

## Reflections on The Gathering

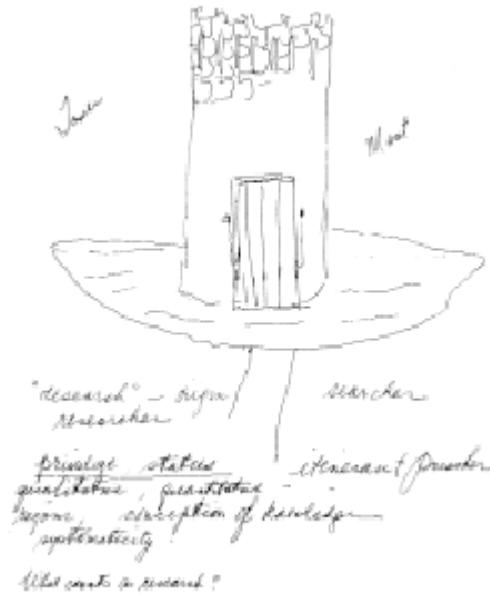
Jane Mace crystallized her experience of being at the Gathering. “I’ve met people this week who swim in the lightning,” she said of the group. Allan Quigley said that after fifteen years as a practitioner and fifteen as a professor, he believes there is a research revolution going on. He traced the development from the 1930s, when research meant only scientific inquiry to today when qualitative method is accepted and becoming more widespread. Quoting Zora Neale Hurston, he said, “Research is just formalized curiosity.”

A tone was set in the opening session. Sitting in a circular Kiva of tiered wooden benches arranged around an open space (in aboriginal culture a gathering place of equality and respect), we listened to Priscilla George, the Rainbow Woman (Ningwakwe) who has inspired the flourishing movement of the past decade in Canadian aboriginal literacy, share her story about overcoming her fear of singing in public as an example of transcendence of fear and working through doubt. These themes recurred through many of the stories told by presenters about their struggle to see themselves as researchers.

In small groups, in workshops, in round tables and in social networks, we asked what it means to do research, when does a teacher call herself a researcher, and why. One participant said, “Research changes us. It forces us to examine who we are and ask why we do this and what we believe in... There is some risk for the researcher; she can be so careful of everyone else’s vision that that she loses her own...And there is always the sense of being an outsider that creates tension...”

Being outside the mainstream seemed to be one consequence of doing participatory research. This was not necessarily seen as a negative. Mainstream, suggested one woman, may be a vision that's become stagnant; creating new knowledge means being counter culture.

One presenter used the metaphor of a gap. While we always say, “Mind the gap” perceiving it as a space into which we could fall and get hurt, she suggested that practitioner–researchers are living in the gap, choosing to work where there is some space and freedom.

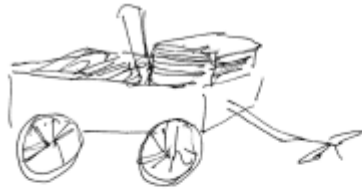




literacy workers in Alberta reflected the general North American pattern of part-time workers, mainly women, with low or no benefits, no pensions and often multiple jobs. In conditions such as these, how many teacher-researchers can realistically be expected?

There is no doubt that the research-practitioners at The Gathering spoke powerfully to the possibilities of incorporating inquiry into teaching. Still, at times there was a missionary tone to the event; as one participant noted ironically, Participatory can also be oppressive.”

In a conference that was talking about different ways of knowing and different models of



• Building research culture - How to build the culture  
what supports are needed? What kind of critical  
mass is needed?

We have a field full of knowledge & wisdom - no  
one is alone yet

• Playing with words - metaphors to crystallize  
some of these ideas

inquiring, there was an undercurrent of anti-academic feeling that silenced the few traditional researchers present. Is every act of reflection or inquiry a piece of research? Is every instance of sharing practice a research event? Every teacher should be a reflective practitioner, but does every teacher have to be a researcher?

Can we work more effectively to bridge the gap between the academic and practice-based researchers?

Many of the tensions that were named at The Gathering call for continuing exploration. [LS]