

Methodology as Constructing Home

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Site

I began my doctoral studies in search of the perfect plans for my inquiry house. I thought three bedrooms, an office and a porch if possible. That wouldn't be so hard to find. Nevertheless, the search for a residence has involved a series of visits as I have been driven to find that someplace to hang my metaphoric thinking cap. Anyone who has longed for that right place to be in life will understand my simultaneous excitement, frustration, and trepidation as I appraised each spot looking for that perfect structure or the right foundation upon which to build.

In my search I found myself at the doorways of "scholarly life," teaching at the undergraduate level for the first time, and trying to put words on the page titled *Dissertation Proposal*. I stumbled a bit through the teaching garden, trying hard to practice what I preached -- "empowering education;" in the process I learned *not* to preach. At the same time, I pushed and pulled trying to figure out the latch on the research gate; in the process I learned to climb.

Neighbors

I went through a number of titles: "qualitative researcher," "critical theorist," "critical action researcher," and "participatory researcher." While I felt pushed to hang a name plate on my door, I was compelled to keep looking. I went to houses that seemed vacant with alarm company signs positively posted. I visited the safe understanding of the civilized suburbs. I came upon gentrified townhouses in a bit of disrepair with angry voices critiquing from inside. At each I paused, momentarily intrigued, occasionally even trying to enter. At some, the yard gates were locked. Once or twice I did reach a doorbell just to find no one there. Other times people looked out the window and gestured that they did not want what I had to sell.

Then, one day, I came upon a humble yet energetic place. People were outside laughing and painting -- rebuilding their houses it seemed. It appeared to be playful work, not in the sense of frivolity, but rather in the sense of joyousness. I was both drawn onto the block and frustrated with myself. I wasn't ready to join in for I couldn't speak the language and was afraid to be labeled "it." So, I sat under a tree and watched, feeling relatively certain that this was the neighborhood for me. It was time to start designing my house. There under the rustling leaves, I enjoyed luminous readings about how others build their structures. From positivism to postmodernism, the architecture of community revealed itself to me.

Plans

As I read, I saw bits and pieces of me in the plans of others and I questioned the floorplan that I was now envisioning. Where would be my bedroom, the place for comfort? Where would I locate the kitchen, the area of nourishment? Where would be the exercise room,

the place to strengthen my emerging thoughts? And, could I afford the wrap around porch that welcomed others to join me? With preliminary responses to these questions and interim plans, it was time to start to build.

Despite the common yet annoying construction delays, I have felt an exciting challenge. However, there have been isolating times as well. There were those times when some admitted not quite seeing what I was trying to build; when some took a NIMBY (not in my backyard) attitude; when I, myself questioned why I was building rather than *buying in*. And it was discouraging that as I struggled to create and lay a foundation, others left foot marks in my wet cement as they moved their ready-made furniture into historic capes.

Contracts

This moment I stand in the entranceway, knowing first and foremost that I must move in or sell. Commitment is key -- should I be in Scholar Town? Even as I *hear* the question, I *feel* my answer. I remember the voices of my students. Betsy stands in front of the bedroom mirror, saying she has never been asked to reflect on her own philosophy of education. James is in the kitchen telling me that he felt uncomfortable with the discussion the first night of class but then realized it was okay to disagree. Ann sits in the living room and I hear the surprise in her voice when I tell her it is okay to take action around one's values. Richard is already in the hallway with an anxious hand on the doorknob as he comments that it seems like I really care. I hear the voices of my class talking about transcendentalism and truth and the socio-historical space from which we define education and community. And yes, I hear my answer, YES.

Yet even though my house is ready, I find myself once more sitting with the construction costs, tax estimates, and depreciation tables in hand hoping to reassure myself before I sign the dissertation note. Night falls and I am still on the stoop, rise over run, a few more articles to read before I cross the threshold. And as the stars appear, one next to another, I recognize that while I had been searching outside for a social location, a neighborhood, a plot of land, a building plan, what I was also doing was coming to a notion of something within.

And in that moment, a moment of inspiration, I realize that the essence of inspiration itself is the awareness that very far *out there* and very deep *in here* are really quite the same place.

Skylights

I finally enter my house and look up through the atrium skylight. I take one deep breath and then another. I feel myself getting smaller and smaller in the immense blackness of the sky, as I slowly disappear into an emerging light, an energy, a movement.

It is a strangely strong, yet quiet feeling to release oneself into a consciousness, a home.