

Collective Analysis: ‘Workshopping’ data about how violence impacts on learning

by Evelyn Battell

For two-and-a-half years, eleven practitioners across the country have been exploring the impacts of violence on literacy practice. They hope that the project, Moving Research about Addressing the Impacts of Violence on Learning into Practice, will help the literacy field to develop a stronger understanding of effective models for practitioner research.

Evelyn Battell’s role in this project was to examine the team’s research processes. She paid careful attention to key elements of the research model and studied the value of each in practice. One element of the project was the workshops at which practitioners presented all or some of their data, and engaged others in analyzing it. The project chose to ‘workshop’ data partly because practitioners more often gain knowledge at workshops than by reading research reports. The workshops also expanded the number of people engaged with the research findings and process, and allowed the researchers to hone their analysis, expand their thinking, and develop a strong presentation about their research.

■ Here is what I learned when I examined how the workshop participants answered two questions:

What did you learn about violence and learning and about research in practice?

Would you take part in ‘workshopping’ data again?

Surprise at being asked to help with analysis

One of the common reactions was that the participants were surprised to find themselves in a workshop about research processes. This difficulty occurred because ‘workshopping’ data has not been a common practice in the literacy field up until now. Most participants found themselves quite pleased with the experience, after the fact, but the process was bumpy to begin.

Values inherent to research in practice

Another set of reactions had to do with the values inherent in research in practice:

- information comes from practice;
- one needs to analyze in terms of practice; and

- research in practice is an attempt to crystallize our practice.

One respondent said, “It makes sense to look at and evaluate the data in a workshop with other practitioners—to sort out the information within the practice rather than away from it.” Another said, “research in practice comes back to being able to rely on colleagues and the support that they provide and how much more we can achieve by establishing that support and calling on that support—not only in research but in the day-to-day as well.”

Sharing, making new connections and finding new resources can improve research.

There was some discussion of the value of research-in-practice style practices for research itself. Inherent in research in practice is thinking that consults the field: “This,” said one participant, “breaks down the stereotype of narrow thinking guarded by the keepers of that part of the data field, gets past control and credentialism.” Another participant said she wanted to use the idea herself of ‘workshopping’ data, probably with her students. A third said she liked that we made the research learner-focussed and acknowledged the researcher’s process.

A number of comments addressed some of the difficulties of research—particularly isolation. Collaboration and consultation during the research

process with colleagues and students brings new perspectives to the analysis and interpretation; "Research need not be isolating," one participant said. Workshops, it was pointed out, are good ways to share, to make new connections and to find new resources. All of these qualities can improve research.

Appeal of research in practice

The appeal of research in practice came through loud and strong. Practitioners were pleased to be part of the process: they felt validated and liked being part of the research rather than just hearing about it. One respondent said it was important to be able to contribute as a practitioner before the research was published.

Some participants learned more about research from witnessing the work we were variously doing.

RiP takes more forms than I thought it did; there are many modalities.

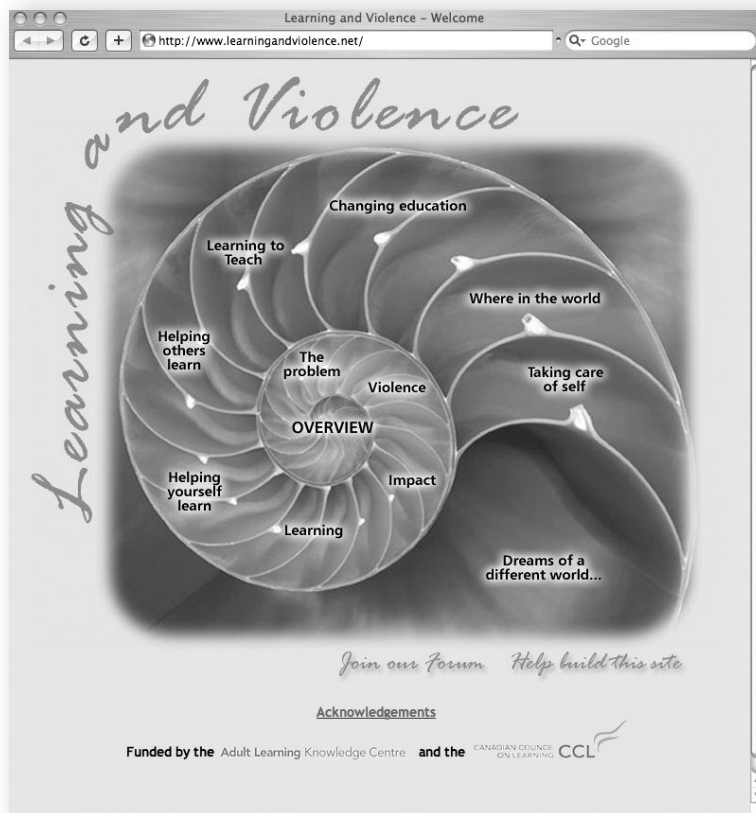
I liked that I learned something practical—that physiology can set up chemical processes that affect learning. I like that because it's tangible and more real to me. It's reassuring to me that there is a physiology that goes along with it.

Using art [is] another way of bringing expression, of approaching a topic. I like that there were the two approaches; several people were doing several things.

Another respondent said she liked the broad range of approaches to a traditional concept.

Red flags

Finally, there were a number of cautionary comments for others planning to workshop their data, and on the difficulties of both RiP and research on violence and learning. One comment was that everyone was researching things they couldn't define. Another issue that came up again and again was that the emotional stress of dealing with questions of violence means you have to spend a lot of time with everyone involved: defusing, supporting, interpreting and making plans. Some participants felt they were unable to help. They wanted to be warned in the advertising that this might occur. Alternatively, presenters might more carefully focus some time at the end of the workshop to help participants see how they had been of assistance in the research process. ■



Coming soon! Book and DVD entitled, ***Moving Research About Addressing the Impacts of Violence on Learning into Practice.***

The book and DVD will be available in June from Windsound Learning Society. To order a copy, go to www.learningandviolence.net/movingresearch/.

EVELYN BATTELL has been an ABE instructor in the college system in British Columbia for many years. She has played a central role in numerous national and local materials development and research projects including *Naming the Magic: Non-Academic Outcomes in Basic Literacy* (2001) and *Hardwired for Hope: Effective ABE/Literacy Instructors* (2004).