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# Educators as adult learners creating sustainable community development through solicitude and care for the other : critical inquiry in Northern California and North East Thailand

Patricia G. Perez

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**University Of San Francisco**

**Educators As Adult Learners Creating Sustainable Community Development Through  
Solicitude And Care For The Other:**

**Critical Inquiry in Northern California and North East Thailand**

**A Dissertation Presented  
to**

**The Faculty of the School of Education**

**Department of Leadership Studies  
Organization and Leadership Program**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education**

**By  
Patricia G. Pérez  
San Francisco, California  
May 2008**

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Patricia Pérez  
Candidate

4-14-09  
Date

Dissertation Committee

Ellen A. Herda

4-14-09

Patricia A. Mitchell

4-14-09

Betty Taylor

4-14-09

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## Foreword

from SALUT AU MONDE!

You, whoever you are!...

All you continentals of Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, indifferent of place!

All you on the numberless islands of the archipelagoes of the sea!

All you of centuries hence when you listen to me!

All you each and everywhere whom I specify not, but include just the same!

Health to you! good will to you all, from me and America sent!

Each of us inevitable,

Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her right upon the earth,

Each of us allow'd the eternal purports of the earth,

Each of us here as divinely as any is here.

Walt Whitman

Leaves of Grass

1891-2 edition



## **CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction**

The primary focus of this research is to consider how teachers can learn to develop a supportive educational community, based in care and solicitude, for students who represent diverse backgrounds. My expectation is that the research will uncover ideas and principles that could inform teacher education curriculum dedicated to serving all children. Care and solicitude, studied from a critical hermeneutic perspective, can shape how we think of ourselves and our students, moving from the idea of individual identity to the concept of identity based in relationship with another (Ricoeur 1992; Kearney 2002). This move, both an academic and personal one, is the core of community development that embraces the realistic world of both unity and difference.

### **Statement of Research Topic**

In my own professional role, I am a teacher of teachers. I subsequently see the need for the educator to consider himself or herself as an adult learner. In the case of the teacher who serves students from diverse cultural and language backgrounds, we find challenges in our own region. In addition, as the result of globalization and migration we see such challenges arising in other parts of the world. The concern that arises addresses how as teachers we can learn to develop pedagogical communities that serve all students in a way that is inclusive of differences in culture, language and identity. There are many contexts in which I could study this topic. For this study, I will invite to participate selected faculty and administrators in higher education who are responsible for shaping and supporting teacher education curriculum in two culturally diverse regions, Northern California and Northeast Thailand.

## **Background of Research Topic**

Adult educators face unique challenges today, for the needs of their students for knowledge and skills that will prepare them for a rapidly evolving world are as diverse as the language, culture, and identity backgrounds of the students who compose institutions of adult education. In order to rise to the challenges presented, adult educators must see themselves as lifelong learners and must strive to encourage their students to similarly embrace learning opportunities throughout their lives.

In order to support such lifelong learning for increasingly diverse populations of students, adult educators must find ways to develop learning communities that are based in solicitude and care. Such an approach to the community of students within the educational institution provides a framework for the specific knowledge offered by the institution. More importantly, it creates an example from which similarly oriented communities may thrive and grow.

Soaring rates of immigration in both the United States and Thailand challenge the educational systems of both countries. For example, the U.S. Department of State (2004:1) reports that, “the U.S. Census Bureau today estimates that the nation’s foreign-born population in 2003 numbered 33.5 million, or 12 percent of the total U.S. population.” Further, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that our population will only continue to become more diverse. Similarly, in Thailand, where refugees from Burma have been entering Thailand for the last two decades, recent numbers of immigrants have soared. In the 1980s the refugee population in Thai refugee camps was about 20,000. These numbers have since increased by about 100,000 and are expected to continue growing (Background Press 2000:1).

In both California and Thailand, immigrants face social justice issues that take the form of segregation, racism, and violence. Such problems manifest in educational institutions through

inequities and draw emphasis to the need to develop educators who are able to counter such problems through supportive communities based in solicitude and care. However, educators who strive toward the creation of such communities are challenged by rising concern about immigration itself, a hotly debated issue that has reached extreme heights in the last few years (Hanson 2005:813). Many see this debate as one that finds its foundation in racist attitudes toward people from ethnic or racial minority groups. For example, Calabresi (2006:2) comments on the political ramifications of such debates, suggesting that while, “no one accuses House leaders of acting out of racism... some say that they are responding to constituents who are [racists]. The House leadership is in a tight spot [because] they need to show some progress on the issue to placate angry forces in the country.” These forces both emphasize the need for and challenge the efforts of educators who seek to build supportive learning communities.

The effect of these attitudes is well-documented and provides a background from which to understand the challenges facing today’s adult educators. For example, though the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case was supposed to have ended segregation and provided equal education for Black children, today’s academic achievement gap between White children and those of ethnic/racial minority groups reflects continued inequities. Kozol (2005:19) recognizes that Black and Latino children populate the majority of urban schools, which are underachieving and under funded. The political attention that immigration issues draws exacerbates these problems, for it “has sometimes been presented to the public as an expiating reason for the academic problems and the racial segregation” (Kozol 2005:150). In fact, Kozol (2005:185) opines that immigrants are treated as racial minorities, for “it isn’t only African Americans who go to these substandard schools, but children of other ethnic origins as well.” These inequities are also reflected in the availability of teachers. California currently has the largest number of

English Language Learners (ELLs) enrolled in the public school system as compared to any other state; however, though these numbers continue to grow, it is increasingly difficult to obtain experienced teachers to work in these classrooms.

Thailand has likewise experienced widespread problems related to refugees, including inequalities in education, segregation, racism, and violence. Similarly, such problems create problems while suggesting complimentary opportunities for educational reform. While the rapid rate of expansion in Thai education has imposed considerable strains on that system, the inequality in the system is another issue. Sinlarat (2004:216) recognizes that “Thai higher education has always been criticized for being alienated from society and for failing to ensure that universities serve societies.” However, a continued influx of refugees has led Thailand to make policy changes that negatively affect the ethnic minority refugees. For example, the majority of the Thai minority population is located in rural areas, but the majority of the schools are located in the cities (Watson 1974:36). Parents cannot afford clothing, books, and supplies and some require their children to stay home and work in the fields, a necessity that further undermines their ability to obtain an education as commonly structures. Further, though location is a primary problem, the existing schools have issues that go beyond their juxtaposition in comparison with their student population, for many schools are poorly equipped and there is a shortage of teachers throughout the country (Sirindohorn 2001:1-8).

In both Thailand and in California, social justice problems are directly reflected in the educational systems. A growing academic achievement gap in both research sites reflects the inequality in a system that does not reach across cultures. In our rapidly changing, multi-cultural world, there is a critical need for mutual understanding and for effective communication that respects people of all cultures and languages. Education communities are where socialization

takes place and adult learners can learn to serve society in creative and appropriate ways. As Hooks (2003:137) points out, “love in the classroom prepares teachers and students to open our minds and hearts. It is the foundation on which every learning community can be created.”

In both the U.S. and Thailand, the need for quality adult learning that speaks to an international audience has never been greater. An interpretive research orientation provides an important framework from which to consider the cultural and ethical dimensions of adult education and develop a new narrative, one that re-imagines an educational system that is inclusive of all cultures and communities.

### **Significance of Study**

In light of the above discussion on social challenges, educational leaders in both California and Thailand should question more deeply current styles of education, recognizing that changing demographics create both opportunities and obligations to appropriate new ways for educational institutions to serve community needs in a way that respects differences. This study is significant because it creates an opportunity to appropriate new understandings in the context of adult education so that it appropriately reflects the culture, history, and social imagination of those whom it serves. In addition, approaching this topic from a critical hermeneutic perspective emphasizes the role of hermeneutic discourse in education, allowing narrative identity to inform possibilities for a new curriculum, one that opens up new ways of thinking and acting and one that celebrates all cultures, regardless of ethnicity, race, status (documented, undocumented, or refugees), or other differences.

### **Summary**

In brief, this investigation uses an interpretive research approach to study adult learning in California and Thailand. My intent is to create a text that informs curriculum development for

educational leaders working with adult learners so that they are better able to understand the relationship between educational systems, adult learning, and the necessary creation of new communities that are grounded in common understanding. The remainder of this dissertation introduces the literature related to finding meaning through work and describes the research protocols utilized in this project.

## **CHAPTER TWO - BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH SITES**

### **Introduction**

Humans are known to have migrated extensively throughout history from one locality to another, sometimes over long distances or in large groups. The movement of populations in more recent times has continued both as voluntary migration within one region, country, or beyond and involuntary migration due to politics, war, or ethnic cleansing. Whether immigrants move voluntarily or involuntarily, their hope is to build a better life.

The stories of immigrants are imbued with conflicting emotions: loss and hope, struggles and accomplishments. To move from the country of birth to a new homeland can be a journey fraught with challenges. These can be successfully met when immigrants have access to education and community support, for such resources provide the knowledge and wisdom with which individuals can build lives that reflect both their core values and their hopes for the future.

This Chapter provides a background to the research sites in California and in Thailand, which were sites selected because of my interest and the high rates of immigration in each area. The research sites will be described in detail in the dissertation. This research focuses on adult learners who are educators, recognizing that they hold keys to the resources that immigrants need in order to appropriate an identity in a new country. In order to understand the resources that adult educators need in order to develop communities based in solicitude and care, it is important to examine the background associated with immigration in both regions. This review includes an overview of immigration issues in California, including attitudes about immigrants and reasons for immigration. It addresses adult education in California to provide an understanding of the population being served. Finally, this review provides similar background on immigration and

adult education in Thailand, providing information from which to build foundation for the research topic.

### **Immigration in California**

According to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (2000:43), there were 20 million immigrants from various countries residing in the United States in 1990. By 1997, this number had increased to 26 million. Current projections estimate that the foreign-born population in the United States will rise by approximately 4.1 million in the next five years, bringing the total number of United States residents who were born in other countries to over 30 million.

The same report (2000:44) noted specific information about California immigration rates. In 1990, 6.5 million or 21.7 percent of the 20 million immigrants resided in California. By 1996, that number had risen again and the issue of legal versus illegal forms of immigration became punctuated by the fact that an estimated two million undocumented immigrants were now living in California. However, that rise proved to be relatively minor compared to the decade that followed. The Pew Research Center (2006:1) estimates that by 2006 that number had risen exponentially, with approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants now residing in the state.

### **Attitudes About Immigration**

These numbers raise many issues, including the educational needs of adult immigrant learners. They also incite a myriad of opinions, which themselves pose challenges and hurdles to educators and adult learners. According to the Pew Research Center (2006:4), a good number of Americans “see immigrants as a burden to the nation and as a threat to American customs.” Some, citing either the law or a myriad of other concerns, express alarm at the sheer numbers,



complaining that the volume of immigrants entering the country “are a burden to the country” because they create problems with the economy, public services, and even national security” (Pew Research Center 2006:1). Others argue for the economic advantage that such individuals provide, advocating “temporary work programs” to provide legal authorization for such workers, some of whom do the jobs that U.S. citizens do not want. Still others support immigration in all forms; indeed, “32% [of U.S. citizens polled] think it should be possible for them to stay permanently” (Pew Research Center 2006:1). These various opinions have a symbiotic relationship with issues associated with adult education. They drive a concern that the resources that the state allocates to adult education are being diluted by the needs of immigrants. They also inform a contrary perspective, that adult education must change in order to adjust to the various needs of immigrants.

### **Reasons for Immigration**

In order to consider the issue of adult education for such immigrants holistically, it is important to look at the reasons that people come to the United States. Many people immigrate to provide better lives for their children, for in the United States, jobs, income, housing, and education are usually more available than in the countries of origin. Most immigrants come from places with repressive regimes, places where day-to-day life is difficult. Many come from countries with devastating poverty and social and political unrest. Comparatively, life here is easier for many immigrants, especially in material ways. However, despite increased opportunities for a better standard of living, immigrants remain faced with a multitude of challenges, from language and culture issues, to attitudes toward their very presence that may affect their security and opportunities, to blatant xenophobia that manifests as hostility and racism.

## **Adult Education in California: A Snapshot**

Immigration creates enormous challenges and opportunities for California's adult educational system. According to the U.S Census Bureau (2001:1), "educational progress is particularly important because education plays a role in determining racial and ethnic differences in other areas of social and economic well-being, such as poverty, health, status, employment, home ownership, and civic participation." By 2010, the youth population aged 13 to 24 in California is expected to increase to almost seven million (U.S. Census Bureau 2001:5). While these numbers create capacity challenges, U.S. Census Bureau (2001:ix) notes that they also provide opportunities, for "investing in an educational system that works for all California's children will pay off for generations to come." However, that opportunity can only be met through changes to both the capacity and quality of California's adult education system, for according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2001:54), "recent research suggests that the quality of public schools in California is relatively low."

According to the California Postsecondary Education Commission (2007:2), in 2006, there were 2,269,221 students in California's higher education programs leading to the associate degree, the bachelor's degree, the master's degree, the doctoral degree, or the diploma. While this appears to be a large number of students, a comparison with the total population, it indicates insufficient education to prepare Californians for successful futures. According to the U.S Census, the total population in California was 33,871,648. According to the Bay Area Census (2000) the overall population was 7,100,000 and yet the educational attainment of the 25 and over population was only 4,599,189.) By comparison, the California Postsecondary Education Commission indicates that the number of total degrees awarded in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2006 was 52,474. The difference indicates that there is a discrepancy and, as California

Postsecondary Education Commission (2007:4) states, “this may be a serious problem in California since many people do not graduate.”

There is also Adult Education, available to youth and adults over 15 years old who withdrew or did not attend school in the United States. Only 36 percent (U.S. Department of Education:1) ...”of all 18 to 24 year olds enrolled in a 2-or 4-year college university in 1999.” The majority or 75 percent of students in adult education programs take English as a second language courses, citizenship preparation, basic literacy, and workforce programs. These courses are geared toward assimilating immigrants and do not lead to higher education.

### **Immigration Issues in Thailand**

Thailand also works with challenges associated with immigration. Thailand is located in Southeast Asia. Its neighbors are Burma (Myanmar) on the north and west, Cambodia on the east, Laos on the north and northeast, while its south extends as a peninsula with islands and connects to Malaysia. Thailand’s location has led to many influences and its immigration trends reflect the political turmoil experienced by bordering countries over the last four decades as three large influxes of refugees from Lao, Vietnam, and Burma came across Thailand’s borders.

The first large wave of immigrants came to Thailand from Laos. In the late 1960s when the war between Vietnam and the United States spread into Laos, the Hmong people of Laos were recruited to fight with the U.S. troops. However, when the U.S. withdrew in 1975, the Hmong people were forced to flee. While some immigrated to the U.S., “by 1978, hundreds of Hmong fled across the Mekong River into Thailand, where they lived in refugee camps” (Pinkel 2006:3). By 1986, Hmong refugees had been accepted to resettle in the U.S.; however, many chose to stay in Thailand and hoped to make it their permanent home. This became a great concern for the Thai government, because they had always made it clear that staying was not an

option. In order to dissuade other refugees from coming and to force the refugees in the camps out, the Thai government closed the camps. Many of the refugees then fled to the northern Thai countryside (Duffy, Hamon, Ranard, Thao & Yang 2004:3-4).

Thailand also experienced immigration in the form of refugees from Vietnam. In 1987, “more than 11,000 Vietnamese boat people... arrived in Thailand... - a 165 percent increase over 1986’s total (Crossette 1987:1). This particular wave of immigrants occurred over a decade after the end of the war and “refugee officials are at a loss to explain the sudden exodus, the largest since the early 80s” (Crossette 1987:1).

In Burma, there has been long history of geopolitical struggles between the Burmans and smaller ethnic groups. Long-standing tension between the Burman military-controlled government and ethnic minority groups erupted in violence when Burmese government troops overran a Karen military base. According to Barron, Okell, Yin, Vanbik, Swain, Larkin, Allot & Ewers (2007:43) “the first wave of ethnic Karen refugees fled to Thailand in January 1984.” Other waves followed and “thousands more Karen were joined by Karenni, On, Shan, and others, as the Burmese army gained control over more territory” (Barron 2007:43). The largest wave happened “in 1995, [when] large numbers of educated and mainly Christian Karen political leaders and others were forced into Thailand” (Barron 2007:43). Thailand added camps to accommodate this influx and “by 2007, there were approximately 150,000 refugees in nine camps” (Barron 2007:44).

Thai sentiment toward the massive influx of Burmese was to send them home. Grove (2002:2) explains that Thai policy had changed from accommodating the Thai and Vietnamese immigrants of the 1970s and 1980s and now policy dictated that Thailand

deny asylum to all new refugees except those “temporary fleeing fighting.” The Thai Military’s definition of “fighting” doesn’t always match up with the Karen definition, and

refugees often find themselves shifted around by yet another group of men with guns when they cross the border.”

At that point, the refugees were forced to their country of origin, remained illegally in Thailand, mostly in the rural areas, or made a decision to re-settle in the United States.

These three waves of refugees together created a challenge for Thailand. According to a United Nations (UN) report by Kalayanamit (1997:6), by the late 1990s Thailand “had about 140,000 refugees and displaced persons, in addition to about 700,000 illegal workers.” In addition, Kalayanamit (1997:6) indicates that

Thailand was bearing host costs relating to administration and personnel, environmental degradation, epidemic control, the displacement of affected Thai villagers, and the psychological impact on the local population. There were cross border attacks and threats to Thailand’s territorial integrity. The most viable solution for refugees and displaced persons was for them to return home and serve as productive members of their societies.

However, as of November 8, 2000, Thailand still has “more than 100,000 displaced persons... being sheltered in 11 temporary border sites. There [are] also estimated to be one million illegal workers on Thai soil” (Jayanama 2000:8).

These immigration numbers created challenges for Thailand’s existing infrastructure, including its adult education systems. Grove (2002:3) cites the conditions and problems of the refugee camps, noting that “with the numbers of refugees increasing, the challenge to provide education and medical care in the camp is becoming more and more difficult.” One of these challenges relates to the limited formal education of many of the refugees, especially the Hmong (Walker & Moffat 1986:3). While the World Bank (2006:3) cites education as a “...key tool for poverty alleviation in Thailand and for bringing about broader income equality and social equity,” it also acknowledges the existing inequities.

Education already receives the largest share of the government budget, but there may be scope for further investigation about the appropriate distribution of the education budget, across levels in order to improve the efficiency of the Thai system, particularly in light of

the fact that tertiary education investments have disproportionately favored wealthier groups (World Bank 2006:3).

An example of the inequities will be demonstrated in the next section through a brief history of Northeast Thailand as it relates to the issues in this project.

### **A Brief History of North East, Thailand**

Thailand, which is officially known as the Kingdom of Thailand, is located in Southeast Asia. It is divided into four major geographic regions: the Central, North, South, and Northeast. The Northeast region is also called Isan, which literally means “northeast” in the Thai language. My research takes place in the Northeast regions, which borders Laos and Cambodia. According to Lepoer (1989:3),

little is known of the earliest inhabitants of what is now Thailand, but 5,000-year-old archaeological sites in the northeastern part of the country are believed to contain the oldest evidence of rice cultivation and bronze casting in Asia and perhaps in the world.”

The Northeast area is the largest and most populated region in Thailand with approximately one-third of Thailand’s entire population living there. It occupies 65,000 square miles or about one-third of the whole country (Bunge 1981:58-61). The Northeast is comprised of 19 provinces: Nakhon Ratchasima, Buri Ram, Surin, Si Sa Ket, Ubon Ratchathani, Yasothon, Chaiyaphum, Amnat Charoen, Nong Bua Lam Phu, Khon Kaen, Udon Thani, Loei, Nong Khai, Maha Sarakham, Roi Et, Kalasin, Sakon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, and Mukdahan. The Northeast region is located in the geographic area known as the Khorat Plateau, which derives its name from the ancient Khmer settlement of Korat. It housed as its capital the capital city of Nakhon Ratchasima (National Statistics Office 2000:1).

The Khorat Plateau was a part of the Khmer Empire before it became a part of Thailand, which explains the Khmer culture and influence of politics, art, writing and some words (Hall 1968:169-172). As a result of many waves of migration, there are many different tribes and

cultural groups in the Northeast representing a diverse number of languages and cultures. However, as much as two-thirds of the population is of Lao origin. Representing people who migrated in the seventeenth century from Laos into the Khorat plateau. Their descendents are considered Thai-Lao and speak a language similar to the Lao language, which is distinct from Central Thai but mutually intelligible. The Northeastern region remained semi-autonomous from the Thai state until formal political control was established in the 1890s (Brown 1994:170-173).

Because Thai-Lao, who shared the language and culture of the dominant culture in Lao, largely populated the Northeast, there was concern of their loyalty to Thailand. When Prince Damrong, the Thai prince, son of King Mongkut, and brother of King Chulalongkorn, was Minister of the Interior, he feared the loyalty of the Thai-Lao. Tanabe and Keyes (2002:121) state that, “despite the fact that well over half of the population of Siam, the boundaries of which were fixed during the colonial period, had previously been called ‘Lao’ by the Siamese, Prince Damrong literally wrote the Lao out of Thai history.” The Prince was responsible for the writings of the construction of the Thai nation, and in it he declared that the people in the north were of Thai decent and not of Lao decent (Tanabe & Keyes 2002:122).

Regardless of the Prince’s attempt to unify the cultures, both the people in the Northeast and those in Bangkok still refer to the people in this region as Isan or Thai-Lao. However, the Prince’s efforts may have had an effect on their loyalty as a survey on ethnic identity and loyalty conducted in the mid-1960s indicated that the Thai Isan identify themselves as Thai citizens and not with Laos (Henderson et al 1971:75). However, until the mid-1960’s the Thai-Lao and the Central Thai have not lived in harmony.

The Northeast is characterized by poverty and low economic productivity. It is the poorest region of Thailand. Agriculture is the main economic activity of the Northeast,

producing around 22% of the Gross Regional Product. Glutinous rice is the main crop and accounts for 60% of their crops, farmers also grow a variety of other crops such as cassava, kenaf, tobacco, and sugar cane. However, droughts in the dry hot season from November through January and floods in the wet cold season from October to February make the land difficult to cultivate and maintain. Further, the soil is highly acidic, saline and nearly infertile from overuse. (Bunge 1981:57-144). Despite its dominance in the economy, the agriculture in the region is insufficient as a source of viable economic self-sufficiency and in 1962-3 in the northeast the percentage below the poverty line was 77 percent (Pasuk & Baker 2002:64).

Sharp contrasts of standards of living have existed between the Northeast and Bangkok. The concentration of wealth and power is in Bangkok and among the 19 provinces the lowest living standards have been found in the Northeast. These discrepancies created animosity and there were several acts of insurgency by the Northerners in 1934, 1936, and 1959. The central Thai government suppressed these. (Myers 2005:31) However, the Vietnam War brought changes to all regions between 1959 and 1975. In the 1960's, Thailand supported the United States in its fight against the Viet Cong, and the Thailand economy subsequently became rich with American dollars.

During the war, several military bases were placed in the Northeast by the United States, and this resulted in jobs and more money for the people. After the military bases closed, many Northerners sought jobs in Bangkok. Because many people in Northeast Thailand were more apt to be poor, uneducated, or undereducated, they were given the lowest-ranking jobs with the worst pay, and as Girling (1981:255) writes, "they returned resentful over what they felt to be both class and ethnic discrimination." The educational curriculum provided by the state was another issue for the Northerners. The curriculum provided was in the Central Thai language,



which means that the rural Northeastern children were educated in a dialect that they did not understand, and they subsequently performed poorly on exams. Therefore, State education restricted occupational mobility and reinforced their suspicions of class and ethnic discrimination. Dissatisfaction with the disparities and the racism they felt made them vulnerable to the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) who promised them a better future.

The first communist activity in Thailand appears to have occurred in the late 1920's when Ho Chi Minh visited the Northeast. Communist insurgency in the Northeast began in the early 1950's and continued until the early 1980's. Dissatisfaction with the ruling powers led to an overt armed insurgency in 1965 in the Northeast led by the CPT, and finally got the attention of the government. The people sought some form of autonomy from Bangkok, because they opposed the central government's military and socio-economic policies, which favored the people of the Central Plains (Meyers 2005:40). Loei, Thailand, where my conversations took place, is one of the provinces located in Northeast Thailand, and the communist insurgency in this region showed independence from the non-communist political controllers in Bangkok (Bunge 1981:220).

This unevenness of the development between Bangkok and the Northeast raised the level of political discontent, and the Northeast became politically involved when they aligned themselves with Pridi Phanomyong (1932-1957), a liberal lawyer whose background resembled the Northeasterners. A large voting base gave the Northeastern leaders, the power to oppose the financial and economic policies of the government, which ignored the dire needs of the Northeast (Brown 1994:188). Pridi was always associated with communism, and three of Pridi's Northeastern leaders were accused, arrested and eventually killed for plotting a separatist movement with communist sympathizers (Kobkua 1995:215).

In 1962, in response to the new power of the Northeast and in order to mitigate the effects of communism the government began instilling programs specifically for the Northeast to improve roads, health, economic needs, and education (Henderson 1981:205-206). Although many non-formal programs had been in place in Thailand they had not reached many of the remote areas in the Northeast. In order to deal with the discontent and the alienation that the Northeasterners were expressing, the government publicly announced a five-year plan and three hundred million Baht in funding to be spent to improve communication, roads, water control and supply, electric power, educational facilities, and public health programs in the Northeast (Myers 2005:44). The Northeast had finally succeeded in getting the attention and help needed from the government.

In early Siam (Thailand's original name until it was officially changed on June 24, 1939), the education system revolved around two institutions, one religious and the other royal. According to Jumsai & C.B.E (1996:543), education in the 1800's was primarily "imparted by the priests." The Buddhist monks provided basic education for boys within monasteries, focusing on moral behavior, Buddhist teachings, and the environment. This was the beginning of non-formal education. Concurrently, King Mongkut Rama IV "started classes for his children and wives in the palace as early as 1851" (Jumsai & C.B.E. 1996:480). Children of the royal household and those from families of the nobility began to be educated in order to serve the court and to govern the provinces. Beyond the monasteries and palaces, society at that time was made up of farmers who saw little need for literacy, for village history, traditions, and local philosophy were passed on orally. As a result, formal education did not exist beyond the most elite classes.

It was not until the reign of King Mongkut Rama IV (1851-1868 A.D.), who spent much of his time searching for Western knowledge and who spoke English well, that education became

a priority. He was the first monarch of the Chakri Dynasty to learn English. King Mongkut learned the language from American missionaries and began modernizing his country according to Western standards. He made many European friends, started modern treaties with Western powers, and opened the first Thai embassies in England and France. In 1851, the King started the first school for his wives and children to learn English (Jumsai & C.B.E. 1996:480-492).

King Mongkut was a great influence on his son, Prince Chulalongkorn, who succeeded his father to the throne. During Chulalongkorn Rama V's reign (1868-1910 A.D.), there was increased recognition for the need for education. He opened up the first school at the palace in 1871 for children and nobles. In 1872, he began classes in English, and in 1881, he opened another school for his civil servants, the staff of his growing bureaucracy. King Chulalongkorn also started a school outside the palace for the general public in 1884 at Wat Mahan Temple, and in 1892 both the Ministry of Education and the first teacher college were opened (Jumsai & C.B.E. 1996:529-545).

The first Thai King to be educated in the west was King Vajiravudh Rama VI (1881-1910 A.D.), who studied in England at Sandhurst and Oxford. He established Siam's first university in 1916, Chulalongkorn University, which was named after his father. King Vajiravudh instituted the compulsory education system in the Education Act of 1921. Until his reign, education outside of the palace had been non-formal, and Buddhist temple based (Jumsai & C.B.E. 1996:565-567). Now, the act required the government to provide public education to all children.

By 1938, the illiteracy rate among adults aged 20 and over was 68%, and the new political regime was impatient with the slow results of formal education. Thailand became a constitutional monarchy in 1932. Between 1943 and 1945, the Adult Education Division of the

Ministry of Education put a law enforcement strategy in place, which required that adults between 20 and 45 years of age had to either prove they were literate or pay a tax.

By 1945 the illiteracy rate was reduced by one fifth, but World War II ended this program (Edirishingha 1999:2).

During the period of the war non-formal education took place in rural areas and was primarily for the out-of-school population 15 years old and over. However, in 1947, various programs were initiated, and the government added a vocational and economic dimension. By 1954, UNESCO had set up the Thai UNESCO Fundamental Education Center (TUFEC) in Udon Tatchathani province. Their objective was to train educational personnel to teach social development, vocational skills, and health. In 1972, a mobile trades training school was started and in 1975, the first distance education program began through a radio correspondence program. In 1979 the Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) within the Ministry of Education was started, with an emphasis on the concept of life-long learning. During the 1980's the DFNE expanded its non-formal education to include formal education. The main emphasis of the education plan from 1997-2001 was to extend basic education to the secondary level (Edirishingha 1999:3-4).

As even this brief historical overview shows, the Isan people of Northeast Thailand have suffered class and ethnic discrimination. However, due to their perseverance and courage, they have managed to retain their identity, prosper, and improve their economic, political, and educational standing within Thai society. The next section discusses the different adult educational programs available in Thailand.

## **Adult Education In Thailand**

Tertiary education in the early seventies was selective and its quality was inconsistent. As Sinlarat (1975:180) points out, “in Thai higher education system, when every person was chosen as an instructor, his tenure of being the instructor always continued because he was a civil servant.” Since there was no evaluation system in place, the instructors did not concern themselves with improving or developing their professional skills.”

At one time education was available only to the rich and upper classes. However, in 1990 a long-term educational plan was developed to enable greater educational opportunities, and to enhance the quality of life for all (Ministry of University Affairs). Yet as noted by Phongpaichit and Baker (1998:49) “by the year 2000 over 70 percent of the workforce would still have no more than six years of primary education.” Although a large number of educational institutions exist, Sinalarat (2004:201) says,

in 2002, there were 1,976,234 students in Thai higher education in programs leading to the associate degree, the bachelor’s degree, the master’s degree, the doctoral degree, or the diploma. While this is quite a large number of students, when compared with the total population (7,590,000), it constitutes only 26.04 percent of the eighteen-to-twenty-four-year-old age group.

Adult education in Thailand also includes non-formal education, defined as that available to youth and adults over 15 years old who withdrew from or did not attend school. This non-formal education includes four basic types: a literacy program, an equivalency program, life-skills training, and income generation/non-formal vocational training. The target groups are classified as “risky” or “disadvantaged” and include ethnic minorities, refugees, the homeless, migrant workers, and individuals with handicaps. The number of students enrolled in these programs is high with 150,592 in the literacy program, 1,970,376 in the equivalency program, 635, 905 in the life-skills training, and 320,686 in income generation/ non-formal vocational

training (Siltragool 2007:6-11). In fact, there are more adult learners in these programs than are enrolled in Thailand's universities.

### **Summary**

Chapter Two provides a brief overview of the number of immigrants in the United States, with specific attention to the number of immigrants in California. It also addresses attitudes of U.S. citizens on immigration, the reasons that immigrants migrate to the U.S., and the challenges and opportunities of immigrants in California's education systems. Also included is a historical overview of the number of refugees that have migrated to Thailand from its surrounding countries and the subsequent challenges for Thailand, including its educational system. Each of these sections is included in order to provide an overview of the areas being studied as they relate to this research topic.

## CHAPTER THREE – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

In the previous Chapter I presented the importance of this research, highlighting the value that this research can have for informing adult learners in teaching programs about the potential for developing communities grounded in solicitude and care. Such communities could provide a meaningful learning context for students of diverse populations, which in turn could support their ability to appropriate their own emerging identities and provide a foundation for their evolving hopes for their own futures. In this section, I present an overview of the literature that informs this research.

This Chapter begins with a discussion of the framework for understanding the evolution of adult education. While the focus of this research is adult education, it is often informed by thinking as related to the education of children, and so some of the literature considered reflects both populations. However, the implications of this research will be directed to adults. An understanding of the history of education leads into a review of relevant literature about inequities in education. This section includes the relevance of such inequities to social change and the development of sustainable communities that are informed by solicitude and care. Finally, this review addresses adult learning from the perspective of understanding the problems with the way that it is structured for all learners, and the specific emphasis that these problems place on the challenges faced by those of diverse populations. Some suggestions about curriculum reform are reviewed for consideration about how appropriate reform could best support the development of communities based in solicitude and care.

## **Evolution of Education**

Much of the current philosophy related to adult education is informed by the first authors on this subject, those who established some of the very universities that now continue to influence thinkers in a variety of areas. The original philosophy of adult education reflected the needs of the students of those universities, for attendance was the privilege of the wealthy. Educational topics developed at such institutions likewise reflected this concept, focusing on history, philosophy, and other topics that informed the nation's policy makers and yet were unconnected to the lives or concerns of either the working class or those who came from other perspectives or cultures. In Thailand, this is also the case, for universities cater to the majority of the upper class and fail to address the needs of the broader society, including the ethnic minority immigrant groups.

“In 1949, Margaret Mead recognized that the function of education in society was to reserve the status quo, and this is still the case today. Alexander Lesser (1985:146) recognized “in virtually all nations, education is essentially an attempt at assimilation, with curriculums overweighted to develop national uniformity and chauvinistic patriotism.” Radcliffe-Brown (1933:229-230) observed that “the mass of institutions, customs, and beliefs form a single whole or system that determines the life of the society. And the life of a society is not less real... than the life of an organism.” This need for a national uniformity establishes a common understanding that is arguably the basis for an effective democratic state.

Having a common basis of understanding through education is especially important in a nation composed in part of immigrants who have different understandings; in California, this opportunity establishes a basis for communication about our common future as a community. In Thailand, immigrants are often refugees and the impetus for a common system of education is



argued from the perspective of healing the wounds of war and ensuring that immigrants can effectively become contributors to society. Thailand's Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn (2001:18) affirms this perspective, noting that the "reason we should give educational opportunities to immigrants – besides the fact that access to education is a fundamental human right – is because they have witnessed war and are affected mentally."

Failure to provide equality in such opportunities for education can be problematic, for educational opportunities too often mirror societal inequities. Shor (1992:15) discusses the inequalities that the educational system perpetuates, noting that

no one volunteers to become a third-class citizen. Average people don't go out looking for a bad education, low-paying jobs, crowded neighborhoods, and less political influence in society; they want for themselves and their children the resources and choices available in the best schools, residential areas and jobs. [...What is available to poor children is too often] limited learning and shabby treatment which confirm their lower status. Unequal funding, inadequate staffing and facilities, and weak curricula – all decisions made from above – dominate the socializing experiences of students from below.

Adult learners must be accountable for discovering the resources and learning needs of their communities. Parents trust teachers and the educational community to do what is best for their children. Unfortunately, not all children are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. We need an educational system that has all children's interests at heart. -Because of the effects of inequalities in education, it is important to understand their causes in order to eliminate ongoing consequences.

### **Education's Role in Supporting Sustainable Communities**

Although assimilation in order to provide common understandings does support an argument for equality of access to and quality of education, it also raises as a concern the necessity of conforming to cultural understandings that may be inappropriate to people from other cultures. As early as 1938, Bronislaw Malinowski opined that European culture would

never allow any other group equality in education, politics, or religion. The slow rate of needed educational reform continues to reflect the problems inherent in such a cultural description. As a result of such ongoing failures to change, educators have limited their opportunities to support communities that affirm the cultural heritage of those who compose their ranks.

The increasing number of immigrants coming to this country provides emphasis to the need for supporting sustainable communities; in order to do so, we must re-interpret the issue of adult learning. Leslie White (1949), an anthropologist who was a contemporary of Margaret Mead, affirms the link between communities and education, writing of the need to reconstruct society in order to reconstruct education. Jack Mezirow (1991) likewise writes that “there are two fundamental reasons that adult education must accept responsibility for fostering democratic social change. Both pertain to the nature of adult learning in modern society.” Jane Vella (2002:7) further affirms the importance of education to care and solicitude in community, stating that “if we are building a civil society that can distinguish domination from democracy, it is necessary to understand that nothing in the universe grows or develops alone. We learn together.”

### **Changes in Education**

The entire educational system needs to be re-examined and a fresh interpretation created that will lead to new understandings. Adult learning needs to focus on a social dimension, which recognizes the languages, cultures, and histories of all of our students and honors and embraces their diversity. Teachers must understand their students and learn ways to communicate effectively. They must learn how other cultures communicate and incorporate effective strategies for teaching and learning. Learning should include the social, cultural, traditional, and historical aspects of a multicultural society. These issues confront educators in California and

mirror issues being considered in Thailand. Ketudat (2000:45) discusses strategies for educational reform in Thailand and writes that “the protection of cultural diversity and the need for societal identity are powerful forces which, in turn, pull in a different direction.” This affirms the need for fostering democratic social change in Thailand.

Changes in education raise issues related to teacher education and to curriculum, both of which must reflect better awareness of cultural issues in education. Cranton (1994:228) writes that “educators must be adult learners continually striving to update develop, expand, and deepen their professional perspectives both on their subject areas and on their goals and roles as educators.” In my experience, most teachers grow comfortable teaching the same curriculum over and over again, which benefits neither teacher nor students. Teachers cannot make education relevant to the needs of students if they are doing so when the language, the economy, and the culture have changed.

Literature about the Thai educational system reflects similar concerns. J. K. P. Watson (1974:43) questions the “overwhelming bias toward academic subjects” the identical nature of curriculum in rural and urban schools, and the relevance of “textbook subjects like history, mathematics, geography, and civics” if “unrelated to a child’s environment.”

### **Adult Education**

In order to support adult learners, it is important to understand the adult education system, for reaching adult learners who can in turn take responsibility for developing communities built on solicitude in care requires understanding both the system as it currently is structured and its potentials if appropriately reformed. This section considers the existing structure of adult education, including the problematic way that it is structured for all learners. It also reviews the relevant literature with regard to the specific problems that the current structure

creates for learners from diverse backgrounds. Finally, it reviews recommendations from the literature about how adult education could better be structured in order to meet the needs of all learners in today's world.

At one time, adult learning was available only to a select group. Cross (1979:21) recognizes those inequities, noting that "as a group, today's adult learners are disproportionately young, white, well-educated, and making good salaries." This suggests either that adult education is not accessible to all or that what is offered through existing programs is not relevant to all. This inequity is informed by the challenges associated with the process of creating lifelong learners and related literature holistically considers not only that which occurs in adult education, but that which preceded it. For example, Cross (1979:20) notes that

despite lip service to the idea that lifelong learning includes cradle to the grave learning, we rarely think of the lifelong learning movement as a call for the reform of elementary education. Yet, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the education of the lifelong learner must begin early.

Lambert et al. (1995:54-55) adds to this discussion, noting that part of the problem in creating lifelong learners is in the approach of the educational system. She suggests that too often when concerns are raised about the success of educational efforts, the focus is inappropriately placed on the student rather than on the system. She points out that

the task is to "fix the kid" and place him or her back in the (dysfunctional) system. Such approaches as study halls ...gang counseling, homework clubs, remediation, and Saturday schools are based on this assumption. It is not that some of these approaches are not useful supplements to fundamental change, but when they are used as a substitute for changes in teaching and relationships, they seem to say, 'Preserve the core of the system for business as usual.'

This "business as usual" approach to needed reform affects learners from all backgrounds. Herrington and Herrington (2006:vii) notes that there has been little change in traditional styles of teaching and "instruction remains teacher-centered and textbook driven, even

in the most elite institutions.” Bess (2000:159) provides specific examples of the gap between such traditional styles of teaching and the needs of contemporary adult learners, positing that

students tend to prefer practical examples and have a need to understand the application of the material to their world and goals: essentially, students learn more effectively when they can associate and understand connections between what is happening in the classroom and what is happening in their lives.

These problems, which affect adult learners in a wide array of adult educational settings, are emphasized among groups with language, culture, or identity differences. They affect both inclusion within adult educational settings and the development of curriculum within such institutions. Maehl (2000:8-9) recognizes these discrepancies, noting that the goal of motivating all students to become lifelong learners has made advances, but still is burdened by the reality that “within the U.S. population, African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups complete fewer years of school than Whites do.” White (2003:29) echoes Maehl’s concerns, saying that, “it can certainly be argued that not everyone is treated equally in society and that equal access to opportunity has not yet been achieved.”

These numeric inequities are due at least in part to the way that curriculum is developed. When students from diverse backgrounds began entering higher education, educators felt inadequately prepared to appropriately address their learning needs. Baiocco and DeWaters (1998:3) explain that “what we are coming to understand is that this new student population does not simply look different, but it presents an entirely new set of instructional challenges. Many of these students are academically, behaviorally, linguistically or socially underprepared for college.” Recognizing this is a first step that reinforces the importance of developing teaching communities that are oriented toward serving the diverse needs of all students.

Reforming adult education to meet the changing needs of all adult learners requires change at all levels. One of the problems that must be addressed is summed up by Banks

(2000:28), who notes that, “a major problem... is how to recognize and legitimize difference and yet construct an overarching national identity that incorporates the voices, experiences, and hopes of the diverse groups that compose it.” Preece and Singh (2003:7), who write on adult learning and poverty reduction, posit that “successful adult education requires grassroots, bottom-up development in a participatory, partnership-based approach....” These suggestions indicate the need for a new curriculum that moves from the idea of an institutional identity to the concept of identity based in relationship with one another. White (2003:29) demonstrates the importance of an inclusive curriculum when he writes that “educators must show people not as victim of their circumstances but as actors in global history.” Nussbaum (2002:290) similarly advocates for higher education that develops each person’s capacity “to be fully human,” a concept that he defines as being “capable of recognizing and respecting the humanity of all our fellow human beings, no matter where they are born, no matter what social class they inhabit, no matter what their gender or ethnic origin.”

Writers who have considered issues related to adult education have long noted the need for change and the potential contained in such change. Arendt (1977:192) gives timeless counsel that sums up these potentialities in a way that continues to resonate, for she notes that “the problem is simply to educate in such a way that a setting-right [of the world] remains actually possible, even though of course, it can never be assured.” This possibility is affirmed through critical hermeneutics, as Ryan (2006:115) suggests, for power and potentiality lie in the process of “engaging others - particularly different others - in critical conversations. Such critical conversations can help school communities acknowledge, recognize, critique, and change invisible practices that impede inclusion.” Such conversations about the problems of adult education and the lack of supportive educational communities in education bear enormous

power, for as Ricoeur notes, it is through discourse about concerns that solutions emerge.

Ricoeur (1991:177) specifically affirms such efforts at reform, noting that

it is from a complaint that we penetrate the domain of the just and unjust. The sense of injustice is not only more striking, but also more adequate than a sense of justice; because justice is often what is lacking and injustice is what is reigning, and humans have a clearer vision of what is lacking in human relationships than the right way of organizing them. It is the injustice that sets thought in motion.

### **Summary**

The theoretical foundation behind the paradigm that informs adult learning today demands reconfiguration. The diverse needs of students who are being educated in the Bay Area provide both inspiration and impetus, for though adult education in the United States has fostered more democratic change than anywhere else in the world, there is still a lot more to be done and change must occur with the conscious realization that other countries will see us that the archetype for social change.

Interpretive theory allows the opportunity for the development of a narrative and the subsequent analysis of a social text that can open the way to new understandings of the traditional styles and methods of adult learning. Ricoeur (1988:248) affirms that this narrative has the possibility “to compose several plots on the subject of the same incidents... so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives.” Ricoeur (1981:13) explains that the text is made one’s own through interpretation and the reader has the capacity to interpret a new mode of being. These new and possible worlds, which can be revealed through the critical hermeneutic task of interpretation, bear the potential to instigate the long-overdue educational reform that will finally allow for needed support of diverse communities. The following Chapter will describe the field-based hermeneutic research process utilized in this project.

## **CHAPTER FOUR – RESEARCH PROTOCOL**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter Four, I describe the research process, which I designed as a hermeneutic field-based inquiry that used the research protocol as established in Herda (1999:96-115). The first section discusses the critical hermeneutic paradigm as it relates to an interpretive research tradition, including a description of critical hermeneutic participatory research and the theoretical foundations provided through discussions of care and solicitude and narrative identity. The second section provides a brief discussion of the three theoretical categories that I used for data analysis: Fusion of Horizons, Communicative Action, and Solicitude and Care. The subsequent sections describe details associated with the entrée to the site and participant selection, the data collection, data analysis, and text creation. A description of my pilot project and a discussion of the key themes that arose from that project follow this. The final section includes my own background as the researcher, which provides some context from which to understand the concern that drives my interest in this research and the enthusiasm with which I pursue additional knowledge about this subject.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Critical Hermeneutic Participatory Research**

“Research is a reflective and communal act,” writes Herda (1999:5). Participatory research in a critical hermeneutic tradition creates a text through authentic conversations between researcher and participants. These conversations provide the opportunity to tell a story. Geertz (1973:10) explains that “interpretive anthropology is what meaning is interpreted behind what is observed.” Through the process of interpreting meaning, the researcher creates a text that “then becomes a multi-layered story, rendered from the interpretive process of multiple and complex



meanings” (Geertz 1973:10). This process allows for the creation of new understandings and new meanings from which evaluation and action can occur. As Gadamer (1989:399) explains:

...to understand a text always means to apply it to ourselves and to know that, even if it must always be understood in different ways, it is still the same text presenting itself to use in different ways. Understanding and interpretation are indissolubly together.

Through the creation of a text about care and solicitude in adult education, I set out to gain new understandings that in turn would lead to changed worlds for current and future adult students who deserve to have educational experiences that are grounded in authentic manifestations of solicitude and care.

In this investigation, the researcher and the participants together considered how cultural and ethical dimensions interrelated within areas of adult learning and how and whether this reflected changes in education brought about by increasingly diverse student populations. Through narrative, our experiences translate into realities; however, such realities have no meaning unless they are understood and interpreted through the other and time. Ricoeur (1984:55) explains the importance of linking narrative understanding to practical understanding, emphasizing that the former is only relevant when grounded in a relationship “between the theory of narrative and that of action.” This relationship also requires an approach to oneself as another, for it is only with the other that meaning is derived and community developed. This emphasis between concern for the other and practical action lies at the heart of critical hermeneutics, which requires that we “work to change organizations and society to embody more responsive and inclusive communities” (Herda 1999:8). This project embraced the use of narrative to ground the researcher and participants in concern for the other in our discussions about needed practical action. Adult education is by its very nature a community concept and appropriate changes carry the potential to improve the experiences of researcher, participants,

and the individuals seeking an educational experience that appropriately prepares them to appropriate an ethical future.

The critical hermeneutic participatory research orientation of this project is also reflected in the orientation it adopted toward the communicative process. Habermas' (1984:101) communicative competence theory describes as foundational the basic requirements for communicative action, noting that these elements include understanding, cooperation, and socialization. Habermas (1984:101) explains that "language is a medium of communication that serves understanding, whereas actors, in coming to an understanding with one another so as to coordinate their actions, pursue their particular aims." It is through the interpersonal relationship that developed between the research participant and the researcher that we derived this mutual participation. I designed this research to ensure that such communication carries the potential to lead both those currently involved and potential future readers from minor changes in behavior to significant changes in action that create more ethical outcomes within adult education.

### **Care and Solicitude**

Within such a research design, the concepts of care and solicitude were also foundational. Heidegger (1962:373) emphasizes the importance of authenticity and notes that authentic existence comes into being only when individuals arrive at the realization of who they are and grasp the fact that each human being is a distinctive entity with their own "distinctive potentiality-for-Being." This emphasis on the distinctiveness of each individual being lies at the core of the concepts of care and solicitude as they relate to this research, for I designed the research both to honor the authenticity of each participant and to respect the distinctive potentialities of each individual currently or potentially involved in adult education.

Heidegger (1962:373-374) describes care as temporal and observes that it can be both reactive and proactive. He elaborates on the temporal nature of care, describing it as “anticipatory resoluteness” and ties authentic existence with time by observing that “this letting-itself-come towards-itself in that distinctive possibility which it puts up with, is the primordial phenomenon of the *future as coming toward*.” By emphasizing the uniqueness of each individual and linking that with time, Heidegger suggests that the aim of solicitude is to move toward one's own most possibility for being. This research incorporated that concept in its orientation, recognizing both a responsibility to the distinct individuals who are currently involved in adult education and the responsibility of educators in general to look with care and solicitude toward the future. Ricoeur (1992:193) expands upon these concepts in ways that further informed this research, for he describes solicitude as empathy and concern for others that is directed toward reducing the suffering of the other. In defining suffering as “not defined solely by physical pain, nor even mental pain, but by the reduction, even the destruction, of the capacity for acting, of being unable to act, experienced as a violation of self-integrity” (Ricoeur 1992:190), he puts the importance of this research orientation in perspective, for through this research I intended to reveal knowledge and wisdom that would empower those who are currently unable to act.

Such empowerment leads to equality, “which is reestablished only through the shared admission of fragility and, finally mortality” (Ricoeur 1992:192). This shared admission requires the development of a self-esteem that is recognized as being in relation with the other, who is understood as being irreplaceable. This research honored the concept of the irreplaceable other in both its subject and its relationship with the participants, with whom I adopted an approach that was itself rooted in a solicitous relationship that was grounded in equality. My intent was

that this research orientation allow all involved in this process to engage in what Ricoeur (1992:190) refers to as the “good” life.

### **Narrative Identity**

One’s identity is developed through history and becomes familiar to us through narrative.

Ricoeur (1988:246) explains that

the fragile offshoot issuing from the union of history and fiction is the assignment to an individual or a community of a specific identity that we can call their narrative identity. ...To state the identity of an individual or community is to answer the question, ‘Who did this? Who is the agent, the author?’

In this research project, I had conversations with individuals who shared their identity through narrative that described their histories. Through the narratives shared by participants, I also gathered information about cultures, which have a history, a collective memory, which their members developed and retold in order not to forget the past. Gallie (1964:66) theorizes that “as a story, history is about ‘some major achievement or failure of men living and working together, in societies or nation or any other lasting organized group.’” Through narratives, individuals share their actions and experiences and “these characters are represented in situations which change or to the changes of which they react. These changes, in turn, reveal hidden aspects of the situation and the characters, giving rise to a new predicament which call for thought or action or both” (Ricoeur 1981:277).

Through narrative and the examination of narrative identity, I explored “hidden aspects” related to the topic of adult education for these immigrant communities in order to reach new and more ethical understandings. Kearney (2004:104) explains the ethical rapport of narrative of history, noting that it is

- 1) a testimonial capacity to bear witness to the reality of the past (with its often untold suffering);
- 2) an analogizing capacity to make present those who are absent and ‘other’ than

ourselves; and (3) an eschatological capacity to project future possibilities where justice might at last prevail.

Herda (1999:4) explains how this ethical rapport translates into research, noting that “the common denominator of these research projects is the lessons on how we, in our organizations and communities, can further understand ourselves and our challenges from what we learn from each other at home and abroad.” Thus, when we learn that a system is failing we have a moral obligation to act. This research utilized the theoretical concepts of communicative competence, care and solicitude, and narrative identity in order to approach this research with the concern that the subject’s potentialities deserve.

### **Summary**

In summary, this dissertation incorporated a research structure that was grounded in a participatory inquiry informed by critical hermeneutic theory. The conceptual themes of care and solicitude and narrative identity informed the genesis of this research process and helped to establish a foundation for the research process. This process is further introduced in the following pages.

### **Research Categories**

#### **Introduction**

The categories of fusion of horizons, communicative action, and care and solicitude have provided an initial guideline for data collection and were used as the basis for analysis in this investigation. Though I remained open to the possibility of having the text unfold in a way that calls for different analysis categories, I determined at the end of my data collection that the initial categories proposed remained most appropriate and those are the ones that I used for my data analysis.

## Category I: Fusion of Horizons

As conversations were the media in which the research took place between the researcher and the participants, it was important to understand the meaning of conversation. Gadamer (1989:387) explains that

conversation is the process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens [oneself] to the other, truly accepts [that] point of view as valid and transposes [oneself] to the other, to such an extent that [the person engaged in the conversation] understands not the particular individual but what [that individual] says.

As explained in the literature reviewed for this investigation, the topic of adult education for immigrants in both California and Thailand is one that ignites passionate opinions from many. Coming to an understanding is necessary in order to seek more justice in the way that adult education occurs. This is possible through language, “which provides the *Mitte*, the medium, or middle ground, the place where understanding takes place” (Gadamer 1989:xvii). However, coming to such an understanding required a continual testing of prejudices.

Prejudices refer to the experiences and understandings that inform a current perspective. Achieving a fusion of horizons requires that individuals “[encounter] the past and [understand] the tradition from which we come” (Gadamer 1989:306). By encountering the past with an aim toward understanding, individuals inform their imaginations about the future, for “the horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point...A person who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him” (Gadamer 1989:269). Herda (1999:64) explains how this relates to the research process, noting that “when we closely examine and reflect on our research conversation texts, we may be surprised to see who we are. Upon further study and reflection, both the researcher and participants can place ideas in perspective.” Similarly, through a close examination of the text of

adult learning the researcher and participants experience the possibility of exposing “ourselves to the truth” (Gadamer 1989:239-240).

### **Category II: Communicative Action**

Communication is essential to discourse about the subject of adult education as it applied to immigrants in both of the research areas. Habermas emphasizes this importance, equating communicative action with emancipation and describing it as the activity of understanding. Coming to a universal understanding is at the heart of his thought. Such an understanding is important to create needed changes for immigrants who seek improvements in their lives and education to inform their future visions of themselves through the opportunities afforded through adult education.

To understand the needs of the immigrants who seek such education, educators must seek to better understand the backgrounds and cultures of the individual students. Habermas (1976:2) emphasizes this, referring to Apel’s ideas that we come to understanding from an always/already tradition. In Habermas’ theory of communicative competence, he says that effective communication must have the joint elements of comprehension, trust, and shared knowledge to arrive at shared values, legitimacy and understanding, all of which define competence. Habermas (1976:3) speaks of coming to an understanding as “the process of bringing about an agreement on the presupposed basis of validity claims that can be mutually recognized.” These mutually recognizable claims, which he refers to as “universal validity claims,” represent the manner in which he connects the linguistic component of language and the communicative components of speech. Habermas (1976:3) suggests that anyone “acting communicatively must, in performing any speech action, raise universal validity claims and suppose they can be vindicated [or redeemed].”

Communicative rationality as part of communicative action is an important aspect of learning. As Herda (1999:67) notes, “learning in Habermas’s framework is associated with critique, recognizing our mistakes, and choosing another way of doing something.” The process of engaging in authentic conversations about the unique needs of immigrants who are engaged in adult learning created an opportunity to recognize mistakes and subsequently adopt a different way of thinking that can lead to more ethical outcomes.

### **Category III: Care and Solitude**

The above categories were relevant and important to this research; however, the most critical component in education is care and solicitude. Care is essential in any community. As Heidegger (1962:162) states, “we cannot exist without Other. Be-in is Being-with others. Carried further, Being with-for Others equates with care...Concern, part of the phenomenon of care, pertains to the world, while care pertains to our relationship with other human beings.” Heidegger (1962:320) links care with the concept of a calling, writing that “...the call is precisely something which *we ourselves* have neither planned nor prepared for nor voluntarily performed, nor have we ever done so.” The “call comes from men and yet *from beyond me and over me.*”

Though Heidegger’s theory establishes care as essential to the nature of our being, in mainstream education, where such nurturing should take place, we are seldom encouraged to search into the depths of our being. Instead, emphasis is more commonly placed on knowledge and skill, while identity is under-emphasized. Herda (2007:16) describes Quirk’s work, noting that in her research she found that “adult learning takes place successfully... when the learning process influences both the student and educator and when the adult learners are allowed to configure their own futures through a meaning based curriculum.” To achieve adult learning



successfully therefore requires recognition that although knowledge and skills are important, identity is essential. Further, this recognition must include an understanding that identity exists only in relation to the other. As Herda (1999:9) points out, “we are always in relationship-in our personal life and in our professional life-and are in the position of [being] respondent to the other one.” Further, those relationships create the opportunity for care and “people who care for one another will more than likely engage in genuine conversations about issues facing them” (Herda 2007:11). That relationship invokes the concept of connectedness and at the core of connectedness lies care.

Ricoeur adds to the discussion about care, using the concept of solicitude to describe how care can manifest in action. He notes (1992:193) that “solicitude adds the dimension of value, whereby each person is *irreplaceable* in our affection and our esteem.” He ties this to the importance of being in relationship, adding that “it is first for the other that I am irreplaceable. In this sense, solicitude replies to the other’s esteem for me.” This concept translates in essential ways for institutions. Ricoeur (1992:193) asserts that “living well is not limited to interpersonal relationships but extends to the life of institutions.” Herda (1999:13) reinforces the importance of extending this concept to agencies, noting that “the critical point is to change relationships among members in organizations and communities. This change does not begin by our changing the other, but by changing oneself.” This concept directly applies to adult education, which occurs within organizations and yet has important implications on the individual level, both for the adult learner and for those engaged in educating.

### **Summary**

In summary, the categories of Fusion of Horizons, Communicative Action, and Care and Solicitude served as the framework for the data analysis. They had an integrative function within

this research, for they provided complimentary support to my analysis of the stories that my conversation partners told. These categories provided appropriate context to the data that I gathered from faculty and administrators in higher education who take responsibility for structuring and supporting teacher education curriculum, for our conversations occurred within the context of understanding more about the ways that they learned, communicated, cared for, and exercised solicitude toward others while engaged in adult learning.

## **Research Process**

### **Entrée to Research Site and Conversation Partners**

I was raised and educated in the Bay Area and have been an educator in the area since 1990. Over the years I have become acquainted with and befriended many educators and administrators. I began as an elementary bilingual teacher in Fremont and then worked as a diversity consultant for the Fremont Unified School district. After completing my undergraduate and graduate degrees from California State University of Hayward, I became a lecturer at that university. I remain friends with several of my professors and I have enjoyed collegial relationships with many other educators and administrators in higher education institutions. Five formal research participants and one informal research participant from the Bay Area contributed to this study. These participants are presented in detail in Chapter Five, however, a list of their names appears here as Figure 1. I selected my research participants because of their known dedication to social justice in education.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>City/State/Country</b>
Dr. Olivia Gallardo	Professor	Female	Vallejo, California
Edmundo Norte	Professor	Male	Oakland, California

Arlando Smith	Professor	Male	San Jose, California
Amy Smith	Professor	Female	San Francisco, California

**Figure 1: Formal Conversation Partners in Northern California**

In the summer of 2007, I had the good fortune to travel to various countries in Southeast Asia with a group of educators and doctoral students led by my advisor, Dr. Ellen Herda. While on this trip, the experiences that I had reminded me about how difficult it is to be an English language learner (ELL). I do not speak any of the languages of the countries we visited, and when we visited schools in small villages and I wanted to communicate with the educators or the students, I could only nod and smile. As painful as this was, I realized that only by experiencing what ELL students feel can an educator fully understand what their students go through. Though I am both an educator of ELL and a speaker of English as a second language (ESL), I had forgotten how difficult it is for ESL students to try and communicate. The trip was a great reminder for me, and when I returned I wrote a paper titled, “Educational Leaders Engaging in Discourse of English Language Learners” for my Law and Culture class with Dr. Herda. In the paper I proposed a teacher study-abroad program of ten teacher-leaders who would spend a week in a foreign educational setting where they neither know anyone nor speak the local language. After Dr. Herda read my paper she said, “This is exactly what is needed in teacher education. Let’s do it!” Within a few months she had organized a trip to Loei, Rajabhat University in Thailand. In the summer of 2008, I joined 17 other educators or professionals and together we resided in the dorms of Loei, Rajabhat University for a week. During that time, I met and had conversations with three Thai professors, the vice president of the university, and a student from Chiang Mai University. Research participants were ultimately selected through a combination of

referrals, and educators and a student I met in Thailand and my conversations with these individuals informed part of the research I present in this text. As with my research participants from the Bay Area, these participants will be presented in detail in Chapter Five; in addition, a list of their names appears here as Figure 2. I have continued to develop my relationship with this community of professors via email, for they are eager to continue the conversations about these issues.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>City/State/Country</b>
Edward Patrick Hopper	Professor	Male	Loei, Thailand
Patcharin Duangsri	Professor	Female	Loei, Thailand
Prakorb Phon-Ngam	Vice President	Male	Loei, Thailand
Kobkhan Gubatapol	Professor	Female	Loei, Thailand

**Figure 2: Formal Conversation Partners in North East Thailand**

Formal participants whom I was able to confirm in advance were initially contacted by email. Once they agreed to participate, they were sent a formal invitation letter (Appendix A) and then a follow-up confirmation letter (Appendix B). Some of the participants with whom I had arranged to have a conversation with were unavailable. Fortunately, I was then able to locate additional research participants.

All of my research conversations in the United States and Thailand were conducted in English. In Thailand, only Patrick spoke English as his first language. However, as all of them taught English at the university they demonstrated a very good level of proficiency and I did not have any problems understanding their pronunciation.

## **Data Collection and Text Creation**

Data for this study was collected in the form of recorded conversations with research participants, a personal journal, and media on immigration and education. The participants were fully advised of the nature of this methodology prior to our conversation. (See Appendix A for sample letters and conversation guidelines.) Participants granted permission and the participants were informed that they could request to terminate the conversations at any time. The participants were also informed that the conversations would not be confidential and would be used in this doctoral dissertation and potential post-doctorate publications.

Once the conversations were transcribed, copies of the transcribed conversations and a letter thanking participants were then sent. A sample thank you letter can be found in Appendix D. This follow up communication provided the opportunity for the participant to review and reflect upon the conversation. After reflection, each participant had the opportunity to delete, add, or change the transcript of what was said in the recorded conversation. The geographic distance between the researcher and many of the participants necessitated that communication occur through email. After each research participant reviewed our conversation, the created text became part of the data for the research.

## **Conversations**

A table listing my conversation partners can be found in Figures 1 and 2. A copy of the letter of approval to use human subjects from the Institutional Review Board for the protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco can be found in Appendix D. Each of the listed participants emerged either through my years working as an educator or through my on-site research in Thailand. They all share the enthusiasm for the topic and are were eager to

contribute to this research. I am grateful that my participants were willing to contribute their time, reflections, and most of all their experiences with and about adult learning.

### **Research Categories and Questions**

In my own professional role, I am a teacher of teachers, someone who works with educators as adult learners. Teachers who serve students from diverse cultural and language backgrounds face great challenges, both locally and, as a result of globalization and increased migration, in many other parts of the world. In the United States and abroad, educators face the common challenge of how to develop pedagogical communities that serve all students in a way that is inclusive of differences in culture, language and identity. There are many contexts in which I could have studied this topic. For this study, I invited the participation of selected faculty and administrators in higher education who shape and support teacher education curriculum in two culturally diverse regions, Northern California and Northeastern Thailand. For the participants, I designed a series of “guiding questions” that I shared with them in advance. These questions are grouped around the categories described above.

#### *Fusion of Horizons*

- What are the current perspectives of adult learning in society?
- What is the relationship of immigrants to adult learning?
- What role does social justice have in adult learning?

#### *Communicative Action*

- How can we begin to know each other?
- What roles do language and culture play?
- How do we begin the conversation?

### *Solicitude and Care*

- How do we begin to recognize our mistakes?
- How do we create a society that cares?
- What are the possibilities for educational institutions to create an environment that recognizes and honors all cultures?

### **Personal Journal**

In addition to collecting data through conversations, I kept a journal of my personal thoughts, reflections and ideas related to the topic of adult learning. The intention of the journal was to record informal conversations and document ideas that I generated through my conversations. In addition, I included articles that I read or heard on the topic of adult learning, immigrants, culture and diversity, ESL, change, or reform in education.

### **Research Timeline and Location**

The field-based research took place in two areas. The first conversations took place in Thailand and occurred in mid-May of 2008. The location was Loei Rajabhat University. The conversations were transcribed in October. Analysis of the data took place in October and November. The second area was in the Bay Area of California. These conversations took place from July 2007 through October 2008. The location of each conversation was the residence or work place of the participants, depending on their preference and convenience. Writing and editing was completed in December and January. A final draft of the dissertation was given to the dissertation chair in February 2008.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis adhered closely to the guidelines established for participatory research grounded in critical hermeneutic theory (Herda 1999:86-138). Herda (1999:98) states that “data

analysis is a creative and imaginative act. In data analysis the researcher appropriates a proposed world from the text. When we expose ourselves to a text, we come away from it different than we were before.” Through this process, I used my role as the researcher to appropriate new understandings from the subject at hand. Through my analysis of the data I gained a new understanding of myself and the presentation of the world as framed by past issues. Herda (2004:b:viii) writes,

in time revealed through plot, the story brings to the fore the past and the future, for one cannot describe the past without embarking on the future; and the self that stays the same through our life is the imperative to the self that changes, thereby, allowing us to survive and prosper in difficult circumstances.

As I collected data for this project, I found myself exposed to elements of individual’s lives that I had never before imagined. These shared experiences informed my understanding and the way that I analyzed the data associated with this project.

The following steps were adhered to during the data analysis, as suggested by Herda (1999:98-99).

- I recorded and transcribed the conversations, understanding that in doing so, “one lives through the conversation experience again from a different perspective” (Herda 1999:98). Listening to the conversations brought me further ideas and instigated additional reflection about the content of the conversations. Further, reading all of the conversation transcriptions allowed me both to develop an overview of the issue at hand and to appropriate a new world from the text.
- I pulled out significant statements, developed themes, and then created relevant categories.
- I substantiated themes with quotes from the conversation transcripts, observational data and from my researcher journal.



- I examined the themes and determined meaning in light of the theoretical framework of critical hermeneutics.
- I provided continued discussion and conversation with participants, using the developing text when appropriate.
- I set a context for the written discussion.
- I developed the text within each category in light of the theory and the problem at hand. In such research, themes often fit into more than one of the categories. When this happened, I indicated this in the discussion, either bringing in more than one dimension to the theme or grouping themes.
- I included discussion of the research problem at a theoretical level and ferreted out implications from the written discussion to provide insight and new direction for the issue or problem under investigation.
- When I noticed areas that could require further study, I indicated those in my discussion.
- I provided examples of learning experiences, both for myself and participants including Gadamer's (1988:304) fusion of horizons. In this concept, Gadamer uses the image of a horizon to express the limitations and potentials of our understanding. The analysis included examples of learning experiences in which a fusion of horizons occurred to an individual within the context of research as a result of a conversation, text, or symbol. Such examples proved important, for they allowed for an orientation toward new understandings both for myself and for my participants during the research process.

- Finally, I described how the data has been appropriated by relating the study to what I have learned and what role the study can play in my life.

During the research process, some participants elaborated in different degrees on the question of interpretation for sustainable community development through solicitude and care for the other. Therefore, some voices take a more prominent role in the data analysis than do others.

### **Pilot Study**

#### **Introduction**

I conducted a pilot study relating to adult learning using critical hermeneutics in the fall of 2007. The participant for the pilot research was Dr. Marcos Pizarro. Marcos is currently an associate professor, department chair, and coordinator of the Mexican-American Studies Program at San José State University. He received his B.A. from Stanford University and his Ph.D. from UCLA's Graduate School of Education. I chose Marcos as a conversation partner in my pilot study because of his commitment as an adult educator to creating community for diverse populations. The entire transcription of our conversation can be found in (Appendix E).

#### **Analysis of Text**

Our reflection on immigration led us to Gadamer's theory on fusion of horizons, which recognizes how essential communication is in reaching a new understanding. Gadamer (1989:304) writes, "to acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand-not in order to look away from it but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion." Through this discussion we learned the importance of conversations regarding adult learning. Our conversation regarding social justice in adult learning brought us to Habermas's theory on communicative action as Herda (1999:66) explains, "in speaking we relate to the world about us, to others, and to ourselves." The practical and emancipatory interests are referred to as

communicative action, and although we agreed that there are courses in adult learning that touch on the inequities in our system, they lack the action that is needed to make a difference.

An aspect of learning is embedded in Habermas's theory of communicative rationality. In his theory, learning is associated with critique, recognizing mistakes, and choosing an appropriate way of taking action. Our conversation reminded us of the importance of praxis. As Herda (1999:11) writes, 'Rather, interest, commitment, and the willingness to learn how to think about the nature of social reality may bring us closer to appropriate research praxis for many of our social problems. This led us to Ricoeur's theory of imagination. Imagination leads to refiguring the configured history and traditions of adult learning, toward "an imaginary world we might inhabit" (Herda 1997a:61-63). We ended with Ricoeur's theory of solicitude and care. Ricoeur defines solicitude as empathy and concern for others, specifically an empathy and concern that is directed towards reducing the suffering of the other. It is important for the institution that educates us all to teach that we only find meaning in relation to others. By this, we bring in the ethical component of adult learning by seeing the self as other and the other as self we realize that we only have meaning in relation to others.

### **Implications**

The conversations from the pilot study were very informative and the pilot study confirmed my belief that the subject matter chosen for the research contained sufficient significant to justify pursue it further. In addition, the guiding questions served my interests well and I learned the importance of keeping on target of the subject analysis. It was more fully developed in the data contained in this text.

## **Summary**

The findings from my pilot study with Marcos Pizarro helped prepare me for the research and inspired me toward future conversations in a critical hermeneutical tradition. As an English Language Learner seeking higher education, adult learning has always fascinated me and the relevance of my experience as an educator of adult learners has impressed upon me the importance of further investigating adult learning.

## **Background of Researcher**

I was born in Eagle Pass, Texas, which is located on the banks of the Rio Grande River across from the Mexican border of Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico. Eagle Pass lies approximately 140 miles southwest of San Antonio, Texas and 260 miles north of Monterrey, Mexico. The dominant language spoken there is Spanish and my first year of life was spent listening and imitating the Spanish language. The following year my parents divorced and my mother moved us to Gilroy, California. The neighborhood we moved into was also Spanish speaking.

During this doctoral program, I have learned that language is the critical medium for meaningful social change in our schools, communities and organizations. This confirms something I sensed about language at a very young age. I did not realize how much I valued my primary language until I started school. My earliest memory of school was needing to go to the bathroom, but not knowing how to ask. I was scolded if I spoke Spanish to other Spanish-speaking children and was told this correction occurred in order to facilitate my acquisition of the English language. I felt very alone and confused in school. My family moved when I was in second grade and ours was one of only two Latino families at my new elementary school. I remember the children making fun of my primary language. They would ask me to say

something in Spanish and then they would all giggle. Gadamer (1989:436) says that “the naturalness of human language - an insight painfully won against the forces of rationalism and orthodoxy - unfolds in the range of experience of differences between human languages.” By this, Gadamer confirms the importance of primary language and describes how a person’s relationship to that language can have profound and lasting effects.

When I turned ten, my mother decided she wanted to become an American citizen. She began by taking English classes and she asked my siblings and me to speak only English to her from then on. Unfortunately, I found it easy to let go of speaking Spanish. Since I had begun my education, I had been told that I should forget Spanish, and now my mother was asking me to do the same.

Shahideh (2004:193) says that “it is our lack of understanding of self which leads to our lack of action, participation, and powerlessness.” Ricoeur (1992:179) portrays the power within oneself. “Man,” he says, “is a self-interpreting animal. By the same token, our concept of the self is greatly enriched by this interpretation of the text of action, and self-interpretation.” In order to take action we must understand ourselves, and we cannot understand ourselves unless we interpret and reinterpret our past.”

During high school I began to interpret my past. I worked in an electronics firm, which employed many Mexican immigrants, and I thoroughly enjoyed reconnecting with my culture and speaking Spanish again. Soon thereafter, a friend of mine who had just become a Spanish bilingual teacher asked if I could volunteer in her classroom. After volunteering for a year, I realized there was a great need for bilingual teachers, and decided to become one.

I attended junior college and received a liberal arts associate degree. I then moved on to the California State University system as a liberal study major, with a minor in ethnic studies. I was

very excited about my ethnic studies minor because I was able to take classes and learn about different ethnicities. However, I was even more excited by the fact that there were classes about Latinos taught by Latino professors. Throughout my elementary education, I had only been exposed to negative comments about my Mexican heritage. These courses not only celebrated my culture, they honored the contributions of my ancestors throughout history. I realized that I had been embarrassed and resentful of the picture that had been painted of my cultural identity by my nation. As Herda (1999:4) points out, “we are always in a historical situation without fully knowing how our history and language influence us.” I felt rejuvenated, I was proud of my ancestry and my language, and I began to reinvent myself once again.

After completing my major and minor, I enrolled in a multi-subject bilingual credential program. These courses were even more exciting, because some of them were in Spanish. Although I had retained my primary language, I had never studied in Spanish: it was challenging, but exhilarating. Here, the majority of my professors were Latinos. However, because there was a shortage of Latino professors we had to take one course with the English monolingual credential program. Our professor was White, and in our first class meeting, she told us that her class would be difficult, unlike those in the bilingual program, and that we would have to work hard in order to pass. I felt insulted that she thought that the bilingual program had lowered their standards for us because we spoke Spanish. This experience should have prepared me for the real world and what lay ahead. Instead I resolved to show her that we were just as capable as the English monolingual students. We were given a group project, and my group decided to make a handout for new teachers. We designed and bound a comprehensive bilingual book for new teachers. We presented our project to the class and the professor. The professor was absolutely astounded that we were capable of such great work, and she acknowledged the fact. She said

that she had not had high expectations for our group, but that she was beyond belief, and that she felt guilty taking a copy. She suggested that we sell the book to the district. I finished the bilingual credential program with a 4.0 and I felt ready to make a difference in the lives of my Spanish-speaking students.

I soon discovered that my education did not prepare me to work with minorities. The materials, textbooks, and the exams were all aimed for the success of the dominant culture. Because of their language, my students were set up for failure. I have read many studies that show how minority students have higher drop-out rates, higher rates of disciplinary action against them, lower overall grades, lower self-esteem, lower test scores, more behavior problems, more underachievement, and more gang involvement than non-minority students. Studies have also proven that it is not inferiority on the part of minority students that leads to these problems. The educational system itself is failing them. Herda (1999:7-8) says,

for several decades in the United States, as well as in other countries, much effort has been expended on behalf of millions of people who are not in a position to exercise their personal and social rights. Most of these people still need, perhaps more than ever, advocates to work on their behalf of the rights they ought to have but don't. However, most of us need to exercise our sense of responsibility more than our right in order to change and improve society. This begins with a sense of who we are and what our responsibilities are, wherever we find ourselves whether in a just or in an unjust system.

I believe we need to educate students on the importance of all languages. As Cesar Chavez (1990) points out,

preservation of one's own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures. Real education should consist of drawing the goodness and the best of our own students. What better books can there be than the book of humanity? I believe it is ethical and moral to educate children on the importance of valuing all languages.

It is essential to educate children in the importance of valuing all cultures. Bernstein (1983:28) says that the understanding of other cultures is both a practical and-moral concern. He cites Winch for emphasis, saying that his aim,

is not to engage in moralizing, but to suggest that the concept of learning from, which is involved in the study of other cultures is closely linked with the concept of wisdom. We are confronted not just with different techniques, but with new possibilities of good and evil in relation to which men may come to terms with life.

Three years later, my horizon was altered again, during a Master's program in urban teacher leadership. There, I learned about institutional racism, the inequities in the different school systems, and the importance of what Ricoeur (1981:97) calls communicative action. Instead of a written thesis, we had to implement a project at our school site to create school change. Through school-wide action research it was determined that the Spanish-speaking students were seen as having behavioral problems. Findings indicated that the teachers perpetuated institutional racism, which allowed inequities at the school. In addition, there was a large gap in academic achievement between the dominant culture and the minority students. Along with two of my student colleagues, I designed, planned and implemented curriculum that grappled with equity issues, diversity and institutional racism. We were working with what Ricoeur (1981:97) calls the task of hermeneutic tradition, where "man can project his emancipation and anticipate an unlimited and unconstrained communication only on the bases of the creative reinterpretation of cultural heritage."

After the master's program, I was offered a job at the university level, mentoring newly-credential teachers. I accepted the job because I felt I could help students more effectively by teaching their teachers about these issues. The teachers I supported received funding for their tuition and books throughout the credential program and in turn they signed a contract that they must work in a high-need district for three years. A high-need district is a euphemism for a low socioeconomic area and many of the students are Spanish-speaking Latinos. The makeup of the population did not surprise me as much as the conditions of the schools. The schools are located in poor, high-crime areas, and they lack many resources, so it is difficult to retain teachers. This



structure ensures the consistent and systematic denial of educational opportunity to these students, who must pledge their allegiance to the flag every morning: “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all” Where is the justice for these children?

Although I always felt America’s resentment of my culture and language, it became painfully real in 2006, when HR 6095 came into legislation. This law was supposedly enacted to prosecute alien smugglers and reform immigration; however, it became an issue about race rather than law and it was a direct attack on Mexicans. Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante and Antonio Vallaraigosa both received threats and hate mail over the immigration policy. It was not the first time I felt that my language and culture were being openly attacked, but what finally broke my heart was the death threat the governor received, which stated that “the only good Mexican is a dead Mexican.” This wounded me deeply: I resented the nation I was supposed to belong to. I did not think I would be able to forgive my country.

However, my perspective shifted once again during the doctoral program, where I have felt that I have been encouraged to redefine myself and to celebrate my Mexican heritage. Herda (1999:13) points out that we must change the relationships among the members in our communities, a change that “does not begin by changing the other, but by changing oneself.” I have learned the importance of using language as a form of action and I am now convinced that in order to effectively create change we must begin with authentic conversations. In that spirit, I begin my conversation about the importance of creating a nation that is conscious of its members and accepting of the culture and language of each of those members. Herda (1999) says that it is important to reinterpret our history, look honestly at that which is good, retain what is good, and

look at what we need to change. This renews my hope that someday my culture and language will be valued by the nation I am supposed to belong to.

### Summary

This Chapter describes the protocol used in this research to study and interpret issues related to adult learning for diverse populations in California and Thailand. The conceptual framework, overview of the pilot study, and the background of the researcher are also included.

My intent reflected authentic solicitude toward both the unknown students who have utilized available adult educational opportunities and for the educators who have required new understandings in order to address the needs of those whom they serve. Through the research conducted in both locales, I have seen increased potential to develop new meanings for adult learning.

## CHAPTER FIVE – DATA PRESENTATION AND PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

### Introduction

In Chapter Five I present the eight formal conversation partners who contributed to my research. Located in two different regions of the world, these educators provide a unique perspective on issues in adult education. Their perspective is important, for “educators at the university level have a multifaceted responsibility to educate students and others on how to use and interpret their history” (Herda 1999:12). As I spoke with each of the educators who inform this project, I became more aware of the implications of this responsibility.

### **Southeast Asia**

In the spring of 2008, I made arrangements to join a group of San Francisco Bay Area educators and professionals traveling to Southeast Asia on a humanitarian trip. I participated in a similar tour in 2007, but the 2008 trip differed from the previous one in that in addition to our direct work with indigenous groups, we also engaged in academic presentations. Twelve of the eighteen travelers, including myself, had been invited to organize and present a mini-conference on culture and social change at Loei Rajabhat University (LRU) in Thailand, before continuing on to Laos and China. Dr. Prakorb Phon-ngam, the Vice President of the University hosted the event, which was titled *Seminar on Research, Writing, and Media Presentation* and it took place May 20-21. Then from May 21<sup>st</sup> -23<sup>rd</sup> we were asked to work with and prepare some of the professors to present a research paper in English. This provided an ideal opportunity to gather research data, and so I worked in advance to try to schedule appointments via email for formal conversations with educators and administrators on site at the university. My first research conversation, however, occurred more informally than I had anticipated; I met one of the faculty

members during lunch on the first day of the seminar and spontaneously began a conversation that provided much depth to my topic.

### **In Relation With The Other**

Edward Patrick Hopper has been a foreign lecturer in the English department of the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences at LRU since 1998. Figure 3 shows his photo with



Figure 3. Patricia Perez and Patrick Hopper  
Photograph by Jennifer Lamp

me after he thoughtfully and graciously presented me with a Thai clock at a restaurant in Loei. Patrick was born in Leeds, in Northern England, and received both his undergraduate and graduate degrees in the United Kingdom. Having completing the TESOL (teaching of English to speakers of other

languages) he desired to travel to

different countries, and applied to several agencies. One of them had a teaching job available in Thailand. The agency sent Patrick to teach at a university in Isan, which is also known as the Northeast, and he describes the university as “a third-ranking university in Thailand, so most of the students we get don’t have a lot of money. The parents are not rich. Anybody who has money goes to a better university. Because they come from poor families, they haven’t been to the best schools or ...they have been to a little village school...” Patrick’s description makes clear his impression that the education in Northeast Thailand has not been the best. An Englishman, Patrick believes his role as a teacher is to empower the Thai students by teaching

them to question. He says, “ask why about anything. Because they believe anything. Nobody asks why. You know, why is that answer, is it good or is it bad? They cannot ask that question. You know they have big problems with it.” Patrick believes “if the poor were taught a little bit about how to go about getting social justice or what is social justice...then maybe they could look after themselves better.” He said, “I think that is one of the great things about the European Union...we have so many different ways of thinking and we have so many different answers to any problem. You have got to show people that this is the greatness of humans, they are all different.” Although Patrick speaks with frustration of an educational system that has taught the Thai students to trust its elders rather than to question authority, it is obvious that he has developed caring relationships based on solicitude that are directed toward providing the capacity for action.

Patrick is bound in relationship with the other, where ethics requires us to recognize the other as an individual who has universal rights. Kearney (1998:248) explains that “the self acquires its identity in large part by receiving others’ narratives and re-narrating itself in turn to others. Self-identity involves one projecting a narrative onto a world of which one is both a creative agent and a receptive actor.” Patrick is developing a new narrative, one in which he is a creative agent and a receptive actor.

Through Patrick’s narrative he shares his sense of responsibility to the other and reflects on his own identity. He notes that

I came to Thailand and I haven’t moved on. But, it is not that I have learned about Thai culture, it is actually what I have learned about my own that has been so interesting. Because, when I see the Thais doing something one way, I think why do they do it that way? And then it is like, why do we do it the other way? That is the greatest thing. Yes, I have learned something about the Thai culture, but the biggest thing is what I have learned about my own culture, which has been so hidden from me. If I had stayed in England, I still wouldn’t know what I was or was not.

Heidegger emphasizes that one understands self and others by knowing them within their tradition and culture. Heidegger (1962:178) states, “this can lead to a person’s becoming for the first time thoroughly and genuinely enlightened about himself.” Living in Thailand has provided Patrick the opportunity to reflect on his past and for the first time to become more enlightened about himself. Now when Patrick talks about identity he better understands himself in relation to others, especially his culture, and to that of Thai society.

Not only has Patrick become more aware of his own culture and language, but has as also has learned an appreciation for the different cultures and languages in the Northeast. He speaks of these with affection, nothing that

in Isan, there are villages that speak Lao as their native tongue and Thai when they go to school. And the other way around that speak Khmer and Thai when they go to school, Khmer more in the south of Isan, but Lao everywhere. Even in one village where I have a friend, his village is split in two and one-half speaks Lao and the other half speaks Khmer.

However, despite the incredible current diversity of Thai culture that he observed, Patrick discussed his fears that the different cultures and languages will disappear, because the government places such singular emphasis the Central Thai language, while actively devaluing other languages. He says that since the government does not promote the other languages, the people subsequently do not see the value in retaining their language. After meeting some young girls in Surin who speak Khmer, he told them that he would bring his daughter to visit them every year so she could learn Khmer. In response, they asked in puzzlement, “why do you want her to learn Khmer?” Patrick noted with surprise that they simply did not see a reason for it, whereas he sees in language part of the richness and beauty of their unique culture.

I am able to relate to this statement, as my second language is not valued in the United States. English is established as the only official language in the United States and no other

language is valued. However, through my next conversation I learned that even in Thailand, English is valued over all local languages, with the exception of the Thai language, with which it is held on equal terms.

### **“Once Upon A Time”**

My next conversation partner emerged through a meeting that occurred as a result from the mini-conference on culture and social change. After my classmates and I had finished our presentation, Dr. Prakorb asked his professors to choose a presenter that they would like to work with on their research paper. Four professors asked to work with me because they had connected with my presentation. My presentation was based on my personal experience of losing my sense of identity and culture through the educational system, and how I was now being encouraged to redefine myself and celebrate my culture and language.

Vorapan Tiparos was one of the professors who asked to work with me, indicating that she had a similar story. The next day I met her in the LRU computer lab and found that she had



Figure 4. Patcharin, Patricia, and Vorapan  
Photo by Jennifer Lamp

brought another professor with her. She introduced Patcharin Duangsri, indicating that they were working on a research paper together, and requesting my assistance with that paper, which was titled, “Developing English Writing Skills through Folktales.”

Figure 4 is taken in the President’s conference room after Patcharin and

Vorapan presented their research paper.

They were both English teachers and one of the classes that they taught was folktales. I

immediately learned that Vorapan and Patcharin are professors who go above and beyond teaching in the classroom, for as we talked, they described their work, including descriptions of their efforts to organize and coordinate English camps with two local elementary schools so that their students can practice their storytelling skills with children.

I was immediately impressed with this commitment to students and also appreciated Patcharin's understanding of the English language, her research skills, and her knowledge of textiles, farming, and more. Most important was her tangible grace and genuine care, which she demonstrated both in her discussion of her work and in her actions during the time I worked with her.

Patcharin is a professor in the English Department and a faculty member in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. She was born and raised in the Loei Province, which probably explains the compassion that she has for her students and colleagues at LRU. Having received her undergraduate degree in English from Silapakorn in Central Thailand and her graduate degree in linguistics from the most prestigious university in Bangkok, Chulalongkorn, she still chose to return to the Northeast to make a difference in the education of the people of this province. Patcharin believes that policies on education must change. She notes that "the policy is from the central office, from Bangkok...policy makers may think that [education] is universal for all students in Thailand. But I don't think so, because people, students, or youth in the countryside or in small cities, besides the major cities, big cities or Bangkok (the capital) have fairly less opportunities."

Patcharin is aware of the inequities of the Northeast and she is working towards making a difference. She believes that "the government should send well-trained teachers who are dedicated to teach underprivileged students" to the remote areas to improve the education of the



students, so that they have the opportunity to improve their socio-economic standing and so that everyone has the opportunity to go to college.

A concern that Patrick and Patcharin shared is the pressure that the Thai government puts on its citizens to learn English to improve their standing. Patrick dislikes that everyone is taught English for the specific reason of encouraging tourism, and Patcharin believes that English should be taught to those who need it but adds that, “and ...foreigners should [also] learn Thai.” I likewise believe that it is unfortunate that the United States puts pressure on its citizens to learn English, because in doing so, they risk losing the rich diversity of their original culture.

During my conversation with Patcharin I was reminded of Patrick’s comments the day before regarding the loss of the different cultures and languages, and I asked her what she thought about the different cultures and languages in the Northeast. She expressed concerns that “the young generation, they seldom speak the Loei dialect, because their parents don’t teach them.” When I inquired about the reason for this, she said that parents

are not proud of it. They don’t want people to discriminate against their children...What I am doing is that I go to interview old people and I ask them say whatever they like to say, and I write down all of their vocabulary or I think the Loei dialect is going to die. Other people’s dialects are also dying. I collect all of the vocabulary and ask the younger generation, small kids, whether they know such words or not. They don’t. That is very bad. In the future, there will be no more Loei dialect.

Patcharin has devoted herself to keeping the Loei dialect alive by documenting words that are becoming extinct and then working with her colleague, Vorapan, to include the Loei dialect in the folktales that are created and presented to students at the university. By creating folktales that reflect the lives of their Loei Rajabhat students the two professors are keeping the dialect alive while teaching their students about the importance of retaining their culture and language. The importance of such story telling is explained by Kearney (1998:395-396) who writes that “to reply to the question ‘who?’ is to tell one’s story to the other. And the story is always one which

narrates a relation to the other, a tale of creation and obligation that never comes to an end...the notion of personal identity is thus opened up by the narrative imagination to include that of a *communal* identity.” Not only are Vorapan and Patcharin creating their own curriculum, but they are also creating curriculum that celebrates the Loei culture and language, and thus they honor the contributions of their ancestors. Like I did during my experience at USF mentioned previously in this project, they have found a way to incorporate teaching practices that honor diversity, which encourages their students to celebrate their culture and language. However, they are not only affecting the lives of their students, but through the English camps they are also affecting the lives of the children who are taught by the university students. As Hooks (2003:xvi) says, “great teaching is about knowing that community, feeling that community, sensing that community, and then drawing your students into it.” Through my next conversation partner, Dr. Prakorb, I learned that the university encourages this sense of community building.

### **“It Is Our Duty To Change Ourselves”**

Dr. Herda asked me to help her plan and organize the conference on social change in Loei, Thailand, and she copied me whenever she emailed Prakorb, who is the Vice President for International Affairs and a primary contact with whom she was working at LRU. Recognizing his role, I asked her if she could ask him if he would be willing to have a conversation with me. In the e-mail he sent responding to her subsequent query, he responded generously, with “of course, since you are making a dream come true for me.” Dr. Herda and I were impressed that he felt that way, because we felt similarly that he was making one of our dreams come true. His comment told us that he was a thoughtful man, but I never imagined the amount of time Prakorb would devote to making sure that our stay was absolutely the best it could be.

Although he had agreed to the conversation, a set time had not been established before our arrival, because we all knew that we were going to be very busy. Prakorb was indeed very busy organizing the conference and being a gracious host. He provided excellent accommodations for our group in the LRU dorms and he was attentive to our every need. Our rooms had a private shower and air conditioning, which was greatly appreciated, since the local weather typically had a high of 95 degrees Fahrenheit with 85% humidity. Breakfast and most dinners were prepared for us in the dorm cafeteria, and lunch was catered for us in the conference rooms. On several evenings Prakorb took our group and a group of his staff and professors to dinner at some of the best restaurants in Loei, where delicious food and entertainment was provided and yet our group was not allowed to pay. He also organized a shopping excursion and a fieldtrip to a monastery where we were able to worship with and share a meal with monks. Everything Prakorb did for us was done with a big smile, and genuine care and concern.

Dr. Prakorb Phon-ngam is both Vice President for International Affairs and Chair of the Master's Program in English at LRU. He received his undergraduate degree in education from Chulalongkorn University, and his Master's degree and PhD's in linguistics from Mahidol University. Both universities are located in Bangkok and considered high-ranking. However, he chose to work at a university that serves the lowest socio-economic group, and he insists on being called by his first name, Prakorb, which shows how unpretentious he is, an especially notable attribute in a culture that values titles. He is well published, and the majority of his research includes consideration of culture and language. Prakorb has traveled to Australia, Denmark, Hong Kong, Malaysia, the United States, and many other places, always teaching

about language and culture.

One evening after a meal at the dorms I finally had the opportunity to have a conversation with him in the front office of the dorms. He was excited to share that his experience was similar to mine in that while he was born and raised in Thailand, and is fluent in the Thai language, his first language was Khmer. He expressed understanding about the importance that language and culture have in education, and he expressed his opinion that, “the university has the duty to play some role in developing relationships among different groups.” This belief is evident in the committed way that he has approached his role at the university.

He said that there were three different types of universities in Thailand, and that LRU focuses on community development. Elaborating, he suggested that

it is our main duty to make our university like a home, teaching our family to be equal and to live with each other in harmony. But, in every house, there are different types of people. So, our role is to teach people of different status, levels, or standards to live, share and help each other. They may need to compete somewhat with each other, but they must also learn how to help each other and themselves.

I asked him how this was done, and he said it is taught through the courses. He said every student must take fundamental courses, “which include...how to live together, how to think and how to help each other.” He said these were required courses that the student must take before the student could take courses that pertained more specifically to their career choices. Prakorb said he used to create Khmer curriculum that included cultural and ethnic appreciation to encourage people to celebrate their language and culture, and for the last ten years “we [the university] are trying to provide a curriculum so our graduates will feel like that.” One of his students developed curriculum utilizing the local Lao food as a teaching aide, and another student is working on curriculum that includes the Lao language.



Figure 5. Prakorb and Patricia  
Photo by Jennifer Lamp

It is understandable why Prakorb is the Vice President of International Affairs at a community development university, because he models what he believes. He not only brings people

together of different cultures, languages, status, and levels, but he treats everyone with equal respect. The people he invited to attend the conference were staff members, professors, and students. Thai, Lao, Chinese, and English were a few of the languages that could be heard throughout the conference. In Figure 5 Prakorb is presenting me with a gift for working with and preparing some of his professors in their academic presentations.

Everyone I spoke with truly liked and respected Prakorb. In my conversation with Patrick, he confessed that initially he had not wanted to attend our conference, admitting that “I did not want to attend, but I said yes, because you know, he [Prakorb] is a great guy.” Patrick also told me that Prakorb hosts an annual international conference on education, sustainable development, and regional tourism called the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), which includes the six countries of Thailand, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, and China. Patrick said, “all of these countries are vastly different, so getting anybody to talk to each other is a major miracle.” The concept of personal and civic responsibility was a recurrent theme during my conversation with Dr. Prakorb. Herda states (1999:7) that

a full and mature sense of self does not stem from a developmental process grounded in individualism but instead arises from a recognition that in one’s relationship with others there resides the possibility of seeing and understanding the world and therefore one’s self, differently. When I change, the rest of the world changes.

During our conversation, Dr. Prakorb stated, “it is our duty to change ourselves” exemplifying that he has the capability of seeing and understanding the world and himself differently. He ended the conversation by saying, “I am always trying to help and change the situation of the minority group.” It is obvious by my conversation with Prakorb and my previous conversations with the professors that Dr.Prakorb leads with solicitude and care for the other.

### **Educational Fieldtrip**

Everyone at the university made us feel special. The four professors I worked with invited me to their homes for dinner, drove me to several destinations, and took me shopping. They also gave me gifts that represented their culture. I was presented with a Thai clock from Patrick, Panrithai Putthongsri gave me two cotton scarves I had admired at the Loei textile, Patcharin gave me a bracelet made from the fronds of a palm tree, and Vorapan gave me a



Figure 6. Kobkhan Guptapol and Patricia Perez  
Photo by Jennifer Lamp

beautiful turtle pin made by her brother, who is a local jeweler.

Our work was done, and the day had arrived for the LRU professors to present the research that we had helped them with to the staff and faculty. Figure

6 shows a picture of

Kobkhan and me in her office. It was on this day that Kobkhan invited us to her office to view

her beautiful collection of colorful masks that decorated the entire room. Because the Thai people were so proud of their culture, I was intrigued to see this collection. During our lunch hour we went to her office and Kobkhan explained the significance of the spirit masks, saying that each of the masks were unique, and used at the Phi Ta Khon Festival, which is held in the Loei province. She described it as a three-day celebration of music, dancing and worship to honor Buddha's last incarnation before he reached nirvana. She indicated that they were carved from the bases of the coconut trees and so they were very sturdy; she encouraged us to try them on. We had a fun time doing so and then taking pictures with her. Because Kobkhan was so friendly and knowledgeable I waited until my classmates left, and then asked her if she would have a conversation with me. She readily agreed and said we could have it then and there.

Dr. Kobkhan Gubatapol is the Department Chair of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, and a faculty member of the School of Education. She received her Master's degree in Education, from Naresuan University located in Northern Thailand, and her PhD degree in curriculum and instruction is from Clemson University, located in South Carolina in the United States. She has over 24 years of experience teaching English as a foreign language at the secondary and university levels.

After everyone had left her office we sat down and began conversing about teaching at LRU. Kobkhan explained she is an English teacher, "most of [her students] are poor in English, because as you know our university is not like the big top ten universities in Thailand. We are a university that provides for the local people. So, we want to help local people. We serve the local people's need." When I asked her if the university is able to reach students living in remote areas, she noted with great distress, "yes we do. But, unfortunately, two of the students [living in remote areas] committed suicide. One passed the test for studying, as a doctor, but her family

cannot afford that, do not have money for the tuition fee to send her to school, so she hanged herself. It is a sad story.” She explained that the system needs to be improved, so that all students have the opportunity to go to college.

During my conversation with Kobkhan, I was reminded of Prakorb’s comment the day before about the role of the university to teach people of different status, to share and help each other, and I asked her if the university celebrates the culture and language of the students that attend. She said, “we encourage them to do that because we are afraid of them losing their culture and the language.” Then I asked her how she incorporates the culture and language of the students in her English classes, and she replied

for example, I have them read the Joy Luck Club, and Anne Frank, and then I have them compare what happened in the old days, in the past, like Anne Frank’s diary, a young girl’s diary, and compare that time to our history at the same time. I have them point out what happened and what is related to the other country’s situation and our own country’s situation at the same time. And what do you think, what should you do and what would you like to have happen in the future?

Kobkhan understands that through the reading of a text, her students may catch a glimpse of what it must be like to think a different way, to imagine a different way of being. Through such stories she reveals a world that her students can relate to applying Ricoeur’s wise explanation that “history is not only the story (histoire) of triumphant kings and heroes, of the powerful; it is also the story of the powerless and dispossessed. The history of the vanquished dead crying out for justice demands to be told” (in Kearney 2004:127). She provides the story of the powerless and dispossessed and “I have them think about their own culture and compare, and think about what they would like to have happen in the future.” Then she questions them “what do we do to make it better?” Her students are then able to enter into a kind of exchange between that which they have read and their own experiences. Ricoeur (in Kearney 2004:131) states that

we must have a sense of the meaningfulness of the past if our projections into the future



are to be more than empty utopias. Heidegger argues in *Being and Time* that it is because we are turned toward the future that we can possess and repossess a past, both our personal past and our cultural heritage. The structure of narrativity demonstrates that it is by trying to put order on our past, by retelling and recounting what has been, that we acquire an identity.

By having her students recount their history Kobkhan is providing her students with a meaningful past in which they learn who they are and from which they can determine what they can become.

Next Kokhan and I discussed the possibilities that educational institutions can create an environment that recognizes and honors all cultures. She said that educators have a responsibility to teach students that we are all equal, and that immigrants should not be treated differently because they come from other countries as laborers. I asked her if LRU did anything to promote the language and culture of other cultures, and she said they take their students on fieldtrips. When I asked her who went on the field trips and where, she said “every major. For example, the Master students, we have English students, administrators, management, and even the Asian project program. They go on field trips to Lao and sometimes to Vietnam. So, we learn a lot from the educational trip.” Through this conversation I learned about the many ways that a community development university supports its local people, and encourages celebrating the culture and languages of others.

When our time at LRU came to an end, it was my turn to take a field trip. Prakorb provided our group with the university school bus and two escorts to take us to Nan where the humanitarian portion of our trip began. We started with a visit to the Yellow Leaf, one of the indigenous groups that we provide aid to, and while I was there I had an informal conversation with Jiraporn Prakhunan, who is the daughter of the Hmong leader who helps the Yellow Leaf. She is 20 years old, comes from a family of farmers who reside in a remote village, and currently

attends Chiang Mai University. It takes her six hours to travel from downtown Nan to the university, but she is determined to be the first in her family to graduate.

We spoke of the composition of her classes at university, and she said that she had no Hmong classmates. Her peers were mainly Chinese and Thai, with a few Lao students. Her curriculum also reflected limited inclusion of local minority groups, for she had never heard either the Hmong or the Yellow Leaf mentioned, though she had found a few books in the library on the Hmong. She deals with the lack of representation of her culture by returning home weekends, and spending the summers in her village. Her experience reminded me of bilingual students in the United States, who are bussed in to school and exposed to different cultures, and then returned to their homogeneous environment. Reflecting on the similarity of this experience to that of many students in the United States informed my approach to the conversations that I held with educators when I returned.

## **Back in the USA**

### **It Takes Imagination**

Returning home, I was anxious to begin my conversations with those I had identified in educational institutions representing social justice, and I eagerly confirmed my meeting with Olivia. Since we live about two hours apart we decided that we would meet half way at a restaurant in Berkeley. Although the restaurant has a very calm atmosphere we decided to meet at 11:30 to avoid the lunch hour crowd. However, as I was approaching my exit off highway 24, the traffic came to a complete stop. I could not believe that I was about 200 yards from the exit and it was blocked. Suddenly there were police officers, a fire truck, and an ambulance approaching from the margins of the road. I imagined that there had been a major accident and I decided to call and inform Olivia that I would be late. After a few minutes I turned my car off

and I saw people walking up to the scene. I stopped one man who was returning to inquire about what had happened and he informed me that, ‘some fat slob is threatening to jump off the over pass.’ His rude description was then exacerbated by his next statement, for he told me, “I wish he would hurry up and jump, so I can get to my destination.” I was so horrified that someone could be so callous that I could not even respond. As I walked back to my car, another man asked me what was happening, and I told him about the suicide attempt. His response, shockingly, was similar to the first man with whom I had spoken, for he responded, “I wish they would just push him and get it over with.” I heard someone else say, “just shoot him.” I could not believe the cruel disregard these people were showing toward a person who was obviously in a lot of pain. It was more important for them to be on time than to be sensitive to a fellow human being. I was very upset, and the experience, combined with my reflection upon it, made me realize the importance of my work for creating sustainable community development through solicitude and care. Shortly thereafter, I expressed my appreciation as gratitude, calling Dr. Herda to thank her for her work that encourages students to make a difference in the world. About ten minutes after I originally stopped, the traffic began moving, and I was able to get to the restaurant. I entered the restaurant, and another encouraging, kind and caring person greeted me.

Dr. Olivia Gallardo is a lecturer with special emphasis in Bilingual Cross-Cultural courses, and she supervises student teachers at California State University, East Bay (CSUEB). She received her Master’s degree in Urban Education and Administrative Services from California State University, Los Angeles, and her Doctorate degree in International and Multicultural Education from University of San Francisco (USF). She has published and presented on the importance of multicultural education. I met and worked with Olivia at CSUEB

while working under federal grants that support credential and Master's candidates. I immediately liked Olivia, because I recognized in her the same passion for teaching that I have. We worked in the same office and I observed that she was always encouraging students to continue their education. In fact, I was no exception: she continually encouraged me until I applied for the doctorate program at USF. Figure 7 is a photo of Olivia taken by her university.

When we discussed adult learning I was not surprised when she indicated her concern



Figure 7. Olivia Gallardo  
Photo by CSUEB

about those who are excluded from adult educational opportunities. She explained that “there are students that will never have the opportunity to go to college. They are not encouraged to continue their education, so they are excluded right from the beginning.” She explained that the exclusion is not explicit, but occurs in more subtle [ways] because “our curriculum does not represent all cultures. The curriculum from elementary to high school is meant to prepare people to work and live in our society, but it excludes certain cultures.” Habermas (1984:337) affirms Olivia’s

concern, explaining that this exclusion affects

learning, because children learn

to believe a host of things; and subsequently to act according to these beliefs... Bit by bit there forms a system of what is believed, and in that system some things stand unshakably fast and some are more or less liable to shift. What stands fast does so, not because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it.

Therefore, without a context that is culturally relevant, education fails and students do not see the importance of continuing their education. Olivia expresses understanding of the important role that language and culture play in a text. If the text does not represent the student, then what is being communicated is that the information being taught does not pertain to the student. As an educator, Olivia seeks to overcome this relevance gap in the way that she approaches her students and makes it her responsibility to encourage everyone to continue his or her education.

Olivia is an immigrant from Mexico and her experience informs her belief that the US educational system is not designed for immigrants to succeed. She says immigrants must come educated, for when “they [come] prepared in their country then they come here and are successful. They are successful, while our kids who are in this country, already born here, a couple of generations from immigrants, are left on the wayside.” When we discussed this further, she added, “I go back to our [US] school system. A lot of times, I hear teachers say, “I became a teacher to teach. I didn’t become a teacher to be a counselor, to be a health worker, or to work with parents. I just want to teach.” She finds frustration with this expectation, for she understands that teaching incorporates more than learning facts. Ricoeur (1981:56) posits “the first function of understanding is to orientate us in a situation. So understanding is not concerned with grasping a fact but with apprehending a possibility of being.” She reiterates that “it is part of our educational system to help the student find the road that will lead them to the particular field of interest that will mark their success. We need to start early with the parents, the students, and teacher preparation.”

Olivia attributes the narrow scope of teacher expectations, and the exclusive curriculum to the lack of social justice curriculum at the university level. She said that

we don’t know what social justice means. It becomes words. If we don’t know what it means, then how can we put it into action? In our teacher education programs, we need to

teach teachers about social justice and how to create an equitable learning environment. However, the idea of social justice is not even something that some of the professors know. They are teaching classes, but if they have never seen it in the schools or in action, how can they teach it in their class?

When Olivia and I discussed how these problems could be addressed, how the excluded needs of many students can be understood, she suggested that we need to

start early in terms of both language and culture. There are many ways teachers can get their students interacting with other cultures and ethnicities even if they are not represented in the classrooms. We have the internet now. There are so many ways for exposure and how to get these kids to talk to other kids that are different from them. Again we live next to each other and it is sad to say that many children never get to know the culture of their neighboring community or country.

This reminded me of Kobkhan and the way that she exposes her students to other cultures through field trips to neighboring countries. While I did not get a chance to share Kobkhan's specific ideas with Olivia in this conversation, I saw many connections between the efforts being made in Loei and Olivia's practical application of community in her efforts.

Olivia further affirms the importance of education to care and solicitude in community stating, "if we are going to create a different system and make changes, I think it has to happen at a very early age. And it should not be one teacher encouraging the students, but all teachers imagining their students going to college. That is what we need to teach our teachers in the credential program." I had heard this before from my next conversation partner.

### **"Language is a Way of Framing the World"**

Edmundo Norte received his Master's degree in education from Harvard University and is expected to complete his doctorate degree in education from Harvard University in 2010. He has published a book and several articles, and the majority of his research includes consideration of interethnic relations. He is an Educational Consultant at San José State University and Lecturer at California State University, East Bay since 1996. At CSUEB he taught several of the

classes in my Master's degree program. The program was called, "Equity and Change for the Leading for Diversity Master of Science program in Urban Teacher Leadership" It was a project-based program designed to prepare and enable experienced teachers to develop leadership teams that create effective school change toward excellence, equity, and social justice.

My work toward creating effective school change began through concepts learned in



Figure 8. Patricia and Edmundo  
Photo by Omar Mercado

Edmundo's classes, so I thought it appropriate to begin our conversation by asking Edmundo his thoughts on social justice in America. He said, "I think there are and always have been committed, well-meaning people who have been willing to work and willing to make efforts to live out that ideal, but there are also a lot who haven't." Figure 8 shows Edmundo and me

during one of our discussions on social justice. We discussed our shared concerns about the implications of educators who lack such effort and he shared his perspective that our educational system is part of a society that has a "very conflicted history, the design of the political structure, the socioeconomic structure here, and that it does ultimately boil down to the individual's perception of and their ways of framing the world and their ideas of what is a good and just way to have a society." We talked about how people frame the world can be problematic, because we replicate what we know and what we have experienced, and he shared his perspective "we may try to do things better, but it is still within that basic framework, and so we end up replicating it, maybe with a better version, but it is still the same way of thinking, the same basic framework." Habermas (1984:100) explains that "every process of reaching understanding takes place against the background of a culturally ingrained preunderstanding." This reminded me of Olivia's comment that if we do not know what social justice is we will not be able to put it into action.

There has to be preunderstanding in order to translate the good intentions that Edmundo described into meaningful action that truly addresses needs.

When we discussed social justice in education, Edmundo expressed his concern that the university as a concept has become a “big technical school, how it is just going to help you get a better job within the existing framework. Not *critiquing*, not fundamentally critiquing or thinking about whether this is the framework that serves us, both individually and collectively, in the long run.” We considered the common understanding of success and the contrast between Ricoeur’s (1984:64) world “as if” with a world in which financial success prevails in importance in a popular mindset. As an illustration, he explained his concern when even well-meaning people who promote higher education end up emphasizing to students how much money they can make. He commented that this “is fine, if it is part of a larger context of also asking...what is really your passion? What does the world really need right now? What are you drawn to do to contribute to the world in making it a more humane, just and equitable place? When I asked Edmundo how higher education became about making money. He attributed it to the fact that it has been

systematically ingrained in our way of seeing the world. Language has played a big role. Language is a way of framing the world. Everything gets framed in economic terms, in terms of money, in terms of jobs, and not in terms of either individually, what they are passionate about and where they feel the most creative, or in terms of I want to really contribute to a society and make it a better place.

Herda (1999:28) explains “when we encounter the world, we do so as something that has already been lived in and [acted] upon.” Edmundo reflected this in his expressed understanding of the reasons that to so much gets framed in terms of money, for he said that “there is a real need to get at least enough financial sustainability to have more opportunity, have more choice about how I can spend my time and how I invest my resources. It is not like it isn’t important. It *is*



important, but that becomes *all* that is important. I think *that* is a challenge in higher education.”

As an educator, I agree that trying to frame education in terms of making the world a more humane and equitable place with the existing framework is the biggest challenge in education. However, before I became an educator my goal was financial stability, and not until I reached financial stability was I able to frame education in terms of solicitude and care for the other.

We specifically discussed the inadequacy of the existing system in relation to immigrants and adult learning. Edmundo noted that

there are all of the *obstacles* in place: political status, immigration status, and all kinds of obstacles. There are monetary obstacles as to how expensive it is and all of the hoops they have to go through, the sociocultural stuff, like knowing how to work the system. That is not there. Just institutionally, it is not set up to support folks. They need to have access to that.

This reminded me of my conversation with Olivia and her belief that the US educational system is not designed for immigrants to succeed. Edmundo also believes that reform needs to begin at the elementary level. He noted

whether by default or design, what is the quality of public education experience that folks from lower income communities or urban communities are getting as compared to those who are better off socioeconomically? We have worked in big urban systems, like L.A., where students can go their whole public education career, K through 12, never having had a veteran teacher. One of first two years of teaching and then they are out the door. That is it. That is the level of education they are exposed to and with a lot of their teachers having these negative, blaming attitudes about “those kids” “those families”.

As a support teacher for over 50 new teachers from 2004-2007, I witnessed this first hand. Most of the new teachers were placed in low socio-economic schools with little experience and limited resources; when they had some experience, they often applied for and were hired by districts with more resources. Fortunately, there are professors like Edmundo who teach teachers in leadership programs about the inequities, and how to create effective school change toward

social justice. My next conversation was with another professor who teaches in a similar leadership program.

**“Equality is the goal. But social justice is the method to reach the goal.”**

Dr. Arlando Smith is the Urban High School Leadership Director at San Jose State University (SJSU). Figure 9 shows Arlando Smith’s photo taken by his university. He received

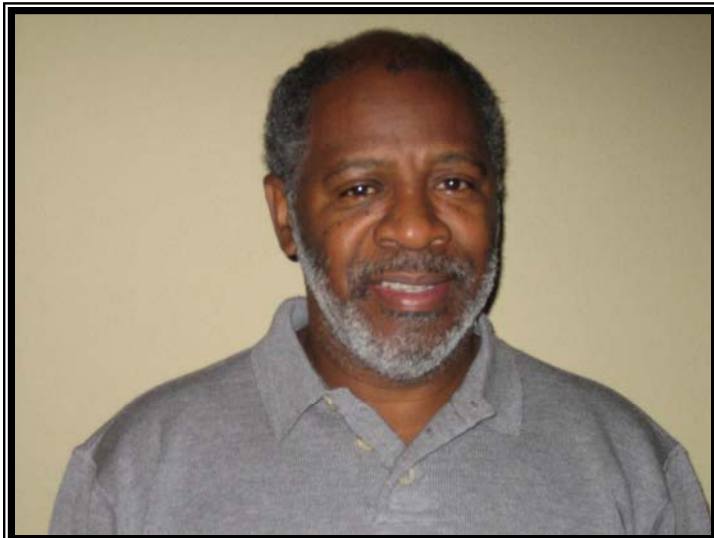


Figure 9. Arlando Smith-Photo by SJSU

his Master’s degree in Urban Education and Administrative Services from California State University, Los Angeles, and his Doctorate degree in International and Multicultural Education from the University of San Francisco (USF). He has published and presented on the importance of multicultural education. Michael Kass,

a good friend of mine who also works towards social justice in education recommended Arlando to me, so I was very excited to meet him and have a conversation with him.

We began the conversation discussing social justice in education and when we discussed adult learning Arlando said

I think we have this belief in meritocracy where if you work hard and if you have initiative, you can be successful, but it is up to you... You just have to go get it. And I often wonder, do people really think that people who don’t get it, don’t want it. You really have to stop and think about how we shape and frame people’s thinking from the time that they are very young. The images that we see, again, the language that we use.

This is in accord with Edmundo’s statement that “language is a way of framing the world” and Gadamer’s (1989:231) assertion that this achievement of thought “takes place in morals, law,

and religion-objectifications of mind that support the individual insofar as [one] surrenders [oneself] to the objectivity of society.” Arlando posits that is why “it takes a lot of work to convince Black and Latino kids” that they are capable of being successful. If society believes that a certain group is not going to succeed then everyone else believes those messages, and certain students are not encouraged to continue their education. We discussed how these messages translate in education and he said that “the teachers make it difficult for those kids, because in their minds those kids aren’t academic kids.” If the students and the teachers are systematically and subconsciously exposed to messages that only certain groups are academic then it is difficult to have an equitable learning environment. When we discussed adult learners he said that “I think we have the same belief about adults. Well, if they wanted, they would just go and get it. Nobody is stopping them from getting it. We don’t look at the informal barriers, I will call them, those subtle things that send a message to people that they don’t belong.” It made me think of my informal conversation partner, Minnie Ransom, an African American woman who agreed that this message had been communicated to her. When we spoke of the composition of her classes at her university, she said that she had no African American classmates or professors, and as a result she felt like she did not belong. She said that no one made an effort to speak to her and many times she felt like quitting, but she was determined to finish.

Arlando makes it his responsibility to teach his students about the negative messages that are given in society and he makes them aware of the terminal consequences, by telling his students, “who do you think they are building prisons for? If the prisons are 85% populated with Blacks and Latinos, and they are building more, do you think that is not for more Blacks and Latinos? As Ricoeur (1984:119) makes clear “the most interesting interpretation is the one that assigns itself the task of evaluating a sequence of events or a set of institutions in terms of their

“*terminal consequences*” themselves evaluated in terms of their value or lack of thereof.”

Arlando expressed his understanding of the urgent need for a new interpretation saying, “we have to get over our own psychological slavery. We have been so psychologically enslaved.”

We discussed immigrants and the messages that society communicates to them and Arlando shared his concern regarding the negative messages that Spanish-speaking immigrants receive. After reflecting for a moment he said, “kids who are in the k-12 system who can speak Spanish, we try to force them to speak English right? However, if you are in the k-12 system and you can speak...French, you are considered cultured since French is the romance language. So, anything other than Spanish.” He explained his experience with immigrants at the university level, adding that

I can tell you our Dean talks about it. The college mission is to become more focused on issues of bilingual education. That is a real thing with the Dean here. So, she has set up a task force that has been looking at those issues. But, I think it is out of recognition that we don't do very much. If you look at where SJSU sits in this community, we don't connect very well with this community.

In order to connect with the community he recommends full-service community schools, which take responsibility for educating the whole person by educating parents, and providing access to medical and dental care. Schools are transformed into the centers of their community with campuses open to the entire family morning, afternoons, weekends and summers. He said, “I am a firm believer in those full-service community schools, because they address the entire issues of family.” This was the same view that Olivia had expressed and coincided with how LRU believes in serving the community.

When we discussed the role of social justice has in higher education, he said that he believes that it has “a huge role. It is a huge role, but it is misunderstood, it becomes so watered down. Again, we are back to what we say we believe versus what we practice.” He believes the

school system is designed to function a certain way, “the way education works in this country is exactly the way it was set up to work. So, people keep saying the system is broken. The system is not broken; it is working exactly the way it was set up to work for exactly who it was set up to work for.” This echoed what Margaret Mead said six decades earlier when she observed that the function of education in society is to reserve the status quo. Arlando suggests “if we want to make it work for different people, then we have to change the system. It is the same thing about social justice education.” He explains that “you have to be firmly committed as a value to social justice, not just to equality. Equality is the goal. But social justice is the method to reach the goal.”

However, we shared a concern, as did Olivia that most people do not have a clear understanding of what social justice is. Arlando’s definition is “a commitment to the underserved and a commitment to make life better for everybody.” He maintains, “that is what it is about, creating this socially just society where we treat each other with respect. We value what each other brings.” He provides what Ricoeur (1992:195) terms “a plea for the anonymous in the literal sense of the term is therefore included in the fullest aim of the true life.” He understands the importance of advocating for those who cannot to create a socially just society.

Arlando devotes a lot of his class time not only helping students to define social justice, but also teaching his students what it looks like in their schools. He questions them, asking “what do you mean when you are talking about social justice? What are you working for in your school? When you see it in your school, you should know if it is just or unjust.” He explained that his methods sometimes lower his evaluations, because his students feel that he is exceptionally hard on them, but he affirms that he would not be happy if he did not take this source of action. Ricoeur applauds him, noting (1992:152) that “character gives us qualities, but

it is in our actions-what we do-that we are happy or the reverse.” He affirms that he would not be happy if he did not take this route of action. My next conversation partner also includes praxis in her teaching methods. My next conversation partner also includes praxis in her teaching methods, making her students think about educational equity.

### **“Creating conversations and opportunities”**

Dr. Amy Elizabeth Smith is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at San Francisco State University (SFSU). She received her Doctorate of Philosophy in Psychology from the University of California at Santa Cruz, and her Juris Doctorate from the University of Michigan Law School. She is on the SFSU Senate Committee on Social Justice, and received the SFSU Faculty Diversity Support Award. She is well published and her publications include desegregation, diversity, racism and discrimination. She teaches a course “Teaching Responsibility Utilizing Sociological Training (Trust) at San Quentin State Prison, and many psychology courses at SFSU. My daughter Danielle a psychology major, took a few of her courses and became one of her lab assistants.

It was through Danielle that I had the wonderful opportunity to meet and have a conversation with Amy. On many evenings Danielle came home from school excited about “a wonderful professor who is committed to social justice and who does not just talk about it but actually practices what she teaches.” On one of these evenings I was working on my doctorate, and I asked Danielle if she thought Amy would have a conversation with me. She responded enthusiastically and, Amy responded immediately and asked me to meet her in her office at SFSU in between teaching her courses.

I arrived ten minutes early and as I waited outside Amy’s office, I could hear her counseling one of her students on writing a purpose statement to apply for her Masters degree.

This did not surprise me as she had counseled Danielle on many occasions. Danielle had not been happy with the counseling department, because she had received advice that prolonged her graduation. However, when she discussed her situation with Amy, she knew immediately that she had found a mentor and Amy subsequently counseled her not just on graduation requirements at SFSU, but also on continuing her education. Danielle is now applying for her Master's degree at SFSU, and her goal is to attain her doctorate degree in psychology.

I began our conversation thanking Amy for all the help she had provided Danielle, and I let her know that Danielle spoke often about her social justice class and work. We began discussing social justice in education, and she expressed that she felt very fortunate to be working at a university with such a diverse community. She explains

it is such a great community with diversity of age and ethnicity and physical ability. It has been a fantastic place to be. In some way, I am at the ground level, addressing some of those inequities in education every day. In other ways, there are ways in which being a part of a university system that is connected to the government, I am sure perpetuates some of those inequities at the same time.

Gadamer (1989:437) drawing upon Humboldt explains, "languages are the products of man's "mental power." Wherever there is language, the originary verbal power of the human mind is at work, and every language is capable of attaining the general goal toward which this natural power of man is directed." Amy declared that her goal is to address the inequities: however, like Arlando she expressed concerned that the "mental power" of the system remains invested in maintaining the status quo.

As a member of the university's accreditation committee whose stated goal has been social justice and equity, Amy understands that having a diverse community means reaching out and embracing the diverse community, and "creating conversations and opportunities" for that community. Because of her work in the state prison system, she believes that the "societal

perception of adult education and our assertive approach toward corrections are so closely intertwined right now, particularly in California, because we are systematically taking money away from education at all levels but in particular at the university level, and funneling it into our correctional system.” She says it feels like society is coming to view higher education more as a privilege rather than a right or something that should be expected and available to everyone. Her concern reminded me of the past history of Thailand and the US, in that education was only available for the wealthy.

After a discussion about the prison system and the inmates she works with she described the cultures that were represented in the state prison saying that

we have tremendous numbers of folks of color, lots and lots, of African American folks, huge numbers of Hispanic/Latino/Mexican folks, bigger numbers of Native Americans, and other groups of folks than we should be seeing there. The Vietnamese people in California in the prison system are increasing lately. There are a handful of Caucasian folks as well. I think the unifying theme is poverty and lots of those folks are coming from places of low socioeconomic status, very often coming from low education, having not had great educational opportunities as well. I see a real connection there.

This reminded me of Arlando teaching his students to make the connection of whom the prisons are built for. Why is it that society does not make this connection?

Next we discussed immigrants in higher education and like Edmundo her thoughts are that “there are tremendous barriers: economic, language barriers, and structural barriers.” After much discussion Amy explained that she helps her students with the barriers through effective communication. She states “in order to be a good teacher, it is my responsibility to work with people on their writing and make sure they are able to communicate effectively.” Gadamer (1989:438) affirms “however limited the power of the individual when compared with the might of language, there is a reciprocal relationship between the individual and language which allows [one] a certain freedom with respect to language.” Amy understands the power of language, and



tries to empower her students by teaching them to communicate effectively. However, she is concerned because classes are getting bigger and she is not able to give her students the amount of time that she would like to provide. We speak about the role that social justice plays in adult learning and she states that

it is connected to diversity and equity, and language and society and the economy, all of those things. For me personally, again my research area is explicitly connected to social justice issues and I teach a class called “The Psychology of Social Justice” and a lot of my classes are connected to the legal system or the justice system and the way those things are carried out.

She believes that teachers are activists and that subject does not matter. Her understanding of teaching is that a teacher is “an agent of social change or social justice if he/she takes on that role and opens up a window or door for a student to change his or her life.” She discussed with me her decision to change jobs from being an attorney to teaching and she said that her decision had been easily made, because she feels “I am making more change or that I am impacting more people in this role than I was in that role.” She explains, “I think if we are doing it right, education could be the leveler. It could be the thing that puts everybody on equal footing.” She said that “we know that education is what decreases recidivism rates in that folks coming out of prison who have education are less likely to reoffend than anyone else in society.” She says it is because “education has power” and she believes if it is done right it could be the key.

A dominant theme that emerged was the possibility of education as an equalizer both to provide equivalent quality of education and to create the possibility of getting to know one another through exposure to cultures that might otherwise remain unknown. I was delighted to hear Amy say that “I think that exposure to other cultures, having folks read or learn about other experiences, other backgrounds, other cultures, I think is incredibly valuable, sort of taking away the sense that it is one group of people who is privileged in this society, and they are doing

everything right and that everything is secondary.” She pondered why some people see the social justice and the inequities and others do not, saying that “for me, I traveled abroad when I was pretty young by myself. “I processed something there that I think stuck with me.” Gadamer (1989:439) explains this is the “way hermeneutical experience is consummated. It is not learning a foreign language as such but its use, whether in conversation with its speakers or in the study of its literature, that gives one a new standpoint “on one’s previous worldview” Amy realizes what changed her previous worldview and expresses her wishes to provide the same experience to everybody.

We share the belief that educators can help to provide a different worldview for our students and Amy said that in her Legal Psychology class she talks “about racism and the way that racism is, from my perspective, embedded in the criminal justice system and the ways that we see that then carried out in the inequities of sentencing and the folks who are in prison.” Gadamer (1989:300) affirms the important role that history plays “we should learn to understand ourselves better and recognize that in all understanding, whether we are expressly aware of it or not, the efficacy of history is at work.” It is important to consider the history of any entity in order to provide a different worldview. This is but one example of bringing social justice issues into the forefront of student consciousness and can be played out in different classrooms, with different topics.

We explored the important role language and culture play in any worldview, and Amy said they

provide such a great opportunity for people to communicate with one another. I think culture is central because where we are coming from takes us to the place where we are. So if we are going to be open to anything that has to be taken into account. My view is that we have to take into account people as their whole selves, and that includes where they came from and their history and their family.

For Gadamer (1989:469) both language and history are an essential part of who we are, for “language is a medium where I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original belonging together.” Amy has a good understanding of the important role that language played in her worldview and she realizes the importance of exposing her students to other languages and cultures for a better understanding of each other. She also expresses her understanding that not everyone will have the same experience, she says “you cannot force everyone to be open [to the conversation], but you can at least create the setting.” In her classroom she provides the setting and she encourages her students to have the conversations.

We agreed that action plays an important role in teaching, and she shared that she provides her students the opportunity to have conversations outside of her classroom. She takes her students to San Quentin Prison to talk to the prisoners and some students volunteer at the prison. “Then in the Psychology for Social Justice class, I actually have folks go out and do different things in the community. Some of the opportunities that I try to make available are to interact or walk through a prison facility, a juvenile facility and Delancy Street.” She says that she spends the whole semester teaching and exposing her students to all the problems with the system. She is providing what Gadamer (1989:483-4) terms “a genuine experience (Erfahrung)- i.e., an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth.” Through praxis she hopes her students will achieve “a discipline of questioning and inquiring, a discipline that guarantees truth.” Amy does not provide the answers for her students, but she provides “some concrete strategies” that will enable her students to seek a different worldview and then to create difference.

In our conversation we discussed ways to address the problems of social and economic inequities, and she said that “you need the buy in of everybody in the society” to make changes.

She is doing her part to expose her students to the inequities, because she believes that “people know that education creates positive life changes for everyone.” She thinks this is possible through the educational system. She says, “I think if there is any institution that is more full of hope, that is more focused on change and has more power for social justice and equity, it would seem to me like the university is the place.” I like Amy am hopeful that this is true.

### **Summary**

In Chapter Five I describe the trip I took in the spring of 2008 to Southeast Asia, the mini-conference on culture and social change at LRU in Northeast Thailand which I helped to organize and presented in, and the professors I worked with and helped to prepare for the *Seminar on Research, Writing, and Media Presentation*. By organizing this trip in advance I was provided with the opportunity to schedule my first conversation and to arrange more conversations to gather research data. The data from my research conversations provided an introduction to each of the formal participants.

My conversation partners Patrick, Vorapan, Prakorb, and Kobkhan allowed me an overview of the issues at hand in Northeast Thailand. Through the text I was able to pull out significant statements about the university, its administrators, professors, students, and the surrounding community. Research participants shared their concerns on social justice, immigrants, curriculum, language and culture, and the traditions and socioeconomics of adult education. The primary analysis determined that national and educational policies are inequitable and fail to address the needs of the society as a whole.

A relevant theme was the issue of language. Although there are a diverse number of languages and cultures the only language that is given importance is the Central Thai dialect of Bangkok. Participants shared how language influences the identity and self-esteem of the Thai

students. Many students are not taught their language or given the opportunity to celebrate their culture because their parents do not want them to be discriminated against. Another relevant theme was inequitable educational opportunities for my research participants argue that people who live in the margins of society are not provided with equal learning experiences. Many live in remote areas and are not provided with the best teachers or learning opportunities. Participants revealed that inequities create a division in social integration and socialization. Participants also complained of the lack of curriculum that respects all cultures and traditions of adult learners. Participants strongly advocate for improved communication as an essential step to address the inequities in adult learning.

My conversation partners Olivia, Edmundo, Arlando, and Amy in Northern California have similar concerns about inequitable national and educational policies. Although they expressed their concern over the loss of language and culture of certain groups they also argue that historically social justice is framed in ways to exclude certain groups from educational opportunities. These research participants also voiced their concerns about the lack of meaningful curriculum in adult learning, but they recognize the need for teacher education programs that address the inequities. Like the Northeast Thailand participants they recognize the importance of engaging in conversations around adult learning. However, their suggestions included an additional concept: the idea of engaging students in conversations about solicitude and care for the other in the primary grades. I found many themes and quotes relevant to the categories of fusion of horizons, communicative action, and solicitude and care, which determined the research categories were appropriate.

In Chapter Six the data presented is analyzed through the lens of critical hermeneutic theory according to the research categories of fusion of horizons, communicative action, and solicitude and care. Figure 10 shows the primary themes and implications that emerged from the conversations with my research participants.

<b>Themes that emerged</b>	<b>Implications</b>
Monolingual language and culture among people groups not in majority	Loss of Identity
Inequitable national and educational policies	Creates a division in social integration and socialization
Unequal Social Justice Framework	Excludes certain groups
Lack of meaningful curriculum	Inappropriate learning environment

Figure 10. Themes and Implications

## CHAPTER SIX- ANALYSIS OF DATA

### Introduction

A few of my conversation partners had heard of hermeneutics in reference to the analysis of biblical text, but none had heard of or participated in participatory research in a critical hermeneutic tradition. Some had participated in qualitative research and expected an interview rather than a conversation. However, Kearney (2004:104) reminds us that “this ethical task of testimony is not simply an individual responsibility. It is also a collective one.” In Thailand, my conversation partners were writing research papers that relied on the survey method using statistical techniques for analysis and they expected me to hand them a survey or a questionnaire. They expressed surprise when I explained that our conversation would be transcribed and used for my research, and that it would become a text to approach problems collaboratively. Ricoeur explains (in Kearney 2004:101) that a text “can tell us about the way things actually happened in the past at the same time that it makes us see, feel, and live the past as if we were there.” Some did not feel qualified, and tried referring me to other administrators or professors whom they felt are more knowledgeable than them. I reassured them that their narratives were just as important as anyone else’s.

Although I had a certain direction of inquiry based on my categories each conversation through narrative developed into a unique text of its own. Gadamer (1989:385) explains the concept of conducting conversations by noting

that it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will “come out” of a conversation.

In all of the conversations I had I found this to be true. I often found that the “conversation has a spirit of its own” that led us to interesting insights. The conversations also allowed me the opportunity to become a part of my participant’s community. Herda emphasizes “it is important for researchers to understand the nature of the community if they are carrying out research in a participatory mode.” Through their narratives I learned more of their history and I was able to gain a better understanding of my participants and their communities.

I was able to learn even more about my conversation partners after I sent them the transcription. I gave them the opportunity to change or clarify what they had said during our conversations. Some people made minor changes or filled in missing gaps. A few asked for a copy of the finished transcription, a few sent me related articles or the title of a book that they thought was pertinent to my research, and most are still corresponding with me. Patcharin reviewed her transcript made a few changes, and added, “your research topic is interesting and valuable. Behind it, I’ve found your good intention to create peace for the world.” In December, Prakorb sent an e-mail to Dr. Herda and I letting us know he is coming out to visit us in March, and he asked about my, “good work.” Although I knew some of my participants before our conversation, the process led to a better and deeper understanding of each other. Herda (1999:89) says, “this learning brings people together and renders us contemporaries with similar goals.”

### **Narrative Identity**

Ricoeur (1992:147-148) writes that “the narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.” In a narrative we come to understand the characters by way of the plot, with each person’s individual identity intersecting that of other persons. Through our conversation my participants shared their identities and described their



histories. Through their narratives I also gathered information about cultures, which have a history, and intersect with their own narrative building a collective memory and testimony to the past.

### **Fusion of Horizons**

Gadamer's fusion of horizon is an essential ingredient in the understanding of the story, as well as the understanding of self. Herda (1999:63) explains "the possibility of all understanding for Gadamer rests in language and is historical in nature. The unique capacity of language is to bring about the fusion of horizons of the interpreter, or researcher, and of the historical phenomenon." In reviewing the data that emerged from conversations with the participants with regard to fusion of horizons, it became clear that the participants appropriated a variety of concepts associated with the term. Specifically, they understood the language and traditions that have been handed down in education.

As participants engaged in the research conversations, they constructed and reconstructed their identities producing memories of the past and expectations of the future through narratives. Ricoeur (1992:140) writes "the genuine nature of narrative identity discloses itself, in my opinion, only in the dialectic of selfhood and sameness." In discussing identity, Patrick and Amy are examples of two participants who talked about how they had changed over time and how their experiences living in another country contributed to their identity and helped them be more understanding of other cultures. Gadamer (1989:449) posits that "by learning foreign languages [people] do not alter their relationship to the world, like an aquatic animal that becomes a land animal; rather, while preserving their own relations to the world, they extend and enrich it by the world of foreign language." All of my research participants demonstrated their appreciation for language, and their openness to foreign languages and cultures expresses their openness to a

fusion of horizons. An example of the latter is illustrated by Patrick's relationship with the young girls in Surin who speak Khmer. He has learned the value of the Khmer language and he not only wants to learn the language but teach it to his daughter.

The schools where the participants work whether in the US or Thailand are located in diverse neighborhoods and all participants emphasized that their lives have been enriched through the many diverse languages and cultures of their students. Gadamer (1989:458) agrees "the significance of the hermeneutical experience is rather that, in contrast to all other experience of the world, language opens up a completely new dimension, the profound dimension from which tradition comes down to those now living." Although the voices of the research participants echo Gadamer in that they see the richness and beauty of all languages, a reoccurring theme that participants expressed is concern over policies that place emphasis on a singular language and actively devalue other languages.

Overwhelmingly participants critically reflected on the language used to discuss social justice in adult learning environments. In both countries, participants feel concern that language around justice and equality is framed in ways that exclude certain culture. In my pilot study Marcos said, "it is hard for us to work around issues of inequality and injustice when people's understanding of those issues is so off" and this sentiment was repeated with the rest of my conversations partners. Gadamer (1989:179) explains "the effort to understand is needed wherever there is no immediate understanding-i.e., whenever the possibility of misunderstanding has to be reckoned with." The participants overwhelmingly agreed that social justice in adult learning is misunderstood and that communication is essential in reaching a new understanding. After close examination the participants and the researcher demonstrated a need for exposing

“ourselves to the truth” for our present horizon of understanding to fuse with a new understanding.

According to the participants, another truth that we need to expose ourselves to is the lack of immediate understanding in adult learning when it comes to immigrants and certain cultures. Most educational institutions do not take steps to address changes in their student populations, shifts in demographics, or subsequent changes in expectations for the students. The curriculum does not reflect the different cultures represented in the student population and the students therefore do not feel represented or welcome. Minnie is an example of an adult learner who said that she did not feel represented or welcome at her university. Gadamer (1989:304) suggests ‘transposing ourselves’ ...we must imagine the other situation...become aware of the otherness, the indissoluble individuality of the other person-by putting ourselves in his position. The concept of horizon suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person is trying to understand must have.” My conversation partners have this vision for they have worked with students from cultures that are not represented in the mainstream culture and have learned of the ways that their learning is subverted by the dominant approach to the educational process. One example of this is how Black and Latino students are seen as behavior problems, about which Arlando said, “if the prisons are 85% populated with blacks and Latinos, and they are building more, do you think that is not for more blacks and Latinos?”

There were numerous instances provided in the data that I collected that highlight issues of sensitivity to other cultures and people, or a fusion of horizons. The necessary reconnection is made known in the horizon of language, specifically the art of communication where new narratives are imagined. The changes in action needed to relate both to the kinds of programs that are offered and to the participant’s awareness of the diversity of the students attending the

programs. All the participants speak of the value and improved outcomes they see when teachers change their approach and materials based on the cultural background of the students, which leads into Habermas's theory on communicative action.

### **Communicative Action**

For Habermas the core of any action is communication. To appropriately understand Habermas' communicative action theory Habermas' (1987:124) theory of the lifeworld is relevant. The lifeworld consist of the shared common understandings, traditions, and beliefs that a community or society develops over time through mutual understanding and communicative action. Habermas (1987:140-148) designates three domains of disturbances in the lifeworld; disturbances in the domain of cultural reproduction manifested in the loss of meaning for cultures, withdrawal of legitimation for institutions, and a crisis in orientation and education for individuals. Disturbances in the domain of social integration result in the unsettling of collective identity for culture, a breakdown or absence of social norms or values for society, and alienation for individuals. Lastly, disturbances in the domain of socialization result in a rupture of tradition for cultures, withdrawal of motivation for society, and psychopathologies for individuals.

These disturbances are relevant to the situation in adult learning. The narratives presented by the participants demonstrate the loss and rupture of cultures, a crisis in orientation and education for individuals, and withdrawal of motivation for society, which leads to psychopathologies for some individuals. Patcharin talks about the young generation in Thai ethnic minority groups and her concern that they do not speak their dialect because parents do not want their children discriminated against. She calls for the need to teach Thailand's youth about the importance of retaining their language and culture. Olivia talks about students from immigrant families in California that are excluded because the curriculum does not represent

them. She says the curriculum is “meant to prepare people to work and live in our society, but it excludes certain cultures.” She calls for the need to educate teachers of the importance of representing all cultures and languages, a recommendation that would apply also to the students about whom Patcharin has concerns. Edmundo talks about the university and the challenges of the existing framework that emphasizes to students the importance of making money to the exclusion of finding meaning. He echoes Olivia’s call to educators, speaking of the need to educate adult learners about the importance of contributing to society both to make it a better place for all and to find their own purpose, satisfaction, and happiness. Finally, Arlando and Amy echo each of the individuals previously mentioned in their separate discussions about the informal barriers that send a messages to people that they do not belong and the terminal consequences that drive adult learners from society. Each of these examples reflect Habermas’ concerns, for they show that cultural reproduction, socialization, and social integration have all been ruptured.

According to Habermas (1984:337) “the concept of society has to be linked to a concept of the lifeworld that is complementary to the concept of communicative action.” In the lifeworld, coordination of action takes place primarily by way of communicative action. Communicative rationality embedded in communicative action is an important feature of learning. Reason leads the research participants to communicative rationality, which is associated with critique, and leads them to a new understanding. As a result they choose to do things differently. Through the authentic conversations that were part of this research process the participants created an opportunity to recognize mistakes in curriculum, policy, or other educational approach and subsequently adopt a different way of teaching that can lead to more effective learning grounded in an ethical dimension.

Many of my research participants provided examples of approaches that they have adopted in order to ground their teaching in an ethical approach that supports all learners to succeed. Patrick engages his students in dialogue that teaches his students to question authority. Patcharin teaches her students the importance of retaining their language and culture through storytelling. Prakorb host an international educational conference, which includes six countries and incorporates subjects related to inclusion of all students. Kobkhan exposes her students to other cultures through text and then has them examine similarities and dissimilarities of shared common understandings, traditions, and beliefs that a community or society develops over time. Olivia advocates to teachers, administrators, and students the importance of continuing education. Arlando teaches his students to define and work toward social justice. Amy engages her students in conversations around racism and the inequities in the system, while Marcos assigns his students a project to do something about any injustice or inequality that the student sees in their lives. The preponderance of these examples is powerful, for through such approaches, each educator holds the capacity to change lives and in doing so, appropriate more ethical futures for so many individuals and groups. This demonstrates what Herda (1999:7) means when she says that individual changes have enormous power, for when they occur, “the rest of the world [also] changes.”

Habermas (1984:13) states that “the abstract concept of the world is a necessary condition if communicatively acting subjects are to reach understanding among themselves about what takes place in the world or is to be effected in it.” Our ability to understand nature, society, and ourselves arises from our communication with each other. All of the participants demonstrated the conditions for creating effective communication with their students, colleagues, and administrators. Many of them are also committed to communicative action through their

publication of texts on language, culture, diversity, and racism. Further, these texts take the topics further than a mere theoretical discussion of the problems, providing instead practical solutions that will help educators and those whom they educate translate good intentions into positive results for all of their students. An example of this is Edmundo's book, which teaches educators how to promote positive interethnic relations.

According to Habermas (1984:86) "the concept of communicative action refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relation [whether by verbal or extraverbal means]. The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement." Habermas' theory was demonstrated both in my research process and in the data collected from my participants about their effective use of communicative action. In the research process my conversation partners and I engaged in rich conversations around adult learning and came to the agreement that we need to have more conversations around social justice with our students and colleagues and give them the skills to make a change. That said, each of the educators who participated in the development of this text shared informative examples of their own successful use of communicative action in working with their students and then developing better understandings and subsequent actions related to their mutual goal of improved educational success.

### **Solicitude and Care**

Ricoeur (1992:310) suggests "might care, taken in its ontological dimension, be the equivalent of what we have called the analogical unity of action?" In reviewing the data the participants demonstrated that their actions equal care. Ricoeur (1992:310-311) "claims that oneself, care, and being in the world are to be determined together." My participants confirm this

in their actions. They advocate the importance of celebrating all languages and cultures, engage in dialogue regarding the inequities in the system, and they engage with their students in praxis toward social justice as mutually defined.

Ricoeur (1992:190) says it is “important to us to give solicitude a more fundamental status than obedience to duty. Its status is that of *benevolent spontaneity*, intimately related to self-esteem within the framework of the aim of the ‘good life.’ My participants demonstrate Ricoeur’s call to go above and beyond the call of duty. They are compassionate and kindhearted people who feel the “summons to responsibility” as demonstrated by their actions of care. For example, Prakorb invited people from another country to teach about the culture of the United States to his staff, professors, and students. He illustrated warm hospitality and kindness, and reciprocated by teaching his visitors about the Thai culture. Many of the participants are in leadership positions or committees that are responsible for working toward changing policies that exclude certain groups of people at the institutions in which they work, so the experience carried the potential for many positive outcomes, affirming Ricoeur’s definition of a call to solicitude and care.

Ricoeur says the ethical life is achieved by aiming to live well with others in just institutions, and he designates empathy and concern as solicitude. The administrators and professors in my research all demonstrate empathy, concern, and care, and aim to live well with others in the institutions in which they work. They celebrate diversity, they are passionate about their teaching, they try to empower their students by teaching them to question and to communicate effectively, they recount the histories of the powerless, they advocate equality and discourage inequities, and they challenge adult learners to make contributions that will make the world a better place. Some provided specific examples that further demonstrate solicitude and



care in action. For example, some educators expose students to different cultures through the use of field trips; Kobkan takes her students to local countries and Amy takes hers to local prisons. Each example is designed to create students who are grounded in a practical commitment to create a socially just society where we treat each other with respect. They exhibit “practical wisdom” or *phronesis*, living through action a solicitude that honors each person in his or her unique being.

Ricoeur (1992:190) says “suffering is not defined solely by physical pain, nor even mental pain, but by the reduction even the destruction, of the capacity for acting” Many participants share their stories of how they act on behalf of others and in doing so empower those who have lost the capacity for action. For example, when Amy teaches at the prison, where many inmates have lost their capacity for acting, she teaches them how to advocate for themselves. Further, through ethical discourse she teaches her students about the culture of the prison and provides them with the capacity to act for others. Ricoeur (1992:191) states that “in true sympathy, the self, whose power of acting is at the start greater than that of its other, finds itself affected by all that the suffering other offers to it in return.” Amy and her students are affected by the suffering other and they appropriate the power to act for those individuals, while the suffering other shares their vulnerability. Ricoeur (1992:191) states that “this is perhaps the supreme test of solicitude, when unequal power finds compensation in an authentic reciprocity in exchange.” They demonstrate critical solicitude, which rests on mutual recognition of one another as capable vulnerable selves. The participants therefore demonstrate an intuitive understanding of the importance of Ricoeur’s (1992:193) concept of similitude, which posits that one cannot have “self-esteem unless I esteem others *as myself*.”

## Summary

In this Chapter, the data presented in Chapter Five was analyzed through the lens of participatory hermeneutic research in the context of the research categories fusion of horizons, communicative action, and solicitude and care. Through authentic conversations with selected faculty and administrators in higher education a unique text developed and I gained new understandings and new meanings of my participants and their communities. I shared my transcribed conversation with each conversation partner, which led to more conversations that in turn led to a greater and deeper understanding of the other. Then I developed the text within each category in light of the theory.

The analysis includes examples of learning experiences in which a fusion of horizons occurred to my research participants within the context of research as a result of our conversation. Our reflection on language and culture made research participants realize the importance of language and how it had enriched their lives living and working abroad and in diverse neighborhoods. In addition they gained an openness for other languages and cultures, learned foreign languages, and became more aware of their own identity, history, and traditions. Another fusion that occurred to participants is the need for communication to reach a new definition of social justice in adult learning, one that is inclusive of immigrants and includes curriculum that represents all cultures.

All research participants agreed communicative action is essential to create needed changes in adult learning. They all gave examples of the three disturbances in Habermas' lifeworld. Many participants gave examples of communication that discourages certain groups from cultural reproduction by dissuading them from retaining their language and culture, such as negative messages that fail to socialize immigrants and certain cultures to succeed. They also discussed

concerns about the existing framework of higher education institutions that advocate capitalism rather than social integration. By critiquing and recognizing mistakes in educational approaches, curriculum, or policy research participants have adopted ethical communicative action that supports all learners. They engage their students, colleagues, and administrators in creating effective communicative action that celebrates all language and cultures, that discusses racism and the inequities in the educational system, and that recognizes that all students need to be encouraged to continue their education.

The data analysis showed that all research participants demonstrated solicitude and care through their actions. They all go above the call of duty by taking positions of leadership that work toward changing policies, curriculum, or educational approaches to improve adult learning. The educators demonstrate care and solicitude to their students by teaching them to question, exposing them to meaning based curriculum that celebrates their language and culture, and engaging them in conversations with local communities and countries. The research participants also demonstrated their understanding of critical solicitude by their actions on behalf of others who have lost their capacity for action. They showed they understand solicitude adds the dimension of value that honors each person by their actions, and they aim toward the good life in just institutions.

From the conversations with administrators and educators new understandings arose regarding social justice in adult learning. The understandings in this text can serve as context for considerations for new policies and curricula designed to meet the needs of all adult learners. The final Chapter, which follows this one, will be comprised of a summary, findings, implications, recommendations for future research, and personal insights.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN – SUMMARY, FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, PERSONAL REFLECTION AND A FINAL WORD**

### **Summary**

I became a bilingual teacher so that I could help underrepresented groups of students to excel in education, but I realized that I was only affecting one class of students. I entered a master's program and I implemented a project to create school change at my school site, but I realized that I was only affecting one school. I began teaching at the university level so I could create change by teaching teachers. It still did not seem like enough, so I began studying at the doctoral level.

During this program, I learned the need for research that explores how educators can develop teaching communities that serve all students in a way that respects differences. While in Thailand I learned the importance of this research for all educational institutions. Through Dr. Herda I learned the importance of creating a text through participatory research. As Herda (1999:2) points out, 'the creation of a text is a collaborative achievement, and by virtue of people working together to uncover shared meanings there is opened in front of the text the possibility of a different and presumably better world.'" This study used an interpretive research approach as a framework to understand the challenges of the educational systems of Northern California and North East Thailand and to begin the process of envisioning change in both regions.

I chose these research sites because of the high rates of immigration in both areas. California has large numbers of undocumented immigrants residing in the state, and Thailand also has a large number of immigrants in the form of refugees. Research included reasons for immigration and examined the adult educational systems. Relevant literature was used to provide information about the social, cultural, traditional and historical elements of adult education. The

literary works attribute the inequities in education to the structuring of the institutions. In both the U.S. and Thailand education was established for wealthy communities, which generally are comprised of the majority ethnic group in each area. These long-established traditions fail to address the needs of the society as a whole, so research determined the need to explore alternative interpretations of adult learning. Fusion of horizons, communicative action, and solicitude and care were explored in a critical hermeneutic tradition, which informed the research categories. Research in both locations was important because it showed that there are universals among different cultures that we need to recognize in the realm of equity, equality, and serving the other.

I conducted a pilot study with Marcos an associate professor at San José State University, which determined that the research categories were appropriate, and the subject matter was important enough to pursue further. I was excited to arrange more conversations, and I arranged to do so with educators and administrators who work in the adult learning communities of North East Thailand and Northern California. My field-based hermeneutic research began in Thailand in the spring of 2008, and I finished my conversations in Northern California in the fall of 2008.

I transcribed the conversations and created a text from the research conversations. Then my research participants were given a copy of our conversation and given the opportunity to edit, add, or delete any part of the transcription. After the participant approved their conversation, data was collected from the text and categorized within each of the research categories. The themes were examined drawing from the conceptual framework provided by the theories of Gadamer's fusion of horizons, Habermas' communicative action, and Ricoeur's solicitude and care. Next, the primary analysis was created introducing each of my research participants and their thoughts

on social justice, immigrants, curriculum, diversity, culture, language, traditions, and beliefs in adult education.

My research participants in North East Thailand were Patrick, Patcharin, Prakorb, and Kobkhan. Patrick's English nationality provided a unique perspective on Thai society and adult learning. He shared his thoughts on the university, its students, and the economics of the area. He shared his appreciation of the incredible diversity in Thailand. He enjoys learning the different languages, cultures, and traditions, and through that learning experience has developed an appreciation of his own language and culture. Patcharin discussed her concerns about the inequitable educational policies, the loss of the Loei dialect, and the importance that the English language is given. She shares her dedication to teaching, her students, and to keeping the dialect alive. Prakorb discusses his thoughts on the importance of language and culture in education and his commitment to include curriculum that represents and celebrates all ethnicities. He also shared his commitment to help minority groups. Kobkhan shared her commitment to serving the local community, and she does this by teaching her students about their language and culture, and exposing them to the languages and cultures of nearby countries.

My research participants in Northern California were Olivia, Edmundo, Arlando, and Amy. Olivia and I discussed the lack of curriculum that represents all cultures, exclusion of certain groups in education, the lack of understanding toward immigrant groups, and the need to redefine and implement social justice in the curriculum. Edmundo and I discussed our concern with educators who lack commitment, with the framework of the educational system, and the obstacles society places on immigrants. Arlando and I discussed the negative messages that shapes and frames people's thinking about each other, groups that are excluded from education, and the self-esteem that that certain groups suffer from because of it. He demonstrated his

responsibility to teach his students about social justice and his awareness of the negative consequences of those that are excluded. Amy and I discussed our enthusiasm regarding the opportunity to work with diverse groups and addressing the inequities in education. She shares her concerns gathered through research and work in the prisons system that some of the same educational systems perpetuate the inequities and create barriers for certain groups. I was impressed with my participants' breadth of knowledge and the solicitude and care that they exhibit.

I then developed a secondary analysis from the conceptual framework drawing from the works of Gadamer, Habermas, and Ricoeur. Some examples of Gadamer's fusion of horizons that surfaced from the conversations included Patrick's realization that he was learning about his own identity from living in Thailand and Amy's understanding that she had gained an appreciation for other languages and cultures by immersing herself in another culture. All participants expressed understanding of the current social justice paradigm and the need for communication to reach a new understanding. Participants also came to an understanding that immigrants and certain cultures are excluded in adult learning and expressed a shared understanding of the need for change in both curriculum and in student expectations.

The narratives of the participants demonstrate interferences in Habermas' theory of the lifeworld. Patcharin demonstrated the loss and rupture of cultural reproduction of the local Thai language and culture. Edmundo and Olivia gave examples of socialization that leads to a crisis and orientation in education, and Amy and Arlando gave examples of the lack of social integration that drive adult learners to pathologies. Many understood the underlying principles of Habermas' communicative rationality, which is associated with critique and adopting a different way of doing things. Participants recognize mistakes in education, and demonstrated an ethical

approach in their teaching methods by exposing socialization practices that prevent individuals from questioning authorities, social integration practices that teaches that one language and culture is more important than others, and engaging their students in conversations around the racism and the inequities that lead to pathologies. Other participants demonstrated Habermas' communicative action theory by hosting an educational conference and engaging their students in conversations or projects around social justice.

All participants demonstrated the importance of Ricoeur's solicitude and care in institutions to aim for the 'good life' for all. They are all educators who are agents of change in the universities in which they work. Research participants showed through their actions, their teaching styles, their curriculum, the books and articles they produce, or as advocates, that they believe in creating an inclusive educational community that serves all students and honors all languages and cultures.

The data were critically analyzed in detail through the critical hermeneutic lens of fusion of horizons, communicative action, and solicitude and care. The research participants establish through their narratives the possibility of creating a different adult learning environment. The data analysis point to several implications for curriculum and policy, which will be discussed in the next section

### **Findings**

After close examination the four primary findings of this research are as follows:

#### **Finding # 1: Language and Culture**

Many of the research participants complained of policies and educational practices that exclude certain groups from mainstream society. California and Thailand have large numbers of



immigrants and or refugee populations, however, their languages and cultures are not recognized, and educational opportunities are not equal in each setting.

### **Finding # 2: Social Justice**

According to the participants the shared common understandings, traditions, and beliefs that afford individuals and groups fair treatment and an impartial share of the benefits of society needs to be refigured. Inequities cause a rupture in cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization. This is the case in each setting to some extent.

### **Finding #3 Meaningful Curriculum**

In each setting, a significant finding was the lack of curriculum in adult learning and teacher education programs that respects the distinct cultural values, beliefs, and traditions of all adult learners. It is important to include curriculum that addresses the inequities and injustices, and provide process to engage students in authentic conversations regarding social justice and provide mediums that lead to subsequent actions promoting ethical learning environments.

### **Finding # 4 Engaging the Other**

Another finding was the importance of educators, administrators, students, and leaders of institutions engaging in conversations with others to gain a better understanding of each other. Through communication we can learn about the challenges in adult learning here and abroad. Although I found this the case in both settings, I found Thailand further ahead than California in terms of engaging the community.

## **Implications**

### **Implication #1 Policy and the need for a fusion of horizons**

During the research process, implications for policy emerged from the data and the data analysis. Findings indicate that language and culture of certain groups in California and Thailand

have been ruptured due to national and educational policies. Although California has a large immigrant population, and Thailand has a large number of immigrants and refugees they both adopt a singular language as the official language. In California English is the official language of the state and in Thailand the national and official language is Thai.

America has a long history of opposing all other languages besides English. As early as 1914, President Theodore Roosevelt publicly announced “we have room for but one language in this country, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house.” This clearly communicates that any other language or associated culture is not welcome.

According to Prakorb Thailand has “more than 60 dialects” of the Thai language. However, only the Central Thai language of Bangkok is nationally recognized and encouraged to promote Thai nationalism. My research participants in both settings have explained how the negative consequences of this policy affect the language and the culture of the people of the Northeast. Even English is given more importance than the Loei dialect. Governments should develop a national policy that aims to include all languages and cultures. People need to feel that they are a part of their nation. However, in the absence of national policy individual universities and colleges should develop their own educational policy. To address this issue and develop meaningful policy communicative action must take place between the administrators, professors, staff members, and students that represent the different cultures and the local community.

Another concern participants have is unequal educational opportunities. As the literature review demonstrates, shapers of educational policy do not take into consideration the different social position of learners. Research participants Edmundo and Patcharin complained about education policies that are structured for certain groups. Edmundo spoke of structural barriers

and immigration laws that exclude immigrants from education, and Patcharin said that policy makers in Bangkok make policies as if education is universal for all, but the students in the margins of society receive poor education.

Policy makers have an ethical responsibility to include all its citizens regardless of language or culture. To develop meaningful policies that protects and promotes the linguistic rights of people, conversations must take place among those who create national and educational policies to come to a new understanding to emerge through effective communicative action.

### **Implication #2 Justice For All**

Many of the research participants and the literature review discuss the inequalities in education. However, as many participants demonstrate there is a need to restructure the existing framework of social justice as it informs the social justice paradigm of institutions. Patrick gave an example of unfortunate socialization that teaches his students not to question, Amy and Arlando gave examples of the lack of negative social integration that leads others to pathologies, and Olivia and Patcharin gave examples of cultural reproduction that has been ruptured.

The life of society is shaped by the aggregation of institutions, customs and beliefs. Many of the participants complain that the existing framework perpetuates the injustices and inequalities in society. Marcos argues that we live in a system that is based on the principles of justice, but that the system in which we live in has been created around fundamental injustices and inequalities. Edmundo says there are lots of well meaning people who try to make things better, but that such actions are too often taken “within the same framework, and so we end up replicating it, maybe a better version, but it is still the same way of thinking, the same basic framework.” This framework affects the institution that educates us all, because societies’ disrespect of certain groups influences the curriculum and teacher expectations. There is a need

for communicative action that calls for a national uniformity of goals to establish an understanding of solicitude and care for all. National policy makers must consider changing the existing framework of social justice. However, in the absence of national policy, educational policy makers should develop a social justice framework that promotes equity, equality, and serving the other.

### **Implication #3 Curriculum for All**

Findings of this hermeneutic research study indicate that there is a need for meaningful curriculum that respects the cultural values, beliefs, traditions, and learning styles of all students. Most of the participants complained of the lack of solicitude and care in the curriculum, and the need for teacher education curriculum to address social justice issues.

Adult learners come to classrooms with a history of values, beliefs, and traditions that should be incorporated into their learning process. Olivia acknowledges that curriculum is supposed to be designed to prepare people to work and live in our society. Many of the participants assert that the historical experiences of people are part of their narrative identity and should be interwoven into their educational curricula. They argue that if the student's cultures are not in the textbooks or in the curriculum it impedes their learning process because the student feels represented nor welcomed.

Curricula must be relevant to the student and geared toward their needs in society. Therefore, curricula should be developed that engages the student and guides the students to live a more enriched, fulfilling life that will contribute to the world and society. This can only be done if the student is passionate about learning and making a difference. Educational policy makers and educators must consider the beliefs and values that adult learners bring to the learning setting.

Many research participants feel that social justice should be a part of every course, because students do not have a clear understanding of what it is. Arlando gave the example of his Master's students who found it difficult to define social justice, and others gave examples of the difficulty their students have trying to put it into action. Therefore, it is very important to begin with changing the teacher education curriculum, which educates the teachers. Faculty members, administrators, and students need to engage in communicative action in the development of this curriculum. This social justice curriculum could be presented to faculty as part of a campus wide professional development. Developing a curriculum that includes solicitude and care is particularly important for universities that serve diverse populations.

#### **Implication #4 Creating Sustainable Community Here and Abroad**

Many of the research participants demonstrated the need to advocate and act on behalf of those who have lost the capacity for action. As the literature review shows, in both California and Thailand undocumented students are a major presence, and they come from nearby and distant countries. Participants recognize that the constant shift in student population creates ongoing opportunities and obligations to appropriate new ways to develop learning communities with neighboring schools and countries.

All research participants demonstrated ways in which they engage in conversations with educators, administrators, and students regarding the inequities in the educational system. Some are in leadership positions or committees in the educational institutions in which they work, others assign students work to address the inequities, and others communicate through their writings on the inequities in the system. However, as some of the participants demonstrated to appropriately understand our diverse student population we must not only engage in conversations and praxis within the organization, but outside of it as well. My research

participants actively engage with others through community outreach, educational conferences, or educational field trips to neighboring communities and countries. Through effective communication with local schools and neighboring and distant countries we can engage in conversations that lead to genuine solicitude and care.

### **Future Research Recommendations**

Part of my research took place in Northern California with research participants from the same area. I learned a lot about the faculty, the curriculum, the students, and the surrounding community of the universities in which they work and how they develop a supportive educational community, based in care and solicitude, for the diverse students that they serve. However, with California's diverse population there is still a lot more research to be done and I highly recommend that research in a critical hermeneutic tradition be conducted in Southern California where there are larger numbers of undocumented students to learn how they develop a supportive educational community.

When I was in Thailand in 2007, I realized that even though the country is more homogenous than the United States there are several other different groups with different cultures, traditions, and beliefs. Although Thailand's population shares a common culture there are more than 60 Thai dialects, and the government prefers central Thai to the northeastern, northern, and southern Thai dialects. I was intrigued to learn how administrators and educators develop a supportive educational community in Northeast Thailand for their diverse learners. It would be interesting to learn how the northern and southern regions of Thailand support their educational community. Therefore, I would recommend that future research be conducted in these other regions of Thailand.

### **Personal Insights**

When I began thinking about doing research my interest was in the educational system of Northern California, because my educational experience was provided there and I am an educator in this same system. I wanted to collaborate with administrators and educators about the issues in the educational system of Northern California, but my advisor encouraged me to include in my research another educational system in my research.

I am very grateful for her recommendation, because as Herda (1999:4) points out research in another country provided me “a means for placing [myself] in perspective, for seeing [myself] differently, it is a means for learning how to think about problems in a different light.” Through interpretive participatory research in another country I was provided the opportunity to see the issues and myself differently, which allowed me new ways to look at and address problems in the educational system. I am very grateful for the conversations with my Thailand participants, because I learned of the many ways that they encourage and support the local people, their language, cultures, and traditions. I will be incorporating some of the things I learned from both the California and Thailand participants in my own teaching.

### **A Final Word**

The goal behind this research was to encourage educators to consider a new orientation toward understanding between self and others both in Northern California and Northeast Thailand that has implications for ethical action in educational organizations. The researcher and the research participants have learned the value of collaborative research with administrators and professors carried out in a critical hermeneutic tradition for meaningful social change to take place in our schools.

Now, I turn it over to the reader for as Ricoeur (1991:432) posits “it is the act of reading which completes the work, which transforms it into a reading *guide* with its zones of indetermination, its latent richness of interpretation, its ability to be reinterpreted in novel ways within historical contexts that are always new.”



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## Appendix A: Sample Invitation Letter

Date

Participant's Name  
School  
Address

Dear Mr. /Ms.:

I would like to invite you to take part in the research project I am conducting on behalf of my dissertation work at the University of San Francisco. I propose to investigate the changes in education brought about by increasingly diverse student populations in both California and in Loei, Thailand, and am inviting particular individuals to share their thoughts in one-to-one conversations which will explore the cultural and ethical dimensions of adult learning.

The conversations will provide data for the analysis of this research topic. Once transcribed, I will provide you with a copy of our conversation so that you may review its content and form. You can add to or delete any section of the conversation at that time; when I receive your approval, I will then use our conversation to support my analysis. Neither the data that you contribute, nor your name and position, will be held confidential.

While the conversations and transcripts in this research are collaborative, in that you will have the opportunity to edit, add to, or delete any section of the transcript of our conversation, the writing that comes from them will be the researcher's product. You will have consented to forgo anonymity under these conditions, have been given complete and clear information about this research, and have complete authority and control at the outset and throughout the process about whether or not to participate. You can also withdraw at any time without adverse consequences.

Again, I very much appreciate your willingness to contribute to this research project with your reflections on your own experience. I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Patricia Perez  
Researcher, Doctoral Candidate  
University of San Francisco  
Organization and Leadership

Patricia.perez@csueastbay.edu  
(510) 657-5256 (home)

Appendix B: Sample Confirmation Letter to Participate in Research

Date

Participant's Name  
School  
Address

Dear Mr. /Ms.:

Thank you very much for allowing me the opportunity to converse with you about your ideas, experiences, and viewpoints on adult learning. I am confirming our meeting on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Please let me know if something requires you to change our arranged place, time, or date.

With your permission, I will record our conversation, transcribe the tapes into a written text, and submit it for your review. After you review the text, I would appreciate any corrections or follow up comments that you may have. I would also like to discuss the conversation we had and any follow-up comments. Please remember that data for this research are not considered confidential.

The exchange of ideas in conversation is the format for my participatory research. It allows you to comment, add, or delete to what the transcripts contain. This process will not only give you the opportunity to correct anything stated in our conversation, but allows you the opportunity to reflect on our conversation. Only after your approval, will I look at the text of the conversation that we had, gather new ideas, possibly even enlarging the area under investigation, and continue my research.

Once again, thank you and I look forward to meeting with you and to our conversation.

Sincerely,

Patricia G. Perez  
Researcher, Doctoral Candidate  
University of San Francisco  
Organization and Leadership

patricia.perez@csueastbay.edu  
(510) 657-5256 (home)

Appendix C: Sample Thank You Letter

Date

Participant's Name

School

Address

Dear Mr. /Ms.:

Thank you for taking the time to have a conversation with me on \_\_\_\_\_. I greatly appreciate the time and energy you gave to my research project, and I know that our talk will add an important dimension to my dissertation.

I have attached a transcript of our conversation. Please take a moment to read through it and feel free to clarify any comments or to suggest any changes that you feel are appropriate. If you do wish to make changes, kindly let me know that you will be providing them by \_\_\_\_\_. Unless I hear from you, I will use the current transcript as data for my analysis. Also, just as a reminder, data from this research are not confidential.

Again, many thanks for your participation and for the lively exchange of ideas. I so enjoyed talking with you and I appreciate your reflections, which I believe will be a valuable addition to this project.

Sincerely,

Patricia Perez  
Researcher, Doctoral Candidate  
University of San Francisco  
Organization and Leadership

patricia.perez@csueastbay.edu  
(510) 657-5256 (home)

## Appendix E: Pilot Study Transcription, Description, Analysis

PP: Marcos, as we discussed at our last Encuentros meeting, this is not an interview. It is just a conversation. It is basically to understand the current context of social justice in a deeper manner. It is just a conversation between you and I, and I really won't have any questions. I would like to thank you for doing this. I really appreciate it. I know how busy you are.

While I feel fortunate to live in America where there is more social justice than in most other countries that I have been in, I think our system is still deeply flawed and it is inequitable. I would like to know what your thoughts are.

MP: I think it is a complicated issue for me. I do think about, read about and have experienced to some extent life in other countries. We hear about and see inequalities and injustices that are different than they are in the United States. I don't want to say these are necessarily more severe, but just different than they are in the United States. I think I see that is a reality, but I do look at it and try to understand what is happening in the United States, and I think we find ourselves in a really deeply troubling situation. I think it has to do with the fact that we have so deeply entrenched ourselves in the idea that we live in a system that is based on principles of justice. At the same time, we have created that system around fundamental injustices and inequalities. This makes it difficult for us to see the contradiction there and makes it harder than in some other countries for us to see the way in which injustice kind of pervades so many of our institutions in our daily lives in the US. I don't know if that makes sense or not.

PP: It does totally. I understand what you are saying, that although what we stand for is just, it is not equitable. I agree with you completely. You say that it is not more severe, but it is different here? I would agree with you normally, but this last year, I went to Southeast Asia. Although here we know who the minorities are, we don't literally say those are the minorities. We don't go into a certain area. Maybe we think it, but we don't say it. In Thailand, it was "those are the minorities," "those are the Hill People," and "those are the Hill Tribes." They just don't receive any respect, funding or any services like there are here.

MP: Not having been in that kind of situation, it is hard for me to maybe wrap my brain around that a little bit. But, I think that the part that is scary to me -- I think back on that old Malcolm X quote, "I would rather have you say to my face what it is that you feel than...I forget the exact way that he phrased it, but it was something to the effect of - I would rather have you tell me right up front, be a bigot right up front to my face, than to in my face pretend that you are not one, but behind my back act in ways that reflect that bigotry. I think that is one of the issues I have with what is happening in this country. In some ways the obstacles we face are made more difficult by the fact that we put on a face that is not reflective of our belief system and the way we act on that. We say that we are for certain principles and then we act contrary to that, but never openly. I guess that is the issue that I see. It is hard for us to work around issues of inequality and injustice when people's understanding of those issues is so off. They don't understand that it is so far off because so much of our language around justice/injustice and equality/inequality is framed for us in ways in which we never even get the chance to participate. It is just done for us. We are told how to think about things. We are told how to believe and understand ourselves as a society, and we don't get counter messages. So, it is just a belief

system that is shared by the vast majority of folks, with the exception of those folks who have either experienced the other end of it or seen the other end of it and responded on a personal level to it. I think that is the challenge of doing work around issues of justice and inequality in the United States. It is particularly difficult. I think one of the reasons it is made difficult is because of the fact that our media is so powerful and pervasive in this country, with such little resistance and so few opportunities for people to have alternative versions of what is going on here. It is operating all of the time at 100%, 24/7, and 95% of that is stuff that we don't even see or acknowledge, but it seeps into our consciousness. Then we act on that. I think that is the struggle for folks, and there are aspects of that which make it a uniquely kind of United States' struggle.

PP: I agree with you completely. When you were saying, I would rather have it in my face, the only time it is really public, I feel, is when it is an issue. I think of the immigration issue. You think you know how people think, but you really don't until one of these issues comes up. I live in Fremont, and this last year, with the immigration, I saw all of these people on the corners, anti-immigrants, and I was just really surprised that there was that much racism in Fremont, because it doesn't seem like there is, especially, as we are such a multicultural society there. We have a lot of Middle Eastern people. We have a lot of people from Asia. To see that and especially to see other immigrants out there being anti-immigrant was a shock.

MP: The thing about it that is particularly difficult though is, I think, that the majority of those folks would never make any blatantly racist statements and would not consider themselves or label themselves as racists. They simply believe in the principles of law and people not breaking

the law. So, when they talk about it, they say, Hey, people broke the law. I am not a racist. So, they hide themselves behind ... Sometimes, they don't even know it, sometimes it is not even a façade. They don't believe they are racist. I think that is what has made this whole debate around immigration in the last couple of years really very difficult in that we are not fighting on equal ground. It is like quicksand. Few people ever allow themselves the opportunity to see the issue holistically. They just see the little part of it that is convenient.

PP: Or like you said, what the media is telling them. That is what I believe too, because you hit it right on the nail. Most of those people that were interviewed were saying "I am not racist. It has nothing to do with being racist. It is about breaking the law." The difference that I see with some of those immigrants is that they came on a visa or they got here because they were educated in another country. They had to have the funding to get here because they were so far away as compared to the border of Mexico where you just come across. They are coming here for a better life, but they see it totally different. One woman said to me, "I came here and we contribute and my kids speak English." I said, "Where did your kids learn English?" "Well, they learned it in India." The kids who come here from Mexico are not taught English. They just work in the streets and their parents come here to give them a better life, even if it means one room with ten people. It is still better.

MP: I think there is so much of that. Implicit in her statement was that the people who come are \_\_\_\_ (are not a benefit?) \_\_\_\_\_ to society and don't learn English, both of which are false. I think that is the problem. Our basic assumptions or starting point are falsehoods in all of the discussions around inequality, whether we are talking about the welfare system, the educational

system, other social services or the economy at large. The starting points for all of those discussions and conversations in our country are falsehoods, both historically and contemporary. So, how do you have a real conference conversation as a country and how do you move towards being a better country? You can't. That is the challenge that I see. It is uncomfortable for people to have those conversations. It is uncomfortable for people to have to consider that the principles upon which they have organized their lives are wrong. So, doing work with those kinds of folks is a real challenge.

PP: I was just reading an article not too long ago about how big business is behind immigration. Yet, I feel like it is those same folks that are saying you cannot make them legal, but they want them to do their work, all the service work, for them. I think that brings it right to where you said, "How do you have a conversation about that" when the media, the corporations and everybody is saying one thing and doing another. I don't really feel like they want immigrants here. I feel like they need them here, but they don't really want them here. The only reason they want them here is to take advantage of their labor.

MP: Absolutely. So, for your class, are you guys just looking at analysis of how people have thought about any issue or is the whole class doing this discussion about injustice and inequality?

PP: No, this is for the doctorate. Basically, all of us have to try to make some kind of change in a community or a group. We are working on changing policy whether it is in society, in the community or within a group. For me, it is through education. This leads me into a question, in



terms of education, how do you think social justice plays out in education, specifically in adult learning?

MP: So, say that again.

PP: What role does social justice play in education and specifically adult learning?

MP: When you say adult learning, are you talking about college?

PP: Yes.

MP: I think one of the things that happens in most schooling is that we help to create and establish a sense of all of those assumptions that we were talking about through schooling. That is a big part of what we do. So, that is one thing. Then, at the same time, when we are not doing that, we rarely challenge any of it. By doing either of those things, we allow injustice and inequality to continue. First, by kind of planting the seeds for a shared understanding of our country being run on principles of justice and equality, we allow the inequalities and the injustices to continue. And, in those cases when we don't plant those seeds or water them, we don't dissuade them. Thus, by not dissuading them, we allow them to continue and thereby support them. I think those are two of the critical functions of education/schooling in this country. I think that is what happens for a lot of folks.

With regard to higher education, a lot of what we do also just continues to allow people to remain comfortable in their sense of what is happening. Even in those situations, such as sociology courses or something like that, where somebody gets a chance to see some of the inequalities, there is often a lack of forced personal investment in those inequalities. There is also a lack of tying the folks sitting in those classes to the inequalities they are studying in a way that demands their attention and their commitment to addressing those issues. So, it is a long way of saying we support the inertia behind the way our society functions.

PP: As a system or an institution in general, because you work for the Mexican-American Studies Department, and I have an Ethnic Studies minor, I work for the teacher education department, and I teach teachers ESL methods and how to teach English Language Learners?

MP: I think it is fairly complicated. There are a lot of classes in the university, for example, which are intended to give people an understanding of the issues of diversity. There are a lot of classes that have that as part of their objectives. But, at the same time, so much of that work doesn't demand anything of the students other than recognizing the issues presented to them. If that is in fact the case, I think in some ways we may be selling those students short, especially if we think about the issues we were talking about earlier, in a situation where people are confronted and bombarded constantly with messages about: This is the way it is. This is the way it has been. This is the way it is always going to be. It is okay. For the most part it is fair. We will try to work on the things that aren't fair. Things are always getting better. This country is always getting better and stronger. We are getting more and more fair, more and more equal and more and more just. Within the context of all of those messages, if we have a class that introduces us

to some readings and an analysis of issues that are contrary to that dominant message, it can be just a blip in a person's life. It is really hard to live within that blip. It is much easier to say Wow and get part of it and say Yeah that is important, but then continue to live in a way that affirms the status quo. It doesn't challenge the status quo. I think the challenge that I see for those people within higher education who are trying to do something different is to engage students in a way that demands their attention more and demands their commitment to finding a way to work towards addressing those issues.

PP: Taking some sort of action?

MP: Yes. And, when I say that, I mean my sense of their action is to find a way to make a commitment to do something about whatever injustice they see in their lives. It doesn't have to be the injustice that I see. But, it could be any injustice or any inequality they see in their lives, and they should find a way to commit to doing something about that in some way. It doesn't have to be a huge way, just in some way, over the rest of their lives. I think that is what our objective should be. If we are not doing that, I think it is like watching a TV show about something. It is cool, BUT (and there is a big but there). So, those are the concerns I have as I approach my own teaching and the teaching of my colleagues. What are we doing for these students? There are times when I have serious doubts and there are times when I have some real hopeful possibilities that are there in my face. I don't know.

PP: I agree with you completely. I was sitting here, thinking about all of the examples of the courses that I took, especially any ethnic studies course. It is all so temporary... something to

think about in the moment. My Masters was all about social justice and making change in the school system. I think about you and I kind of feel we are in the same boat. We wanted to continue. We had hope. We were inspired and we wanted to continue, to do something better and to make a change. We wanted to create that action and continue that action. So, when I graduated from my Masters program, there were these great diversity workshops I signed up for. I was so excited I invited everybody in my cohort of 20 from our Masters. I E-mailed everybody in our cohort and invited them. I was very excited that we were going to continue our work and make a difference. Hardly anybody responded and this was a social justice class. One person even wrote back to me "haven't we had enough of that?" I was so disappointed. It broke my heart to think that we all went through this program just to receive the master's. I didn't feel that way I wanted to make a difference but, literally, I am the only one who continued to find a way to make a difference. It really saddens me.

MP: Yes. I don't blame people. I mean I try not to blame people. I get it. I get why people have a hard time like that. It is hard. I am teaching a class right now with my graduate students, which is a Seminar in Applied Chicana and Chicano Studies. It is about giving them the skills to do something. They have had all of these classes, written all of these papers and done all of these projects, and they know a lot. But, now that they are asked to do something, they are struggling tremendously with developing a kind of a theoretical framework for action, but then also developing an applied framework that reflects on action. They have expressed an extreme level of discomfort with that class because of that. It is a challenge. What I am saying to them is that we are trying to help develop your skills for change, for engaging in change, and you cannot do that any other way than to actually try to do that. It is really, really hard. I think it is hard for

me to teach the class and hard for them to take the class. I am hoping that in the next few weeks things will start to click and they will walk away feeling like it was important and that they got something they will actually use. We will see. It has worked before, but it is definitely a challenge.

I think that this is the thing that we have talked about in Maestros too. How do you help people living in a world that is as crazy as the world we live in when you are getting all of these messages about: You should care about this. You should do this. You should want this? -- and then say, here, let's live contrary to that and let's be comfortable with that. Let's be happy while we are doing that. I think that is a really tremendous challenge and not one I am comfortable in demanding people take. I am okay requesting people to consider it, but that is about all we can do. We must just hope that if we keep on doing it, learn how to do it better and live our lives in a way that helps other people see the importance of that, then it will spread and people will find their way to join in that work and create new ways. They will do something to make a better world.

PP: What comes to mind for me is that there are too few classes in higher education that deal with these issues.

MP: Yes. And, I think the other issue is that those classes that do exist are not systematically connected to each other or to part of a larger plan to give our students tools for making a better world. This conversation is giving me a lot of stuff to think about for our department and the discussions that we can have that we haven't had previously.

PP: Last semester, I was teaching an ESL class (English as a Second Language) and I gave them so many tools to use in their classrooms to work with their students. I received a lot of thank-you E-mails and phone calls, saying they really appreciated it and, this is really helping me in my student teaching or in my classroom. But, the one that really got to me was from a Middle Eastern woman. She came to my office and she said, "I just wanted to thank you for teaching me. I learned a lot and it was the only class in this semester that I was comfortable in. I am an English language learner." I thought how sad for her to go through a whole program through the teacher education department, and she only felt comfortable in my class. She was taking five classes. She wasn't just talking about that semester either. I have carried that with me. I am teaching that class again and I have told the students, "It is sad that the university isn't making our English language learners comfortable." Most of the students who were not English language learners said that they didn't feel supported either. They felt like it was either sink or swim for everybody. Still, I don't think they understood that, because of her language, the color of her skin or her race she is not being accepted. She has something else that makes life difficult for her.

MP: Yes, it is tough. There are some days when you leave and you think maybe it is time to look for a new gig. Then, there are other days when you feel it is working. I guess it is good to have both kinds of days.

PP: It is. Like I said, I get E-mails from some of the student teachers I taught, thanking me and saying everything you taught me, I am able to use in the classroom. The teachers weren't

working with a student, because of their language. They were just leaving him in the back of the class and not dealing with him. Now, he has opened up to me and is responding to me. They are using all of their tools and feeling like they are reaching this little person. It feels good. But, then there are days when I just feel (and I am sure you do too) very alone in this work.

So, how do we create a society that cares?

MP: I think that is not as hard a question to me as it may seem. I think we answer that question by simply caring. If we care and try to care as holistically, as fully as possible for ourselves, then what we are doing is the thing that we want to see happen. That is the most we can do, to live in the way we want the world to be. When we do that, if nothing else, it gives people around us the opportunity to see what that looks like. I think that is the real challenge. When I think and reflect back on my understanding of those lessons that we have lost along the way, I think in indigenous communities when the way of teaching was by example. I think one of the trappings of US society is that we teach by telling people what to do and what to think. That doesn't really work. It doesn't really work for so many different reasons. I think we must teach people by just doing it and hoping that they see... And, I go back and forth on this. When I teach in my classes, I try to base everything I do on the principles in which I believe. There are a lot of things that we are doing in a given class that I think are really important. We don't always talk about a lot of them. We don't talk about probably 75% of those things. Thus, the question I sometimes leave with is did they get that? Did they see that? And I don't know the answer. There is some times when I will point it out and I will feel kind of silly for pointing it out. Hey, did you see that we did that and this is why we did that? There are some times when I do that and

I think it is helpful, and there are some times when I don't do that and I just hope that they got it. I feel it is better to have done it and not talked about it than to have talked about it.

I will have classes where the discussion just isn't popping. It is not happening. But, I am going to ask the question anyway and I am going to wait for the answer. It is going to feel awkward and will continue to feel awkward, but, if nothing else, I am living by the thing that I believe. That is, I do care what they have to say. It matters to me what they have to say. It matters enough for me to be uncomfortable and to let them be uncomfortable and to wonder when is this class going to end. I think the way we do it is by caring a whole lot about everything and trying our best to live in that space for as much of our day as we can, so that people get that. It would be really interesting to pull out a bunch of students who have been in those kinds of situations and reflect back with them and see what they got out of it.

PP: Out of your class?

MP: Yes.

PP: It is interesting because I was Googling you so that I could get information to write up on whom my participant was going to be, and there was a rating for professors. I don't know if you have read that.

MP: I saw it a few years back. It has been a while since I have looked at it.



PP: I was looking at it, and it was really interesting, because you have affected most of those people. There were a few who said "he gives too much work," but your work, like you said, was probably more reflection. That was difficult for them.

It reminded me because I just got my feedback from my last class. Most of the feedback I received was "she was very caring," "she was very supportive," and "she got me through this." So, I agree with you. I think you just have to care and continue to show that you care, not just for those individuals but for everyone.

MP: It is a constant challenge. I think one of the difficulties too is recognizing it is a constant challenge and not getting comfortable and complacent and not forgetting that you really have to be en pointe. You have to really be focused, you have to be with the students and you have to be where they are. You have to recognize where you are and where you are stuck or struggling. That is a difficult thing to do.

I think the challenge of all of this is that being that present is not always easy, not always fun and not always what one wants to do. I am working on that. I think what I do like about having the job have and doing the work I do is that I am always learning. I am always learning and getting a better understanding of how I do this thing that I want to do. I haven't got to the place where I feel like I know the answers to that question. So, it is fun doing that, but it is a challenge. There is a lot of personal work and reflection that you have to do constantly. I think is part of the challenge. When we talk about how to help make a more caring world and how to be a more

caring person, that is a difficult question to ask and to answer, especially every day. But, it is fun when you remember. Ha, Ha.

PP: When you feel it is working. I agree with you. It is challenging. It is difficult. It is being a role model, every day, day in and day out, trying to reflect your values. I have noticed that I have basically just started retaining or finding friends who feel the same way and think the same way. This is not just because I am being racist or I am leaving people out. It is because I am learning from them. I am constantly learning from those people. They are great role models and I think that is what I want to do. That is what I want to be. So, I surround myself with those kinds of people.

MP: That is great. I think that is particularly necessary and hard to do too. It is hard to find people because they usually don't live in your neighborhood.

PP: Right.

MP: So, how do you keep them as part of your life on a regular basis?

PP: All of us are so committed to our social justice work that we are all so busy. Literally, I had Michael Kass and Roberto Almanzan and their wives over for dinner, but it took us a whole year to finally get together. Everybody is busy with their diversity work, their consulting work, their charities or Maestros.

But, how do we bring more people into those groups?

MP: I don't know. Are you talking specifically about Maestros?

PP: Yes. I was thinking about our last Encuentros or the time before (I am not sure), but you said, "I wish I could put you all in a bus and just take you somewhere."

MP: I think it is tough. I think the way to do it is to do the best work you can with people who get that, want to be a part of it and want to build it. If they keep on doing it, they are interesting folks \_\_\_\_\_, and as that happens, it spreads in little tiny ways (that is the way I am thinking about it right now), in little, little, little tiny ways, one person at a time. I think the work that we are trying to do right now is so complex and big that it is hard to get, hard to wrap your brain around, hard to live and hard to do. Thus, having a small group really works and bringing in new people really gradually really works. I think I am okay with that. But, we are also getting closer to a place where we can have a handle on it and really share it with other people. I think that is going to be an interesting new avenue to take. We will see what happens. I don't know if the work we do will be easily spread by going out and doing talks about it and things like that, but it might. We will see.

PP: You mentioned that this conversation is giving you some thoughts on how to do work different. Have you thought about how you would do that differently?

MP: The thing I was thinking about was at the university, teaching and stuff like that, having conversations with colleagues about these kinds of issues. So, I think that is one thing I would like to do. I have been thinking about it in different ways, but I would like to be able to have those conversations and just make a space for them. That is one thing.

With regard to the Maestros work, I think it is mostly just having time, creating spaces and opportunities to do the work. But, I am also okay with not having time, because I think it is real, it is really where people are at. The way that we work right now is in a way that fits in with peoples' lives. So, I think that is okay.

PP: I think it is okay with Maestros because everyone there is about social justice. You know they are busy in their lives, but that is what they are doing. But, are they open to those conversations at the university and with whom would you have those conversations? Would it be retained in a department? Can it spread outside of the department?

MP: Yes. I sometimes think about it a little bit in talking to some folks about -- so I have to get back to you on that one.

PP: It is really difficult for me. That is why I am asking. I think San Jose State is a little different than where I work. In our department, teacher education, they have a diversity class, just one diversity class. Two of the professors decided that we need to get rid of one of the classes. Well, which was the first class to go? They want to eliminate the diversity class. Their reasoning for it is that diversity should be taught in every class and that is true. I believe that.

But, will it be taught in every class and is everybody capable of teaching diversity? I don't think so. I would rather be able to teach that diversity class than eliminate it.

MP: I also think the fact of the matter is that while diversity should be included in every class, it requires its own class to provide people with a framework of how to understand diversity within the US and how to develop a comprehensive means for engaging in work that is affirming to diversity. It requires a separate and fully engaged conversation, because, otherwise, it is just those two weeks when you cover diversity at some period during the semester. It is an extra or an add-on. It is not intrinsic. I think it is not just content, but, as we have been talking about, it is also how. That is why you need a whole class to show and demonstrate the how through the content.

PP: I think you need more than one class.

MP: Yes.

PP: Like you said, they are going to hear about diversity for one semester, but then, does it just go out the door and are they going to provide any action? I think of it like a math class. When I was teaching elementary school and you had a whole book to get through. At the very end when I taught third grade, there was the study of fractions. So many of those teachers didn't cover fractions because they felt they didn't have the time for it. That is what I think will happen with the diversity class. They will say, "I have so much content that I have to cover, so I am going to leave out the diversity."

MP: Absolutely. I think we are in a fortunate space in terms of being in the Chicano studies department. But, at the same time, we all have these different approaches to it. We all come from different backgrounds in terms of our academic preparation and different approaches to thinking about issues related to social justice and different ways of engaging our students. These are really challenging conversations to have. They are not easy. And people are really settled in their ways, myself included. So, how do you begin to get people to think about doing something different? I don't know. Yes, maybe I am going to find a way to have that conversation. We will see.

PP: I find it really difficult at work to have those conversations, but this project is allowing me to have a lot of conversations with people. I think that I need to have many, many conversations.

MP: That is great. It is good to have that opportunity. I have to create some myself, I think.

PP: Do you have any questions for me?

MP: Your work on this project is to look at education schooling, higher education in particular, and how it takes on the task of confronting issues of social justice?

PP: Our class is all about social justice. Actually, our professor, Dr. herda teaches a philosophy called Hermeneutics, which is interpretative philosophy. It is all about praxis, going out and

doing something in a community. My topic is actually "Adult Learning for Sustainable Community Development: Solicitude and Care for the Other."

I am hoping to have these conversations here as well as in Thailand. I am going to Thailand this summer and will be having those conversations, but we are also going over there to talk about social justice, culture and the society there. We are going to teach for a week at a university in Thailand and are going to be working with about twenty teachers who work with the minority students in Thailand. From this university, they go out to work with what they call the minority group. The hope is to bring these teachers to the US to show them minorities are teachers here (it is not segregated as it is over there) and how our minority teachers teach the minority students. So, the hope is to bring them here.

MP: That is cool. I would like to hear more about it as you go through it.

PP: We are hoping to make this an ongoing project.

I went to Thailand this last summer. My first language is Spanish, and so I am an English language learner. At 5 when I started kindergarten, I didn't know the language, but I think along the way, I forgot what it is like to be an English language learner. When I went to Thailand, I couldn't speak to anybody and didn't understand the culture, so I was immersed again as an English language learner.

MP: That is cool.

PP: It was. It was really, really interesting for me, all of a sudden, to just be able to smile and nod and be in their shoes, the English language learner's shoes. It helped me gain a whole new perspective. It was perfect, because that is what I am teaching.

So, I am hoping to bring teachers from here and immerse them in another culture where they do not know the language or the culture.

MP: To get that experience. That is cool. That makes sense. Great.

Will you send me a copy of this when you are done?

PP: Sure. I think it will be great reflection for both of us.

I really appreciate your time, and I will be at Maestros. I didn't even look at the date, but I am off in January. I figured either one would work for me.

#### Pilot Study: Presentation of the Data

With my research questions in mind, I visited my conversation partner, Marcos Pizarro, a Mexican American, and an associate professor, department chair and coordinator of the Mexican American Studies Program at San José State University. I was meeting Marcos at 10:30, and I left my job at California State University, East Bay at 9:00 to make sure that I would be on time. I arrived a half-hour early and walked around the Mexican American Studies Department. It was very exciting to see all the Latino/a names on the doors of the offices. I also saw many



posters in Spanish and Latinos depicted in the posters, and heard Spanish being spoken. This was very different from my own work environment. I work in a teacher education department where there is only one full-time faculty Latina, and three part-time Latino lecturers. Rarely do I see posters of Latinos unless they are for a special event such as Cesar Chavez Day or Cinco de Mayo, let alone hear Spanish spoken. On our campus all of the classes taught on ethnicity are housed under an Ethnic Studies Department.

When I first arrived, I saw that Marcos' office door was ajar, so after about ten minutes of observing his department I decided I would see if we could start early. I was really anxious to hear his thoughts on social justice in adult learning. I knocked on the door and Marcos greeted me with the warmth of our culture (a great big hug), and I apologized for coming early. He said it was not a problem and that if I gave him a few minutes to finish the lesson he was working on we could begin. I sat in one of three comfortable chairs and I checked out his office. There were many books by Latino/a authors, and posters of Zapata, Che Guevara, and Cesar Chavez. He had posters of Malcom X, Martin Luther King, and some of Native Americans, and next to one of them was a dream catcher. Marcos also had posters of past propositions that were aimed at eliminating Spanish bilingual programs and anti-immigration. There were also many photos of his family and drawings by his daughter. His office showed that he was proud of his culture and his family, and his environment reflected everything that he stood for. I know Marcos through a teachers' social group called Maestros that he created seven years ago. I have only been a participant for the last couple of years, but I know that Marcos is a caring person and that he is always working on some kind of social justice project, which is why I chose him for a conversation.

Our conversation began with trying to understand the current context of social justice. We agreed that it is a complicated issue, not only here, but also in other countries where the issue can be more overt. We recognized that one of the reasons why working on social justice in the U.S. is so difficult is because so much of our language around this issue is prefigured for us. Marcos pointed out that we have a powerful media that does not include everyone in decision-making. I agreed, and gave an example of the media's representation of immigration. Last summer, the media kept focusing on the fact that illegal immigrants were breaking the law. About a week later, they featured interviews with anti-immigration protestors who simply repeated the same thing that the media had said: they were not racist, but they did not believe in people breaking the law.

Marcos said, "Our basic assumptions or starting points are all falsehoods in all of the discussions around inequality...both historically and contemporary. So how do you have a real conference conversation as a country and how do you move towards being a better country?" After much discussion we realized that our country has a history of not addressing these issues. People are too uncomfortable with these kinds of conversations.

Since Marcos and I are both educators, I asked him what role he sees for social justice in education, and specifically, for adult learning. He thinks that inequalities are perpetuated in our educational system, because this allows people to remain comfortable. We concurred that our educational system has classes that are intended to teach people about issues of diversity. However, without praxis nothing changes. Students may learn to recognize issues of equality in such classes, but they are not taught how to change things. At the same time, they are receiving messages from the media and other sources that our country is the best, the strongest, and that we are fairer and more equal than other nations.

After a very long conversation, we both agreed that while it would be a big challenge to try to engage the country in conversations around social justice, we could do so with our students and colleagues. One by one, or a few at a time, we can give them the skills to make a change.

Finally, I asked Marcos how can we create a society that cares? He did not find this a hard question. He said, "I think we answer that question by caring." We then engaged in a conversation about the possibility of creating a society that cares and respects all cultures, and we decided that we must continue the conversations and imagine the possibility of social justice for all.

I learned many things from the conversation with Marcos, but the most central lesson for me was the importance of field inquiry in a hermeneutic tradition. Marcos and I had had many conversations prior to the pilot study, but I realized that none of our earlier conversations has been so open and honest. I learned about my own views on social justice and we both walked away understanding the importance of having these types of conversations with our colleagues. It was exciting to learn that that by initiating one conversation, many more conversations regarding social justice would take place.

### Analysis

In this section, I present the analysis of my research and suggest initial conclusions in view of the hermeneutic theories that inform the data. This section consists of a conversation in which my participant and I discuss social justice in the United States, abroad, and in adult learning. The three categories I address are: the current situation; fusion of horizons and communicative action; and solicitude and care. The theme of adult learning, language, and culture will be woven through the interpretive, hermeneutic text to provide a framework to interpret social justice in a different paradigm than that of the positivistic one.

The analysis will address the current situation of social justice in adult learning in the U.S. and Thailand, and specifically the roles of economics, politics, and culture in this sphere. The analysis will also address how the language and culture of adult learning ensures the success or failure of English language learners in the U.S.

For this document, I analyze the pilot study conversation in section seven in terms of the theory presented in section six. The main themes that surfaced from the conversation were the nature of language, understanding, the importance of action, imagination, solicitude, and care.

Throughout our conversation the theories presented in section six surfaced continually. We began the conversation with Ricoeur's theory of interpretation, by interpreting our social justice paradigm. My conversation partner and I analyzed social justice in the U.S. and abroad. Although we acknowledged the differences between the issues here and those abroad, we recognized the shared importance of language in every culture. It is the interpretation of the country that frames social justice, and we came to realize the importance of interpreting and reinterpreting social justice to effect change. What followed was a discussion on immigration and how it is configured through the media. This led us to Gadamer's theory on fusion of horizons, which recognizes how essential communication is in reaching a new understanding. In this discussion we learned the importance of conversations regarding social justice. Our conversation regarding social justice in adult learning brought us to Habermas's theory on communicative action. The practical and emancipatory interests are referred to as communicative action, and although we agreed that there are courses that touch on the inequities in our system, they lack the action that is needed to make a difference. An aspect of learning is embedded in Habermas's theory of communicative rationality. In his theory, learning is associated with critique, recognizing mistakes, and choosing an appropriate way of taking action.

This led us to Ricoeur's theory of imagination. Imagination leads to refiguring the configured history and traditions of the social justice paradigm in adult learning, toward building an inclusive environment. We ended with Ricoeur's theory of solicitude and care. Ricoeur defines solicitude as empathy and concern for others, specifically an empathy and concern that is directed towards reducing the suffering of the other. It is important for the institution that educates us all to teach that we only find meaning in relation to others. By this, we bring in the ethical component of social justice: by seeing the self as other and the other as self we realize that we only have meaning in relation to others.

#### Implications drawn from the Research Analysis

At the beginning of this document I demonstrated the importance of this research and proposed an interpretive approach to explore the cultural and ethical dimensions that are associated with all areas of adult learning. I intend to explore the topic of adult learning through the function of narrative identity. By placing ourselves in perspective we have the capacity of seeing the issues and ourselves differently, which allows for a new way to look at problems.

The research implications are two-fold. First, I attempted to find meaning in the current interpretation on the topic of social justice in the U. S., and abroad. Next, I attempted to find meaning in the current interpretation of social justice in adult learning. I searched and researched the cultures of both and after analyzing the history, culture, and language, I found the field of adult learning to be relatively unexplored. The pilot study resulted in data providing insight and suggestions for practice, as well uncovering new directions for future research.