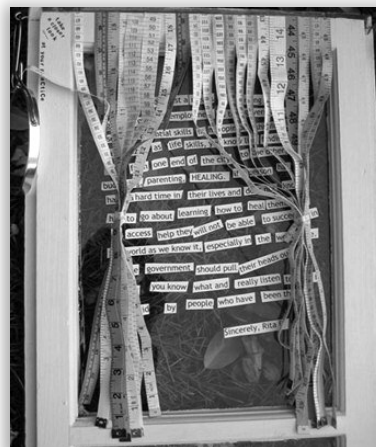


# Measure This: How we see literacy

by Nancy Cooper

■ When I was asked to create this piece of art for the project, I started thinking about research and how it is perceived in academic and literacy communities. Quantitative research has often been the preferred way of measuring literacy. We are bombarded with statistics that paint a dire picture of the state of literacy in Canada. When practitioners are asked to present at meetings they are asked about percentages of success and failure. But qualitative research can often be where the meat of an issue is found: in the stories, words and experiences of the very people who are involved with literacy learning and provision.



So I wanted to make a statement about how quantitative research is often preferred by funders and some researchers. I used the measuring tapes as a curtain covering the quote from a former literacy learner who is currently a literacy practitioner. She states that if the government really listened to people who have lived the experience of the healing and transformation that comes from literacy, then programs would change radically. This is a perfect example of how qualitative research can capture the realities of people and how change can come about as a result of the research.

The 50 per cent symbolizes the numbers that we work with every day that represent peoples' lived experiences.

In any good research, the researcher must place herself within the process. To convey this concept I hung the double-sided mirror onto the side of the window frame with the note asking people to take a closer look at their practice.

I used a beaded chain to hang the padlocked money because I wanted the chain to symbolize an act of literacy learning. To some it may look like a simple beaded chain, but to others it may represent a learning process that involved learning about counting, measuring, starting and finishing a project, and cultural practice.

The padlocked money is symbolic of how hard it is to get funding in literacy programs. I ask the question, "Who is not getting funded?" because I want to know how criteria are developed and what research those criteria are based upon. What constitutes good research in the eyes of the NLS or the provincial literacy ministries? Which key unlocks that padlock? What do we, as practitioners, call good research?

The mirror on the bottom urges people to look back in their practice. In many cultural teachings we are encouraged to learn from the past and use that knowledge to move forward into the future in a good way. ■

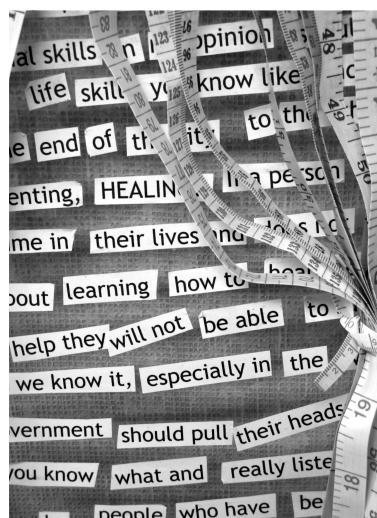
The Back Page

*The Back Page is a place to share personal essays or other creative pieces that express the complexities and beauties of literacy work.*

**NANCY COOPER** is from the Chippewas of Mnjikaning First Nation near Orillia. Born and raised in northern Ontario, she has the Canadian Shield in her blood. An adult educator for most of the last 17 years, Nancy is currently involved with Native alternative secondary programs through the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres. Nancy lives in Toronto with her partner Janet and their standard poodle Krizia. Nancy and Janet are eagerly awaiting the arrival of their twin boys in early July.



What do we, as practitioners, call good research?



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