

Violence affects learning for future generations

by Christianna Jones and Nadine Sookermany

■ Research is a journey; a long, complex, but enriching journey that explores and examines data, emotions, personal experiences and relationships. In this article we, two practitioner researchers involved in the two-and-a-half-year project, *Moving Research about Addressing the Impacts of Violence on Learning into Practice*, look back on our participation.

This project was an incredible experience for us, as novice practitioner-researchers, because it brought our practices as community literacy workers, anti-violence activists and parents together into one collaborative research journey. As our projects unfolded, we were interested to see how interconnected they were. Nadine's research named how violence gets in the way of supporting our children well as they face traditional approaches to education within the K-12 system. She saw how things have not changed much from one generation to another. Women literacy learners struggle to support their children to do well in a system that is failing them, as it did so many years ago for the women themselves. Christianna examined the impacts of the residential school experiences on learners in her community and saw how the violence continues into the next generation. Although the violence may look different, it is violence and continues to impact future generations.

Here is an excerpt from Christianna's report, *Balancing: The Impact of Residential School on Second and Third Generations*.

I chose to engage in this research project to provide some history of what happened in residential schools, how residential school shaped the lives of our parents and grandparents, and how those impacts shaped the second and third generations. The purpose of my research is not to provide an excuse or to lay blame, but to

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Words	Words	Words
Strung together, form sentences		
Paragraph, indent, punctuation		
Line after line		
Reading	Reading	Reading
That's Research		

Numbers	Numbers	Numbers
Carefully assigned values		
Quantitative, graph, qualitative		
Not too much		
Analysis	Analysis	Analysis
That's Research		

Body	Movement	Singing
Poetry, collages, video		
Heals hurt and trauma		
Touches the soul		
Creative	Qualitative	Feeling
NOW, that's Research		

create awareness so that we have a sense of our history. When people understand where they come from, and the factors that shape their lives, they can deal with and overcome the barriers and bring balance to their lives. A state of unbalance of the four aspects of self has been created, and we have lost the





These reports are available online at <http://learningandviolence.net/changing/ElevenResearchers>.

ability to walk the earth in a healthy way. We have forgotten how important it is to take care of and nurture the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical parts of ourselves.

Working with Anishinabek people, my people, for the past 20 years, I have encountered sadness; loss of hope; drug, alcohol, physical and sexual abuse; and lack of respect for self, family and community. But, more importantly, this work has provided me with a respect for the resiliency of my people. There have

been many who remind me why I continue to work in my community. There are pockets of hope that encourage me to continue on the path I have chosen. I remind myself that it took a generation for us to get where we are, and it will take another few generations to bring us out of that.

There is a ripple effect that started at residential school. This ripple will continue outward until another ripple or object comes into contact with it; only then will the ripple be redirected. It is my

hope that this research report will be the “something” that comes into contact with the first ripple and begins or continues to effect change in our communities.

Here is an excerpt from Nadine’s report, *The Unfinished Collage: Examining the Impact of Violence on the Lives of Literacy Learners and Their Children*.

My project was to meet with adult literacy learners to explore how literacy practitioners and ABE (adult basic education) instructors can better support women who are parents to help their children do well in the formal education system. In this project, I used an arts-based research method to explore how one group of women have experienced the formal education system and to contrast that with their children’s experiences.

My research question to the women in my project was: “Name what your children are going through at school and help me (a literacy practitioner) support you to help them do well. I am doing this because I am also a parent, and I hear you say that some of our children are experiencing bad things at school. That hurts me, you and our children.”

How did we do the research together? We used collage. A collage is made from objects that are pasted together or attached to create art. Each woman worked on her own individual collage. We used magazines, old books and other art supplies to create our art. Arts-based research methods are useful when working with literacy learners as there is often little, if any, use of the printed word throughout the process of data collection. The process of doing art also provided us with the opportunity to dialogue and share as a group, which gave me a rich source of data collection that I did not fully anticipate. I used both sources of data, the collages and the information shared at our meetings, in my final analysis.

One mother shared that her 17-year-old son was currently out of school. He had been suspended three times and could not return. Once he had missed so much school, he got behind, and she couldn’t help him. She didn’t understand the system, and now he was out. She didn’t think he would go back. This was hard for her because it was so similar to her own story. She shared how she was kicked out of school for one year when she was 16 years old, and that was why she never finished.

The most striking finding in my research was the shift in the balance of power around what I learned from the women in my group about my own parenting practices. I found that I was experiencing the same things as the women in my research project. Our children were having bad experiences at school, and they were having those experiences not because we were not parenting well or were “bad parents.” These experiences were intrinsically linked to systemic issues of racism, classism and sexism in the education system. The system was doing exactly what literacy practitioners sometimes do when we assume that parents who are poor, who have not had access to education, and who are of a particular culture or race are not good parents. These situations may not always be healthy or supportive for our children, but they are part of our lives. We can parent well through adversity. We have been doing it for generations.

The full reports from this project are available on the **learningandviolence.net** website. You can find all of the practitioner research reports at: [www.learningandviolence.net/changing/ElevenResearchers.htm](http://www.learningandviolence.net/changing/ElevenResearchers/ElevenResearchers.htm) ■

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