I want to talk to you today about getting real. Real for me is critiquing what we do and recognizing and naming our social reality, and if we don't like it, doing something about it. To do this I first want to identify some myths of adult education, and then to indicate what I feel is the reality behind the myths. Also I want to analyze why we have these myths because certainly myths have a function. Finally, I want to talk with you about critical pedagogy and participatory research which I believe moves us towards solutions. To repeat, I want to do four things: designate some myths in adult education, identify the reality behind the myths, propose reasons for the myths and to suggest solutions.

Myths and Their Reality

The first myth is about the humanistic goals of adult education. We perpetuate the myth that what we do is to help mature adults reach self-actualization and to reach their potential. Maslow's stages of self-actualization are our code words for this humanistic goal. We make the case that we are making a better society because individuals become better through our humanistic program. The reality is that most adult education has little to do with self-actualization or with building a better society. Our discourse is framed instead by the work place: learning for earning is the goal. This vocationalizing of most of adult education practice is complemented by an array of educational leisure-time offerings. The fact is that most people in our society have little time or little opportunity for leisure in the most robust sense of that word: the ideal of the full development of the personal and social personality. Rather, leisure is often defined as escape from the tedium of work.

A second myth we adult educators perpetrate is that we are narrowing the gap between the most educated and those least educated. We talk about "second chance" learning, lifelong learning and the importance of access. We have turned much of the education of adults into providing more education for the already educated. In fact, the one variable that best predicts which adults come into our programs is the years of education they have. The more education a person has, the more likely they will appear in our adult education programs. This is called widening the gap.

A third myth we have as adult educators is that we are learner-centered and that we empower learners. In actuality much of adult education has little to do with centering on and empowering the learners except as part of our processes. So while we may provide for student participation in the classroom, we are often in fact domesticating, not educating, our students. We have bought into the myth of education as a liberating experience to enhance and increase life choices. In actuality, those who had life choices before they came to our classes or program continues to have about the same life choices on completion. Those who had limited life choices before they entered our program often have few choices on completion of our program. We may make people feel better but that doesn't mean that they are liberated. In fact, it may mean we have simply put more nails into the coffin. For example, if we hold an open door to our educational program and individuals come in, try hard, and despite their work don't get that credential or that better job, whom do they blame? Nor us. In fact, we blame them with our language of deficiency, e.g. lack of motivation, poor self-esteem, inability to delay gratification. Our values of individualization teaches our students to blame themselves because
success depends on the individual. If you don't get somewhere, then who is to blame? Not the system, not the educators; you are.

A final myth I want to put on the table is the nature of our society--what we believe about how it works. We believe that our society is about equality. In fact, we believe our educational activities are about making society more equal because we do recognize at least some historic problems of inequality. We believe we are a meritocracy and that in any generation any one of us can become the political and intellectual elites, and thus the leaders. We do not own up to the fact that we live in a society in which race, gender, and social class are sources of inequality and these socially constructed inequalities work systematically to keep power relationships in place. Most of us do not question our privilege in society nor do we question the dominance of our knowledge, our culture or the fact that our centered-ness in the dominant discourse means we marginalize those from other groups. To be African American or Chicano or Native American or Asian American is to be often seen as different, though not in any positive sense, for we often conceptualize different as deficient despite the objective reality.

For example, just last week a graduate student told me that she was coming back to nursing and that her last job had been one of "corporate wife." I wondered, is there a concept of "corporate husband?" I doubt it. The fact is that this woman had a name for what she did: her job was to enhance her husband's business career. She didn't say she was a homemaker (which I believe is an admirable occupation) nor did she say her job was to enhance her husband's life (another admirable activity of marriage). No, the "bottom line" was the business success of the male because that's what is important: making money as an individual and making money for the corporation, which now this woman also saw as her husband and thus was defined as a "corporate wife."

You may agree or disagree with me on whether these are myths. I have, in my forty years as a person dedicated to my vocation as adult educator, steadily developed my own analysis of our practice. I believe I have evidence that these myths exist. But I'm open to disagreement and to your critical analysis. What I personally want to do is to engage you in a discourse about confronting reality. For me adult education is about critically assessing our reality, to name that reality, to devise strategies through adult education to change that reality, and to help students to do the same thing.

That change means that we move towards a more democratic participatory egalitarian society where the values of all groups inform our decisions on practical problems. Let us turn to the analysis of our society and to the role of education in that society. Let us look for explanations.

**Analysis of the Dilemma**

If we are in truth perpetuating myths about adult education, is it a conscious act? Are we doing one thing while saying another? I don't think so. Most of us believe we are and do what we say. Occasionally a contradiction makes us question an activity. But generally we are not consciously deceitful; rather, we tend to uncritically accept our world and its rationality. We uncritically assume that modernity is good and we need to be continually developing as a society into a better and better world. Let's examine our history more critically and become aware.

It was the Frankfurt School in the early 1900s that called modernity into question. Modernity was based on reason and rationality with science and technology as its major driving force. Optimistically, one could view the enlightenment as an opportunity to usher in a modern world in which science and the logic of rationality would mean the good life for all. Over time social live would so improve in quality that we would end poverty and oppression so that all human beings would enjoy a quality of life hitherto unimagined.
The Frankfurt School intellectuals questioned those goals. In the name of science and rationality, the world of modernity produced fascism and the holocaust on the political right as well as Stalinism and the gulags on the political left. It was clear to those intellectuals that science had produced scientism and rationality had produced irrationality. Science based on prediction and the prediction model, when applied to social life, was inexorably leading to a technical rationality which was morally bankrupt. These intellectuals saw the West becoming a one-dimensional society driven by technical rationality. If the language of prediction is flawed, how can we find a language of possibility? This has been the central issue challenging contemporary intellectual thought and I believe it is the central challenge to adult educators today. What is the responsibility of adult education? Is it to promote the goals of scientific rationality? Or is it to provide ideological space so that ordinary citizens can participate in making history through a language of possibility?

I wish to explore the issue of the quality of this modernity in which we who are privileged live. Again, we can be informed by those theorists from the critical tradition established by the Frankfurt School. If science and rationality have produced modernity as we now know it, what is the quality of modern life? Are we more free? Are we more equal? Do we enjoy a more emancipated critical mind? Do we develop social goals to insure growing equity within our societies? Who profits from our educational endeavors? What is the role of universities and community colleges in this society? And what role do those us in these institutions have as we extend ourselves? Are we promoting social democracy? Who profits from what we do? Who loses? Who makes decisions in these processes?

In response to the critique of the Frankfurt School, Jurgen Habermas noted that to date modernity has been powered by science and technology without any clear attention to where ethical decisions are made. It is not enough to crack atoms. What does one do with atom bombs, nuclear power plants, toxic waste? These are important ethical questions. Habermas argued that we have moved to a new form of rationality, a communicative one not based on science. Now language and communication is a dominant feature of our society. Habermas' idea for developing the good society is bringing everyone to the table to communicate, to make decisions. This leads to a third type of learning: emancipatory learning. How do we do this?

It seems to me that technical rationality is a key to our thinking. Technical rationality seems to perpetuate those myths I spoke about. Much of our life and work is informed by science and rationality, as if we can interpret our humanity in terms of rationality, as if we can interpret our humanity in terms of rationality alone. We are people, not machines. We must have visions other than simply being effective, efficient producers so that the U.S.A. can compete with Japan and Germany. And when we think about communicating and power relationships, control of knowledge becomes the issue. It is idiotic to assume that life is only rational and technical rather than political and communicative as well.

If we understand that power operates in our society, making one part of the society more dominant and more powerful, then we can discuss how to distribute that power. But if we believe that society is some system in equilibrium which is moving developmentally towards modernity, then we limit our solutions to technology, rationality and functionalism. I reject the functionalist system's equilibrium model of input-output-throughput, which is how society is explained to us. It does not recognize that science is only one dimension of life. It is my view that we should be working to promote participation in decision making; we should recognize that the way to develop ourselves and our society is to make the society more democratic and the state more responsive to all its people. As for technology, we must begin to bring it under control, to ask whether it is appropriate, and if it is not, to reject it.

Let us note the ideas of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci spent the last years of his life in prison trying to figure out how Mussolini got control of Italy, why the Italians voted for fascism rather than a socialist
democracy, and why Italian peasants accepted the oppression and the degradation heaped upon them by brutal landlords. Gramsci hypothesized that the state was made up of both a political society and a civil society. The political society was how the state controlled its citizens by force, for example the military, the police, the law, the courts, the prisons. Any state having to live by force alone would never last long without the support of a civil society. The civil society, made up of families, churches, schools, and the media, developed the consensus: the rationality for the society. The civil society helped develop the state's internal constraints, thus operating the society by consensus rather than by force. Gramsci called this prevailing view of internalized "ought" or norms--the common sense idea of "yes, this is the way it ought to be,"--hegemony. Gramsci recognized that societies develop their own reality--their own cultures. His concern was how the state or the society developed and maintained this hegemony as things changed in history. Gramsci realized that the role of intellectuals was key and that the knowledge they produced assisted in adjusting the prevailing hegemony so that it continued to make sense. He also noted that all social classes produced intellectuals, some of whom identified with the state and others who critiques its hegemony on behalf of those who were poor an, in Italy's case, peasants.

Let me illustrate. In Reagan's administration there was a growing concern regarding nuclear proliferation. Reagan was trying to build a consensus to promote a military build-up. So we began to hear words like the "evil empire" describing the USSR as our enemy while at the same time the MX missile, the most destructive nuclear weapon imagined, was renamed the "peace keeper." Regardless of what the situation actually was at that time between the USA and the USSR, intellectuals of the state built a hegemony of thought which made sense to most ordinary citizens and allowed us to develop the largest, best equipped, most technically superb military force of all times as our major national preoccupation for twelve years. And though many other intellectuals tried to frame arguments against nuclear proliferation, their counter-hegemonic efforts failed. The debate over changes in state hegemonic control is obviously a power issue.

I want to argue for increasing the democratic capacity of what Gramsci called the "civil society." A strong civil society, which promotes the full participation of its citizens, ensures that we strive toward a participatory democratic goal. It counters the development of a civil society dominated by the powerful interests of the state and those citizens representing a dominant cultural majority. For it is when we have a dominant culture, such as the Eurocentric culture in the United States, that other cultures are pushed out to the margins or marginalized. Organic intellectuals of the dominant group are then able to develop a rationale to make sense of their privilege. A participatory civil society prevents the marginalization of less powerful "sectors," be they based on race, ethnicity, gender or social class. It counters the hegemony of the dominant culture.

To be democratic we must facilitate the right of those who are marginalized to gain access to the decision-making table, to present the knowledge of the "have-nots" in competition with the official knowledge of the "haves." Unfortunately, what we see today is that we have allowed technology to foster unbridled commodity growth and that we are less free because our lives have been commodified. Education is increasingly the handmaid of "work" and is continually being reduced to de-skilling workers in order to increase their efficiency in moving "pig iron/" Fredrick Taylor, the originator of scientific management, demonstrated this de-skilling phenomena a half century ago. Taylor invited us as educators to become complicit with those who are exploitative by focusing education on making workers effective and efficient. We do this by rewarding workers with a commodified life style in exchange for their skilled artisan abilities and control over their work life. Or we provide welfare to the unemployed to ensure the consumption of commodities we produce to further ensure their contribution to the GNP.

In fact, I will argue that adult education has become increasingly complicit with private industry and business. Through workplace literacy, business and industry utilize the adult education profession
and government funds to develop their own educational enterprise worth, in the USA, 210 billion dollars annually. Our own educational industry is worth an estimated $50 billion more. I hear your response: Taylorism disappeared with behaviorism. We have brought critical theory to the workplace. Adult educators, through human resource development, are now developing the learning organization or the learning environment whereby all workers participate in learning at work. How is learning defined in this context? Adult educators who now call themselves Human Resource Developers (HRD) claim that workplace learning is more than the acquisition of skills and I believe that they are correct in their assertion. But what they do not seem to realize is that much of today’s work is done outside the market, and that we do not question the relationship of work to the life interests of society’s members versus the profit interests of capital. Thus, HRD remains captive to learning for earning, and it is framed by the need to make profits.

North American civil society, though more flexible than those in the poorest of nations, is fashioned by the dominant culture which controls the society by its hegemony. This hegemony blinds us to our own lack of control over our lives. If we are poor, it is our fault? To be white and European is to be preferred; English is the dominant language in practice. We accept the social construction of our society by those who, through images and language, want us to accept this bottom line mentality, not only for our work but for our life spaces. But let us remember, hegemony is a social construction; therefore, it can be changed through political action.

I argue that our everyday practice either endorses or counters this hegemony. We cannot be neutral. And, I continue to argue that we ourselves are not free. As adult educators we have been commodified, and we buy into an alienating practice, because we do not critique what we do. Our practice is reduced to techniques. We serve industry by delivering to them compliant workers trained to be efficient producers. This is not education, it is de-skilling. I conclude that we make daily decisions which incrementally and adversely affect the poor, and we often do not consciously understand what we do. We are caught in a hegemonic trap in the same way as those Italian peasants. Is there a way out?

Possible Solutions

For me the problem is clear. The issue is power and asymmetrical power relationships. Power is negated by equilibrium models. There is a dominant culture which has been developed to reproduce the asymmetrical power relationships in our society. One of the major apparatuses which insures the reproduction of this system is the school; and I mean school whether found in the university, the community college, the voluntary association, in business or the factory. This is my starting point. I hope you can thus appreciate the importance I place on critical pedagogy and knowledge production.

I define critical pedagogy as the educational action which develops the ability of a group to critically reflect on their environment and to develop strategies to bring about democratic social change in that environment. Education is not about promoting the existing hegemony; education is about developing counter-hegemonic struggle. Education is not simply about attaining knowledge, education is about the politics of knowledge. Education is not about the preservation of status and elitism; education is about democratization of power relationships.

Critical pedagogy challenges the social reality as it is currently constructed. Some knowledge is privileged; it has become official knowledge. This is not because it’s better than some other knowledge; it is because this way of knowing supports the social structure as it is not constructed. We must be able to critique that social structure and recognize that it is a structure of privilege. Do we accept the idea that race, class, ethnicity and gender are socially constructed in society? Do we clearly see the inequities that these constructions produce? Do we see our complicity in reproducing these constructions? I believe this analysis can start within the system by borrowing from the ideas
of education for empowerment. These concepts are more often found in the nonformal system and in those systems arising from feminist studies. Specifically, I refer to the ideas of Paulo Freire's liberatory education, feminist pedagogy and the Asian and African views on knowledge production and participatory research. Marginalized groups and the poorest sectors of the world are developing ideas and we need to learn from them.

Let us talk first about liberatory education or education for transformation. First you will not have called it transformational learning, although it could well be labeled that. I choose to avoid the psychologism minefield because transformation, in my definition, is social as well as personal. In this I follow Freire rather than Jack Mezirow. Mezirow also draws from Freire. However, he explicitly separates personal transformation from social transformation. He sees the former as the agenda, actually the definition, of adult learning; he sees the latter as a political act which is at the discretion of the learner.

I believe you cannot have one without the other. Transformational education must be contextualized. If such learning requires one to be critically reflective about one's environment and the social relationships that it produces, then it is important to recognize the dialectical relationships between personal and social transformation. Freire says that reflection without action is wishful thinking. Critical consciousness facilitates analysis of problems within their context for the purpose of enabling people together to transform their reality rather than merely understand it or adapt to it with less discomfort. The educational agenda is to critique the intellectual content as it relates to our own social situation and to the power relationships we experience daily. If one does this, then socially constructed inequities are the agenda, not the definition of some internal psychological state. We cannot ignore race, gender, social class, or ethnic origins as if they do not exist. This is our reality and we must critique it, challenge it and change it. This also means that action is a part of learning. When we try to change things we expose the bases of power in our society which profit from existing social constructions. In doing so, we experience personal transformation.

For example, presently the faculty at Northern Illinois University is under attack from the Graduate School and from faculty in the College of Liberal Arts and Science. We are doing some things which they say will bring ruin to the intellectual integrity of the university. The argument is couched carefully in terms of standards for research and the size of the program, e.g. admissions.

There are 25,000 students at NIU. We have 350 graduate students in our adult education program. European-Americans dominate our overall university enrollment, and any unity within the university may have from 0 to 8% non-white students. We in adult education have 43% non-white students. Other departments do not separate U.S. persons of color from international students; we do. We have 17% international students of color and 26% U.S. born students of color. We know the completion rates of these groups. We have found other ways than GRE tests to admit students. We have sought to correct inequities in terms of whose knowledge is in the curriculum. We try to see that women and African and Latino and Native American thought and texts are celebrated as well as male authors and European thought.

We have developed some different delivery systems which are not individualistic and competitive but are communitarian and supportive. Doctoral students are not isolated and left ABD (all but dissertation) if they don't want to be. This means we are graduating, not just admitting, persons from marginalized groups. This means that their knowledge is contesting official knowledge. Is this why we are seen a problematic by our peers? What do they mean that we are violating standards? We are not violating intellectual standards; our student perform at least as well as theirs. The only standard I see us violating is structural racism.
The very existence of a critical mass of marginalized persons in the classroom changes the discourse. I use the work marginalized in the Foucault sense of "the other," meaning that group of persons who can be easily identified as "not one of us" and thus make "the other" from which we then define what is the norm, the accepted. This does not mean that all marginalized students admitted to the program consciously have developed a critical stance. It does mean, though, that through their experiencing of inequity, they can more easily be engaged in a discourse to challenge the hegemony of dominant thought, and how privilege gets defined. When race is put on the table, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latino-Americans, indigenous Americans by definition now have categories to label European-Americans and not let this group see themselves as "the Americans." Eurocentrism is brought out of the closet when we admit to a concept called Afrocentrism. That is to say the "real American" as opposed to "the other." It is hard for us as whites to think of ourselves as hyphenated Americans just like all those whom we have hyphenated. If you as teacher or administrator challenge this reality, and change the social relationships in the classroom or in you organization, you are transforming both the structure and the persons in the structure, including yourself. You can also reframe problems. Let’s look at the problem of "student retention."

Tell me why anyone would want to enter our colleges, or adult programs, but not graduate? One of our Mexican American graduate students laughed at the concern for the quality of the Chicago public school system. When the Chicago school system was criticized as a failure because, among other things, there was a 78% "drop out" rate at the Roberto Clemente School, this student argued that the drop out rate demonstrated the effectiveness and efficiency of the Chicago public school system. Schools are organized to make sure Latino Americans are not retained and graduated and sent on higher education. Is he right? Are drop outs really alienated push outs? And does this alienation occur because of the hidden curriculum, the lack of the right cultural capital and the reproductive nature of schooling as described by economic, social and cultural theories and state hegemonic explanations?

Suppose we stop blaming students if they drop out and instead begin to focus on ourselves and our structures as the problem. Suppose we frame the problem in terms of developing a welcoming structure in the university or our college for persons who don't look like us. What would such a structure look like?

We would be keepers of the dream, not keepers of the gate. We would see to it that our faculty and staff looked like our citizenry because we would think that of all institutions, school is about developing citizen scholars to serve society. There would be competing knowledges in the curriculum. We would have staff persons who would not look puzzled or askance at a non-Anglo-Saxon name, and would have an international curriculum because we would know that we must think globally. We would not tolerate suppression of ideas covertly through a managed curriculum any more than we would overtly deny freedom of speech. We would have staff development seminars to encourage faculty/staff to be inclusive, not exclusive, and to challenge persons who exercise their privilege by oppressing others.

Another major departure for action in critical pedagogy is embedded in the idea of knowledge and participatory research. First, one must acknowledge the social production of knowledge. If knowledge is socially produced, then knowledge can be produced by any group of people. Further, the way any group experiences the world, their culture, their contexts, will affect the way they see and name the world. In our classrooms, then we must clarify the nature of knowledge and our own subjectivity in our position as teacher or co-learner. I find Gramsci’s notion of intellectuals as producers of knowledge very robust. First we must not that there are intellectuals in all social classes and in all groups, however gendered, and of whatever national origin. Now we can think about questions such as: Whose knowledge are we studying? Why? Is there an official knowledge? Why? Are some people privileged by the knowledge we study? If so, who? If knowledge is socially produced, am I a
producer or consumer? Why? If knowledge is affected by the socially constructed culture and the context from which it arose, then whose culture is being celebrated? If social knowledge is not objective, then how does that affect the way we conduct research? If objectivity is only way of knowing, in what other ways can we know?

These kinds of questions being us directly to the question of who our intellectuals are and to the idea of competing knowledges developed out of marginalized groups.

Let's think of the teacher and student as intellectual. This changes the power relations in the educational setting. Teachers are not just clever conduits of official knowledge. Teaching is not mastering a body of knowledge which is then objectively transferred to waiting skulls. Freire labeled this process "banking," and it has no privileged place in a transformative setting. Teaching is about producing intellectuals from marginalized as well as dominant populations. Education is about producing knowledge; it is about collecting data as a way of life, analyzing these data and their relationships to me and my context, and transforming me and my context to a more egalitarian set of relationships.

Being an intellectual, an organic intellectual in the Gramscian sense, means that you can then choose your political standpoint. Organic intellectuals who identify with those who are powerless work for democratic social transformation. Intellectuals who enjoy their privilege will work for the present hegemonic power relationships. No one can be neutral. You either perpetuate one ideology or another. Education is political. If you choose to ignore power relationships, you have chosen an ideology which is complicit with oppression. And here I identify oppression as socially constructed inequities based on a variety of things like age, gender, race, ability, and social class. This leads us to participatory research.

Participatory research suggests that all persons are capable of being organic intellectuals and of producing knowledge. When we help those who are poor, who are marginalized, who as a group lack power to exercise their ability to critique their social system, to collect their own data, to develop action plans and to critically reflect on that action, then we are encouraging education for social transformation. When we democratize the production of knowledge, the process of determining who gets to be the intellectuals and who defines whom, then we move to a potentially more egalitarian stance.

We at NIU have developed one such program in Urban Adult Education through extension. We have enrolled community-based adult educators in an innovative Master's program which brings 21 hours of a degree program to them as a group. We have a team of six professors who have reorganized and directed content to emerge as several themes around adult learning, participatory research, community, education for work and life, and the socio-historical context of our adult education practice. Students have had to organize themselves to make decisions, to challenge power relationships, and to manage assessment and evaluation. Professors have had to deal with loss of autonomy, loss of power, and new modes for teaching and learning. We have brought in resource persons from the community to teach what we are incapable of teaching; we have utilized weekend residential meetings to democratize our processes, and we have tried to think free of "old skins" as we contemplate "new wine." It is very hard.

We have also worked on developing a new curriculum which will directly engage these issues of power and knowledge. We have developed courses in naturalistic inquiry, participatory research, critical pedagogy, political economy, and the politics of adult education. Afrocentrism and diversity vs. multiculturalism are hotly debated. Our African-American students are forging ahead politically to discuss an African-American research agenda in adult education. Four African-American NIU
graduates in the adult education professorate have been pivotal in making race an issue for
discussion in the Commission of Professor of Adult Education.

Summary

Let me summarize what I have said. First of all I have questioned the current social reality which we
find in adult education today. A number of myths were identified. I have tried to demonstrate that
believing and acting on these myths is not a conscious act—rather it is that we have uncritically
accepted the established hegemony. I have provided analytical tools through theorists such as
Habermas, Gramsci, Freire, and dozens of adult educators who have developed a critical practice to
challenge us to become more critically conscious of why we do whatever we do. These tools can help
us interrogate our own oppression. In particular, I have suggested several strategies: to move from
a banking model to a participatory, democratizing model where students and teachers are seen as
colo-learners who do not separate their analysis from action, who do not champion the individual over
the group, and who redefine knowledge from its narrow, self-serving, elitist base by democratizing
the role of the intellectual and the knowledge production process. In doing this we challenge power
relationships by developing new ways of relating to one another, by introducing and validating other
ways of knowing, by putting our privilege up for analysis and for extinction, and by having as our
educational agenda democratic social change.

What do you say? Let’s get real and open up our practice to critique and transformation.

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