

May 15, 2004

I was delighted to discover that the Department of Adult and Community College Education of the School of Education of North Carolina State University, where I was a professor twenty five years ago, named me as the recipient of the **E.J. Boone Adult Education Enhancement Award** for outstanding contribution to the practice of adult education! I share with you my two minute acceptance speech:

## Thank You

I want to thank all in the Department who decided that I was to receive this wonderful award. They made a wise choice, because I am not only a maker of theory but a *teacher*.

That is the best part of this best of all professions: we are all in *praxis* - working every day with learners and colleagues, looking over our shoulder to ask: How can it be better? Why did that work or not work? That's *theory* - the answer to the question WHY? Kurt Lewin, one of our mutual friends, said long ago: "There is nothing so practical as a good theory."

My books come out of my work which began exactly fifty years ago in a New York City classroom. I was starry eyed and full of undigested theory. That first day! Little Tony saved my life. As the noise in the classroom of ten year olds grew and chaos theory seemed the only one working, I pleaded with the children: "Don't you think it would be better if you did your work quietly? How about settling down?" Tony stood up, put his hands on his hips and shouted: "She means SHUT UP!" I kept Tony by my side that semester and metaphorically, throughout my life.

You are entering the best of all professions with a base of skills and knowledge never before known. I certainly did not have what you have now in 1954. What I did have was curiosity and awe-filled respect for the learners who sat before me, in New York City, Indonesia, Sudan, Tanzania, Chile, and McGee's Crossroads! That curiosity and respect moved me to ask the question WHY, and make theory.

I offer you today my congratulations and wish you curiosity and respect for all who come to you.

I have said before that what we do as educators is much more complex than heart surgery (though I have especially profound respect today for the skill of such surgeons). The surgeon knows exactly what the heart under her hands will do. You never know what human beings, alone or in a group, will get up to! You are counselor, teacher, designer, strategist, administrator, manager, evaluator, and sometimes, policeman. As educators, we are essentially peace-makers, welcoming with equity each person who comes to us. How much your contribution is needed in these troubled times!

I wish you joy in this invigorating work, which I love and continue from my back porch.

Listen to *your* Tony, make theory and celebrate the complexity of your wonderful work. That's why they give us such awards! I am proud and grateful to accept it. Thank you!