

But I'm Not a Researcher...

by Kathy Rollheiser

■ The last meeting of the focus group in British Columbia was on 7 April 2006 and it went something like this...

Kate: Testing... (*tap tap*) testing, testing 1 2 3...okay, I think we're recording. Welcome Leona and Susan. I'm so glad you could come. Could you each tell us a bit about yourself? For the record...

Leona: Hi. I'm Leona and I'm a literacy practitioner.

Kate and Susan: Hi Leona.

Susan: I'm Susan and I work at the college level in Adult Basic Education.

Kate: And I'm Kate. I work as a remedial reading teacher in the community. I was hoping there would be more of us today, but several were busy writing their cost-sharing proposals, and, let's see, the Literacy Coordinator was doing a workshop, and someone else came down with the flu—burning the candle at both ends, no doubt.

Susan: You're going to feed us, right?

Kate: Um, yes, of course.

Leona: Great. I'm starving.

Kate: I'm sorry—didn't you have breakfast?

Susan: Can't afford breakfast.

Leona: Not on what they pay us.

Susan: They pay you?

(sound of phone ringing)

Kate: Hello? Hi there, Betty. No, we are just getting started, are you on your way?...Oh, no! That's too bad. We were looking forward to your input. Well, yes, there really is no end to the paperwork, is there? But thanks for calling. (*To Leona and Susan*) That was Betty. She can't make it. We might as well get started. Well, as you know, I am working on a research project with Literacy BC. We are trying to get a sense of who

is doing research in practice across Canada. I have some questions to ask that will hopefully spark some discussion. So, here goes...What does research in practice mean to you?

Leona: Well, I think it means that researchers do experiments, like they try new things to see if they work or not.

Susan: But not just experiments. They read stuff too. Important papers written by other researchers, and then they write back with their two cents' worth. But what does that have to do with us?

Leona: Yeah. I'm not a researcher. I just teach my students and do the best job I can.

Kate: But how do you decide what to do? Where do you get your teaching ideas from?

Susan: I don't know...books, journals, colleagues in the field. You know, I search out new and interesting ideas.

Kate: Yeah. I surf the internet all the time—you know, see what's new. I belong to a cool chat site called The Literacy Coalition (TLC) and I find out what other practitioners are doing. I talk about what I do, what I've read and all that kind of stuff.

Kate: Well, could we call that research?

Susan: No. I don't have time for research.

Leona: Me neither. I work 20 hours a week—well, that's what I'm paid for, but I think I actually put in 30.

Susan: 30? Luxury! Try 40.

Leona: Maybe it's actually closer to 50, now that I think about it.

Kate: I hear you. We all put in way more hours than we are paid for, that seems to be the industry standard. Do you assess your students' progress? See if what you are doing is working?

Susan: Yes, of course. I do that quite regularly.

Kate: And what do you do if the results aren't what you expected?

Susan: Well, I read, and talk to other practitioners—and usually ask the students—you know, 'What do you need' and things like that.

Leona: I do that, too. And I try to adapt the lessons to be more useful to the students—their needs, you know.

Kate: Don't you think that could be called research? You change what you are doing based on results and try for different results? Then check again?

Leona: No.

Susan: No, I'm not a researcher. ■

KATHY ROLLHEISER is a literacy practitioner from Kamloops, BC. She wrote this tongue-in-cheek script for the national framework project, *Focused on Practice*. To read more of this witty piece about the underpaid and overworked life in literacy, and about how many of us are engaged in research without realizing it, go to www.literacyjournal.ca, click on Crazy Wisdom, choose Wild Cards, then British Columbia.