication through the journal."

Practitioners face several barriers to writing: lack of time, insecurity, uncertainty about content. The journal plans to support writing with a series of workshops for writers, and hiring regional animators who can support writing in different parts of the country. The biggest barrier for practitioners is time. One participant suggested a concrete way to overcome this barrier: build a writing day onto the end of conferences like this one. This gives people supported writing time, away from the myriad responsibilities of work.

For more information about the journal, people were encouraged to visit www.literacyjournal.ca.

Student Participation in the Research Process
with Norah Randall

Rapporteur: Elsa Auerbach

Nora works at the Reading and Writing Center in Duncan, BC. It is a storefront centre, and most of the students are First Nations. Nora wanted to do inquiry with students, but didn't know how. She had an idea she liked, but the students were not interested. This made her ask, How would I start from the students' interests? She realized that the answers she got would depend on the questions she asked.

Nora invited participants to describe how they have done research with students. Here are comments from participants:

- In Alberta: groups of students talked about what they wanted to change within the centre. Their priority was the computers. Part of why this research worked was that the group was already in place. The students were used to working together and discussing things.
- Funding came first, then teacher interest, then student involvement. Getting learners to see themselves as people who can find out something they want to know takes weeks to develop.
- In one project, what worked was doing a photo project with learners. They were asked to take community analysis photos that addressed the question, "What do you see in this community that serves you, that doesn't serve you." This project raised the question, what other cultural spaces exist where people can address community issues?
- In one successful project, teachers introduced and structured the research and it was successful.
- One group was dealing with the issue of not having enough money to buy food. The members of the group all ran out of money mid-month. As a group they decided to contribute at the beginning of the month and buy food collectively.
- In one group, students were asked to research something about the environment (land, air quality, water quality). Then they made recommendations for the town council.
- Another group did a history project. Learners researched different things that had happened in the community and published their findings.

The group discussed what conditions allow inquiry to grow, and came up with the following:

- a safe environment
- a sense of community, ongoing relationships and group
- key people
- doing something concrete
- standing back and letting the learners to it
- finding the question that intrigues

Another option could be to involve students in inquiry about how they view progress.

The workshop ended with a discussion of the differences between action research and participatory action research. Action research focuses on researching teaching practice,

and students could be involved in this. Participatory action research would mean that students participate in developing the research process from the beginning, including determining the research questions; its goal is action beyond the classroom.

Understanding Learning and Literacy in a School Board Employment Preparation Program

with Christine Johnson-Pinsent

Rapporteur: Joanne Green

Christine is currently enrolled in the master's program in the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa. She also works as an assessor and curriculum developer at an adult basic education program in Ottawa. This inquiry session explored literacy practices and learning activities in an employment preparation program. The school board program was designed for adults who face significant barriers to employment, such as minimal levels of formal education, ethno-cultural differences, sole-support parent status, and mild psychiatric and cognitive disabilities. The program reaches beyond traditional classroom walls to deliver learning and literacy activities in three distinct settings: a coffee shop operated by the students, a job placement in the community, and the traditional classroom setting.

Christine used the following topics, gleaned from her master's thesis research, to guide the discussion:

- the literacy practices and learning activities occurring in each of the program's three distinct settings;
- the values and meanings that students and instructors place on literacy practices and learning activities in each setting; and
- the learning relationships that develop in each of these settings.

Evaluations

Individual Evaluations

As we gathered at the final plenary, we took a few moments to fill out two evaluations: how the Institute had affected us, and an assessment of the Institute as a whole.

Personal Impact Evaluations

For the personal evaluation, we reflected on the Institute's impact on our

HEAD	What new knowledge did you gain?
HANDS	What new skills did you gain?
HEART	What new feelings or understandings will you leave with?
FEET	What action will you take?

Many people felt they had learned to view and carry out research in a different way. This made people feel encouraged to use their new skills and clear about what action to take. Many were effusive and felt they'd learned and experienced so much they couldn't possibly list it all in the evaluation. A number of participants felt energized and opened up by the creative aspect of research. They were stimulated to want to know more, do more, and keep the connections alive. Below is an overview of the responses.

HEAD
What Did You Learn?

The participants left the conference with greater understanding of research on two different levels. The first level was about the range of activities that can be considered research, and greater understanding of its context, including policy and funding. The second level was the specific practicalities of research and its relationship to practice.

Participants felt very much validated at the Institute. Their work was located in the centre instead of its usual place on the margins. Participants looked at how power and privilege keep some people silent and some work invisible. They also gained a greater sensitivity to the power dynamics between researcher and who or what is researched. One participant identified another ongoing dynamic: "Practitioners, academics and other kinds of literacy workers still have a lot of myths about each other."

A broader understanding of valid research was a crucial component of many people's learning experience. A number of participants mentioned how they'd learned new ways to talk about, think about and understand research. Many people spoke of a new definition of research—one which was more encompassing. One participant said she learned that research can be "humanized" and "empowering". With a broader definition of research, participants felt able to bring more creativity to the practice of research.

Looking at research as a process—from idea to proposal to application to conclusion—helped participants feel they learned practical techniques and strategies to explore further or apply in their workplace. One person reported that it was important to learn ways to clarify and tighten the focus of their research project. A number of people commented on the value of learning how to incorporate arts-based approaches into their research. Someone else wanted to know more about how to use art and music in a tutor-based program. One participant spoke of gaining a deeper understanding of the "importance and place of research in practice in the literacy field."

> My head is boiling with information, more questions. My head is awake.

The Institute stimulated the desire to search for further knowledge. Several people wanted to know even more about incorporating models or strategies into their practice. Others wanted to look at how their research could be funded. Many were eager to carry on the networking and conversations begun at the Institute.

HANDS
What Skills Did You Learn?

Many participants listed specific new skills they would use in their work: arts-based inquiry, collage as journaling, new ways to work with others, how to ask new questions and how to bring more creativity to their work.

I have acquired lots of skills, too numerous to mention

The broader definition of research which people developed gave participants more freedom to explore and use their creativity. It also gave them the energy and confidence to practice and pursue the skills they gained.

A number of people felt their communication skills were strengthened by the Institute. They felt they more fully understood communication and the importance of "speaking frankly". Some stated that they were more comfortable with negotiating conflict. Others said they learned about sharing and "when to hold back and listen."

Many participants felt more clear and confident about their own research. On the practical level, people said they learned more about the steps involved in carrying out a research project, research techniques, how to analyse and focus data and write up the research. Several participants said they also learned to "value the research component" of their work.

Some participants mentioned learning new skills connected to the broader context behind research. These skills included how to "humanize" research, how to incorporate more creativity into research, and the importance of working with practitioners to develop research projects.

HEART
What New Understandings and Feelings Will You Leave With?

The most warming and energizing feeling that people left with was a greater sense of community. Many felt less alone because they saw that others were grappling with the same issues as they were. New relationships were particularly valuable. The evaluations included words like respectful, warm, thoughtful, tolerant, and generous to describe those they had met at the Institute.

We are a community

In general, people said they felt grateful, inspired, trusting and validated. A few people said that opening up new ways of approaching research left them feeling a bit shaky and unsure of where this would lead them. Other participants said they learned to doubt themselves less and "to look for happiness and passion in doing research instead of getting caught up in restrictions and rules." Many participants found or re-discovered their passion for research for social change.

People were grateful for the experience of the Institute because they were enthusiastic, positive, and motivated. Being validated and energized inspired them. One person said, "I have new motivation to write, to document my work" and another, "I felt inspired to move on and get going with my research."

FEET
What Action Will You Take? What Things Will You Do?

Many people said they wanted to keep learning about research, to find ways of sharing what they had learned, to maintain contacts with people they met at the Institute, to initiate their own research projects or integrate research into their classroom.

Tell everyone about research in practice!

Participants said they were planning a research project or looking for ways to bring research into their current work. They were also enthusiastic about building a research in practice movement and sharing what they learned with community members, learners and co-workers. They were eager to find ways to help others get excited about research in practice.

Many participants wanted to read more research and keep learning in different ways. They planned to read research that reflects different perspectives, to read suggested literature, to learn more about arts-based research, to e-mail other participants and to explore graduate work. Many wanted to actively keep up connections they made and "keep the conversation going."

Assessment of the Institute

In the second part of the evaluation, participants were asked to assess the nature and format of the Institute. Organizers asked what was most and least useful, and invited suggestions about how future gatherings could be improved.

What was most useful about the Institute?

Overwhelmingly, participants were delighted with the format of the intensive course over four mornings. People liked working with the same group over time, felt that the course leaders were excellent instructors, and appreciated the positive atmosphere.

The courses themselves were described as holistic, using a process which involved thinking, feeling, moving and laughing. At the same time, there was time and space for doubt and disagreement. The courses were described as "open-minded, collaborative" events which "challenged assumptions".

Participants felt they were able to build a greater sense of community by spending their mornings with the same group of people. As one participant said, this community "is what inspires me and supports me to continue thinking I can do research in practice." The length of the course also allowed people to cover more ground and hear more voices.

The atmosphere of the Institute was keenly appreciated by many participants. People talked about the "warm atmosphere" and the "richness of conversations". People said they were pushed mentally and stretched emotionally. They also appreciated that the in-depth morning sessions were balanced by the practical focus of the afternoon sessions.

What parts of the Institute were least useful?

Many people felt that the affinity groups were the least effective part of the Institute. They expressed disappointment that the groups were artificial, not focused, had no purpose, or didn't help people bond.

Some participants were also disappointed in the afternoon workshops and inquiry sessions. A few people felt they attended sessions which did not match their descriptions. Others were disappointed that the sessions were a forum for people to describe what they had done.

What ideas could you suggest for improvement?

Participants were very creative with suggestions to strengthen future gatherings.

Content

To improve the afternoon workshops and inquiry sessions, people suggested that each workshop should be clear about who should attend. Some sessions seemed to require that participants were currently working on research projects. Perhaps if workshop leaders spoke about their session, people could more easily choose one which fit with their interests.

Several people were disappointed that there were so few opportunities for people to hear about what was happening in other parts of the country. Others were very interested in hearing more from speakers from different countries. One person suggested a panel discussion which allowed speakers to address the whole group. Others felt that each participants should be given time to address the whole group—so that all could hear what everyone else is working on and under what conditions they are doing the work.

A number of people mentioned that they hoped future gatherings would include sessions focussed on numeracy. Several people said that the more popular sessions from this Institute should be offered at the next gathering.

Participation

Many people keenly felt the absence of who did not attend. In particular, they mentioned the lack of Aboriginal, deaf, and francophone participants. People suggested that future organizers draw on practitioners who work in more "diverse community settings" like women's centres, Friendship centres, and community based health centres.

As to the size of the Institute, participants wished that more people could attend at the same time as they hoped that future gatherings not be too much larger. Many people were concerned that the intimacy of the relatively small group was one of its distinct advantages. Others felt the group sessions should have been smaller to allow for a better teacher/ student ratio.

Communication

Several people suggested a central bulletin board to announce social or other meetings, or a morning gathering so that each day started by connecting the whole group. Others suggested more signs, to guide people through the various buildings spread over the campus.

Although there was a fair amount of free time in the schedule, people felt there was not enough time and space for socializing, networking, reflection and debriefing. People would have appreciated more time in the day or evening to get together either to socialize or network. One suggestion was to have a comfortable common space where people could meet over coffee and tea, and a quiet space for reflection, writing and processing the day's activities.

Environment

Many participants felt the lack of physical activities in the classroom and the Institute. They would have liked more movement-based work in the classroom, team-building exercises or opportunities to be physical during break times.