Resisters, Rejectors, and Ridas:
How to make urban schools work for
disengaged students and critically conscious teachers

Summary: *The recent success of New York City's Eagle Academies or Chicago's Urban Prep with male students raise the question: Now that we know how to reach some students we have been unable to reach before, how do we reach those students we have never been able to reach? This paper combines ideas from Dr. Prudence Carter and Dr. Jeffery Duncan-Andrade to provide answers.*

In Keepin' It Real*, Carter thinks a broader respect of the unique cultural styles and practices non-white students bring to school is needed to know why they resist/reject mainstream education. To her, the most successful negotiators of school systems are culturally savvy teens drawing from multiple traditions, whether it's knowledge of hip-hop or classical music, to achieve their high ambitions.*

Carter also revisits an old issue and suggests: What some urban students resist/reject is not "acting white," but the assumption that to succeed in school one must assimilate into mainstream society to the exclusion of one's own culture. Doing well in school becomes a "subtractive process" where minority students lose their identity. To clarify, she introduces the "non-compliant believer," students who resist and reject mainstream schooling since a) it fails to link the basic values of education to the deeper understandings of their own every-day realities, and b) which along with their language and urban culture, is absent from the curriculum and unwelcomed in the classroom.

Duncan-Andrade accepts many of Carter's interpretations, but suggests a different response. Drawing from research in urban classrooms of highly effective teachers, he characterizes 3 types of teachers: Gangstas, Wankstas, and Ridas. He also outlines 5 indicators of effective urban teaching.

Both Carter and Andrade agree, youth need not *reject what makes them literate, self-sufficient, community oriented, and politically active for a socially just world. They disagree on how this is accomplished. Prof. Carter refutes old ideas about teenage behavior and racial difference, suggesting inter-cultural communication, not assimilation, can help close the black-white achievement gap. Prof. Andrade sees the situation differently. He suggests education is the practice of freedom and students must have Rida teachers who help them use their school experience to improve their present and future neighborhoods while gaining academic skills and knowledge for career, and higher learning.*

This paper encourages African American males to go into teaching, becoming Ridas who engage non-compliant students in a classroom counter-culture community, using a "THUG LIFE pedagogy" and encouraging a resistance to mainstream education that is not rebellious, but transformational.

"What is unequivocally helpful from Prudence Carter's inquiry is the assertion that these young people's way of being and the concepts of achievement and mobility need not be mutually exclusive. That is, as a society perhaps we need to meet these students where they are culturally so they can participate in the opportunity structure without having to compromise their sense of self."

~ Harvard Education Review (Summer, 2007)

Urban students are asked to trade the culture of their home and community for the "higher culture" of the school in exchange for access to college. This reduces the life choices of students into a false binary, that of choosing between staying behind as a failure, and "getting out" as a success. Faced with the prospect of leaving their communities behind to be successful, many urban youth opt out of school. They choose to retain an urban and cultural identity they perceive to be in conflict with the expectations of schools, even if the cost of that choice is school failure. To be effective, urban schools must begin to develop partnerships with communities that provide young people the opportunity to be successful while maintaining their identities as urban youth.

~ Jeffery Duncan-Andrade

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~ INTRODUCTION ~

Resisters, Rejectors, and Ridas: How we can reach _all_ students
Many students simply like school and do well. Most aren't enthusiastic about it, yet they endure and eventually graduate. Some simply dislike school, opposing and finally rejecting what it offers--even to their own detriment. This paper concerns the last group, who though warned daily of the importance of "an education" make up an Unconvinced Generation (Evans & Loflin, 2006). This essay will review and combine several ideas explaining why some students resist getting an education, and offer orientations to enable re-engagement.

New York City: 2011
Of course this is all placed over the background of a national concern for the so-called achievement gap, academic disparities between urban students of color and their white, more-affluent peers. Programs and ideas abound: Take the $127 million 3-year plan aimed at "reducing disparities" among young black and Latino men announced 08.05.11 by New York City mayor Mike Bloomberg.

Chicago: 2010
Let's don't forget Chicago's leadership. Remember, all 107 seniors at Chicago's Urban Prep Academy were accepted to four-year colleges. Thankfully, Chicago's Marva Collins had led the way in showing African American students can achieve academically just like any other student.

Indianapolis: 2010
This success story, mentioned by the nationally acclaimed Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu at the 2010 Indianapolis Public Schools Infusion Conference, is very, very significant. The school's long hours, all-male student body, a strictly enforced school uniform of a black blazer, khaki pants and red tie, and the school voice mail opening with "I'm college bound" before it asks the caller to leave a message reflects a way to be affective with some urban African American males. This is a great school and must receive recognition and be duplicated.

In Indianapolis, the Charles Tindley charter school is presented as an example of these types or levels of programs. With its elaborate entrance requirements, "College or die" motto, strict dress and behavior codes (enforced by cameras everywhere), high tests scores and college acceptance, it is also quite effective with some urban students.

"Some" is purposely used because the success of the families, students, and staff at Tindley is important not only in that it proves again what's possible, but because it brings up the next challenge. _Now that we know how to reach some students we've been unable to reach before, how do we reach those students we have never been able to reach—those who are not attracted to an Urban Prep model or to any public school model for that matter? Indeed, what about urban students who do not want to pull up their pants, wear a blazer, tie, and khaki trousers—let alone come to school?_

These "yet to be reached" students are intelligent, they enjoy learning, they want to go to university if that's what it takes to empower themselves to be able to define their own reality. However, what alternative is there for black males who see the Eagle Academy approach as requiring them to reject their identities as urban youth in order to become acceptable to society? What is the alternative for those who do not share the middle-class social-political culture of those African American professionals, organizations, and schools (like Charles Tindley) who want to help them? Is the fact that no alternatives exist for the most resistant show a generational and social-class disconnect with disaffected, disruptive, and oppositional students?

The same situation applies to working class urban students of all colors. What about those students

who **do not see** themselves, their global youth culture, their neighborhood, or proposed solutions to the everyday problems they face each reflected in a school's curriculum? I don't see the lives of the alienated and oppositional students who may not want to pull up their pants--not to mention wear a blazer and tie--and I see no Indianapolis alternative to the narrative offered by the mainstream African American community who support schools like the Urban Prep Academy. Don't we want to reach **_all_** students (Loflin, 2010)?

~ PART I ~

Don't we want to reach _all_ students? Yes we do, and we can
To re-engage the more resistant students and so reach **_all_** students, we must combine ideas suggested in _Keepin' It Real: School Success Beyond Black and White_ (2005) by Dr. Prudence L. Carter and "Gangstas, Wankstas, and Ridas defining, developing, and supporting effective teachers in urban schools" (2007) an essay by Dr. Jeffery Duncan-Andrade. Carter invites us to look at academic disengagement in an entirely new way. Andrade emphasizes the characteristics of teachers who engage the more disaffected and actively oppositional students.

The questions
Why are so many African-Americans performing less well than their Asian and white peers in classes and on exams? Why do some student resist and reject schooling at all costs? Some popular explanations are:

- the circumstances of poverty
- broken families—no fathers at home
- levels of parental education/involvement
- low levels of school funding
- a poor quality curriculum
- the vestiges of racism in schools
- the nihilism of post-modern society

~ The student and the teacher ~
Of all the possible factors regarding the achievement gap, this paper stresses 2 of the more important. Later, to develop the issues raised and the ideas proposed, the paper will provide ways schools can engage _all_ student and close the achievement gap.

~ The student ~

The burden of "acting white"
It was John Ogbu (1998) and others who argued the "oppositional cultural" theory: African-American students display antagonism toward the dominant white society by resisting educational goals, choosing not to engage in school because they perceive high academic achievement as "acting white" and particularly if they should present themselves as "good" students (Fordham, 1996).

The burden of "acting white" revisited: Where cultural identity and education intersect
What is significant to this discussion is the research of Professor Carter who draws from survey and interview data of 68 low-income African American and Latino students from Yonkers, NY. She concluded: _What these young people resisted was not "acting white," but the assumption that to succeed in school one must assimilate into mainstream society to the exclusion of one's own culture--doing well in school was a "subtractive process" in which so-called "minority" students lose their identity._

Samkian (2006) interprets Carter's argument: the notion of "acting white" has not as much to do with academic achievement as it does with students' cultural identity and sense of group belonging, regardless of their grade point averages. In other words—some minority students achieve success in

school while escaping ostracism through an unspoken means of "keepin' it real" and rejecting "acting white."

Williams (2006) goes on to explain the difference culture makes. In our society, she says, a privileged few get to define: a.) what knowledge is, b.) what it means to be smart, and c.) the images of the so-called "intelligent student." If students do not conform to these images, no matter how sharp their "natural ability"/IQ, they are "marginalized."

So, Williams sees the engagement of African American students is affected by how teachers and principals, (the schools' cultural gatekeepers), "parcel out rewards and sanctions according to which ones abide by dominant cultural rules." Thus, in many cases, students are "pre-emptively marginalized" by urban schools "quick to deem their cultures, their behaviors, and their perspectives as disruptive, deviant and/or even delinquent."

Because their teachers "privileged" and thus (directly and indirectly) enabled the styles, tastes, and understandings of white middle-class students, African American students experienced their teachers "denying the legitimacy of their cultural (expressions) and even their critiques of the information they (were) expected to learn."

Williams spells it out: As a result of these experiences, "Carter finds that black and Latino children are failing, not because of lack of drive, desire or effort, but because:

- they have essentially been
    - devalued by elitist attitudes
        - which, by design,
            - reject them on a cultural basis,
                - delivering the harmful message that as they are, they simply <u>don't</u> belong there."

This is profound!

How does this play out?
Not wanting to adopt the linguistic and appearance styles of the majority, Prof. Carter reported, these young people "struggled with how to maintain culturally authentic selves, while, at the same time, achieve."

Nonetheless, as pointed out by Southworth (2007), Dr. Carter places the variety of responses of African American students to these "harmful messages" surrounding structural expectations and dominant cultural values at school in 3 categories:

1. The **non-compliant believers** are students who are not able or willing to comply with mainstream norms and behaviors. Thus, their engagement with and attachment to school is limited if at all, leading to less successful educational outcomes.

2. The **cultural straddlers** comprise the majority of the successful students. They can conform to mainstream "white" expectations, and are able to "act black" or "act Spanish" in their communities, a term Carter defines as "code-switching."

Remember, Carter's argument: students do not interpret "acting white" as a desire to excel in school, but as a rejection of individual culture and identity. Thus, straddlers are high achievers, but are able to communicate with their peers within the cultural framework of the community and so are not accused of "acting white." They're members of the student council, take AP and honors courses, represent the

school at special public events, yet "keeps it real" in the neighborhood through such actions as rhyming about the social-economic injustices they and others face.

3. The **cultural mainstreamers** embrace the dominant cultural values and assume that the speech patterns, dress and behaviors of the dominant (middle-class white) culture as the norm--what "regular" people do. They are the most likely to be accused of "acting white" because they do not embrace their own culture and ethnic identity in the same way as *non-compliant believers* or *cultural straddlers.*

Samkian also helps make clear 3 of Carter's many research conclusions:
- Carter argues that the non-dominant cultural capital minority youth utilize needs to be validated in order to realize a stronger form of multiculturalism in schooling.
- Carter realizes that achievement necessitates an ability to access dominant forms of cultural capital as well.
- Carter calls for "multi-cultural navigators" who help students negotiate between the "dissonance" of their own cultural capital with the mainstream culture regulating schools.

Since, as Southworth mentions, the issue is understanding the processes regarding a student's ability to maneuver between school--where the dominant culture reigns--and their own community, "multi-cultural navigators" (teachers or community partners/mentors) who accept and value different cultures can help parents and students navigate through the often difficult processes involved in schooling and later in the workplace.

What is important to remember, Carter found the majority of the students--ages 13-20--she interviewed *believed education was the key to success, jobs and mobility*—even the *non-compliant believers* who refused to comply with dominant cultural expectations, yet shared the same educational value of "getting an education."

International validation of Carter's ideas
Carter mentions South African students who also experience the barriers to success mentioned above. See Loflin (2006) regarding Aboriginals in Australia**.**

Gender: Why are most non-compliant believers male?
An additional aspect of Carter's work deals with gender--obviously because most of the *non-compliant believers* are males. The difference in the socialization of young men and women, Carter found, was a major component in student achievement as well--a component not explored in the Ogbu/Fordham thesis.

The chances of urban males succeeding in mainstream society are inhibited by not only their academic achievement, but also by their cultural norms and the conditions in which they are raised. Reed (2006) and Southworth agree with Carter and argue:
- families tend to push the girls harder and expect them to make better grades, conform to dominant speech and dress patterns, while the males are "babied" mostly by single mothers;
- urban males want to be successful and obtain white-collar employment, but white-collar jobs require them to use "*soft skills"* such as speaking Standard English and dressing in ways valued by the dominant culture. This poses a dilemma for young men who "grapple" with social pressures to be masculine or "hard"--not compromising their cultural identity for social success; and,
- thus, these social cues encourage young males to be socially non-compliant, which places them at odds with the largely inflexible public schools and a formal workplace climate.

The dilemma facing urban male students

Then there is the dilemma Carter sees urban males facing: if they reject the cultural expectations of schools and other mainstream social organizations, this sets them up for negative evaluations by teachers who too often view them as potential "thugs" anyway. This leads to academic failure with its consequences.

Yet, total conformity to the dominant cultural practices means an invalidation of their own cultural "repertoire" and critical analysis of their every-day reality—something urban males can't deny. *Non-compliant believers* don't relate to school because it fails to link the concrete values of education to the deeper understandings of their own economic, social and political realities.

In most cases, this is why these students look up to hip hop artists because *they are able to keep it real: be both authentic and "successful."*

~ The Teacher ~

What are the characteristics of a highly qualified urban educator?

Discussions concerning the type of pedagogy needed to improve achievement for low-income children of color are increasing. This is very significant in light of the NCLB mandate: "Every classroom will be staffed by a highly qualified teacher." The ideas of Dr. Jeffery Duncan-Andrade (Cesar Chavez Institute at San Francisco State) are important because he studies exceptional urban educators.

Beginning in 2002, Andrade developed 3 critical inquiry groups of South Central LA teachers: 2 serving 6–12 and 1 serving K–5 teachers. He used research emphasizing "cariño" (care)--action research described as a means for "emancipatory change." The educators were picked because their students did well by traditional standards (test scores, grades, college-going) and by the standards of critical pedagogy (critique of structural inequality and oppression, critical reading of the word and their world, individual and collective agency for social change).

Andrade identified specific "basics" of effectively teaching poor and non-white youth in urban classrooms: (1) authentic caring; (2) critical pedagogy; (3) culturally relevant pedagogy; and, (4) social justice pedagogy. Missing from the past data, according to Andrade, is how such basic ideas help us understand the purpose, process, and pedagogy "driving" these effective educators. In addition, absent were comprehensive studies providing evidence supporting his contention that these "basics" close the achievement gap while at the same time providing students with the tools to effectively navigate in and transform the larger society.

A pedagogical theory for low-income youth of color: Why do some teachers fail where others succeed?

Andrade's review of research on low-income and non-white urban schools, where low achievement results were virtually predictable, reveals similarities among the teachers consistently effective. To clarify the data, he created a paradigm to: (1) describe 3 types of teachers serving in the classrooms; (2) identify core principles across practices; and, (3) link practices and achievement levels.

The Gangstas: These teachers have a deep resentment for most parents, students, and neighborhood members and are generally dissatisfied with their job, the school, and the broader community. They aggressively advocate for ineffective and repressive school policies such as zero-tolerance discipline policies and tracking. In staff meetings, these teachers deliberately sidetrack or bully forthright discussions of racism, structural inequalities, and social and economic justice. They

are present in virtually every school where students are suffering. Fortunately, they are not the majority of urban teachers.

The Wankstas: These are the majority of the teachers in urban schools. The expression is usually attributed to hip-hop artist 50 Cent. He describes the "Wanksta" as the person who is always talking about what he/she is going to do, but never delivers. In Andrade's paradigm, the term is not a put down. Wankstas, he notes, are the result of a natural human instinct: self-protection.

Andrade found most teachers come to the urban classroom with the full intention of becoming effective. It doesn't take long before they realize they've been poorly prepared and will be poorly supported as professional if they continue to work in urban schools. This professional disrespect impacts on their belief they will improve as teachers. The little hope that they maintain resides in their relationships with students. When students are disinterested and sometimes blatantly disrespectful, the majority of teachers begin to lose faith. They find it increasingly difficult to rationalize being hurt—and sometimes humiliated—by youth, while also enduring professional disrespect from outside the school. They stop believing they've signed up for a lifelong mission to be an agent of change, and start finding reasons to dis-invest and excuses for their inability to create classrooms where **all** students learn. They're Wankstas, and not Gangstas. They still talk about wanting to be able to educate all their students. They're not emotionally invested like Gangstas who spend significant amounts of energy disliking students and the neighborhood around the school.

Rather than risk caring unconditionally for students who may not return that care, these teachers become emotionally detached from their calling and the outcomes of their work. They avoid the emotional risks accompanying the critical self-reflection required of teachers wanting to make a concerted effort to change their practice. Instead, they end up in the "survival mode," blindly following the latest school or curriculum reforms, student discipline fads, and teacher transfers.

Still, Andrade believes Wankstas, although deeply troubling at one level, also hold promise because they can and will improve if the conditions that support that growth present themselves in a compelling and accessible way. Many of the "go along to get along/get a head" Wankstas could eventually help *cultural straddlers*, though not *non-compliant believers*.

The Ridas: "Rida" is a popular cultural term referring to people who can be counted on during times of extreme duress. It's often referenced in hip-hop with the expression, "ride or die," meaning that Ridas are people who would sooner die than let their people down. There are almost always a few Ridas in schools where students are suffering but, like Gangstas, they are the exception.

Ridas are consistently successful with a broad range of students. They risk deep emotional involvement with most of their students and they're sometimes hurt due to those investments. The depth of relationships with students allows them to challenge students and get notable effort and achievement.

Ridas are often uncommitted to the larger school structure because they perceive it as morally bankrupt and hesitate to take on any challenge that would mean time away from their direct service to students. It's often the case that Ridas remain at "failing" schools--it's the only logical path they see to work with the students they care so deeply about while still being able to pay their own bills.

What distinguishes Ridas?
Andrade points out Ridas because they use a social justice pedagogy--a set of teaching practices aimed to create "equitable social and academic outcomes."

An *equitable education* suggests resource allocation based on context, which would include attention to funding and teachers, but in a manner paying closer attention to the specific needs of a community. An equitable education is better defined as a Culturally Relevant Education in that it is designed to address the material conditions of students' lives (i.e., social toxins such as poverty, inadequate housing, unemployment, gangs, alcohol/drug abuse, police brutality) while maintaining a high level of intellectual rigor. This is different from "cultural competency" (Loflin, 2009) which may not have the wider-scope of Culturally Relevant Education.

At the same time, an equitable education encourages students to embrace the socio-cultural richness of the community as a resource, rather than as a barrier to be overcome**.**

Five pillars of effective practice of teachers who are Ridas
Andrade's research led him to pull together the various characteristics of the outstanding urban teachers he observed or worked with.

Pillar No. 1: A critically conscious purpose
Andrade asked Ridas why they teach. They said they believe their students, specifically low-income disenfranchised children of color, are those most likely to change the world--the ones with the least to lose and so most likely to be willing to take the risks necessary to change a society. Teaching with this broader view and objective characterize educators with a *critically conscious purpose.*

In fact, Andrade discovered these students were not necessarily the teacher's favorite, but the "bane" of the teacher's existence; these potential agents of change were not prone to follow class rules, but rather to test and/or break them.

As a result of such a critically conscious purpose, **their classrooms didn't mirror middle-class education**. These teachers worked at understanding the history of the communities where they worked and the people living there. They also formulated a critical awareness and analysis of structural and material inequities their students had to face and deal with on a daily basis.

They re-defined success for their students. Ridas talked to students about using school as a way to return to their communities, rather than as a strategy for escaping the neighborhood. They developed curriculum reflecting critical thinking, enabling a sense of hope and purpose that students could be well-educated critical agents of change fighting for their communities and *a more just world.*

They did not pretend their teaching is politically neutral, making sure students understood the two essentials of freedom--to think and act critically for themselves, and their community.

Pillar No. 2: A distinctive sense of duty to students and the community
To make his point, Andrade quotes Carter G. Woodson regarding the idea of a leader vs. a servant:

> *You cannot serve people by giving orders as to what to do. The real servant of the people must live among them, think with them, feel for them, and die for them. The servant of the people is down among them, living as they live, doing what they do and enjoying what they enjoy. They may be a little better informed or have some experience some of the other members haven't, but in spite of this advantage they should have more humility than those whom they serve.*

Rida teachers viewed themselves as members of the communities where they taught. They invested in students many had written off as hopeless. They saw those students as members of their community they couldn't simply disregard.

This was reflected in the following series of traits Andrade saw in each teacher he studied:

- They wanted to be at the school and wanted work with "challenging" students.
- They took risks with their students, curriculum, and ways of teaching.
- They saw access to students as a privilege, not a "right" of their profession.
- They described teaching in urban schools as "a way of life" not a job.
- They associated their teaching with "the struggle" for human dignity and justice.
- They described being a teacher as "who I am, not what I do."
- They were not afraid of the neighborhood, and had a committed and consistent presence in the school's community--building relationships with parents, siblings, families, and community stakeholders. Some chose to live in the community and though it did not guarantee success, it did help teachers to "know what goes on" and this created an added dimension to their connection with the students and their families.

Pillar No. 3: Preparation
The teachers Andrade worked among were always at, or near, the top of their school's traditional measures of student success, despite having (and many times accepting in mid-year) students their colleagues had forced out of their classrooms. Although these achievement patterns suggest they were already excellent educators, each spent a tremendous amount of time preparing for class. This counters a not-uncommon notion that good teachers don't have to prepare.

Ridas constantly prepared. Their intense commitment to preparation gave them expectations of success rarely found in low-achieving schools. Andrade saw time spent preparing lessons and units fostered "a contagious level of excitement, passion, and belief in the curriculum they delivered."

Pillar No. 4: Socratic sensibility
The teachers in Andrade's study lived out a "Socratic sensibility" by striking a delicate balance between the confidence in their ability as teachers and frequent self-critique. They constantly reflected on their practice and their relationships with students in an effort to get a little bit better each day. To aid in this process, they encouraged all types of visitors (parents, teachers, future teachers, and university professors) to their classrooms. They were particularly open to those who were critical.

Pillar No. 5: Trust
That trust is important in a teacher–student relationship should not be surprising to anyone. Andrade found Rida-level teachers don't expect trust and try to earn it daily. Ridas know from Woodson's, *The Mis-education of the Negro* and Watkins' *White Architects of Black Education (2001),* that to many our public schools represent a history of colonialism and repression.

> "Can we call the preparation to produce the cultural hegemony of European-elites, education?"
> ~ Mwalimu J. Shujaa, American educator

To some students and families, this makes public schools "the enemy." Ridas accept this and realize that no matter how good their intentions, as staff in an urban school, they're connected to that history. This awareness allows them to be conscious of this obstacle to building trust with students and the community. It helped them to understand the importance of standing in opposition to district school policies that were oppressive, racist, punitive, and that do not challenge the cycles of social and economic inequalities, but actually reproduce them.

Evidence of building trust was clear in every aspect of their teaching, from their curriculum, to their grading, to their classroom management policies, and to their pedagogy. For example, these teachers were indignant about student failure which they saw as their own failure.

Raising the human element of educational attainment

Don't forget, Andrade's teachers were at the top of their schools in many of the ways by which we traditionally measure success (test scores, literacy and mathematics acquisition, grades, attendance, graduation, and college enrollment).

Andrade discovered each reached this achievement because they focused on *raising the human element of educational attainment* most schools don't measure. Knowing great teaching will always be about relationships, these teachers focused on the human element by making sure students had:

- a positive self-identity,
- a clear purpose for attending school, and
- a justifiable hope that school success will be rewarded in the larger society.

For most low-income children, particularly low-income children of color, there is little in the history of schooling or the broader society that would solidly justify any of those three beliefs.

~ PART II ~

Urban school challenges: Engaging _all_ students

As was mentioned in the introduction, now, unlike in the past, those concerned with urban students have created schooling styles (Chicago's Urban Prep or Indy's Charles Tindley) which engage <u>some</u> urban students who were historically un-engaged. This is wonderful. Yet, again, what about those urban students who continue to drop out? What about the persistent non-compliers or those would-be *cultural straddlers* who can't seem to be reached by their *multi-cultural navigator?* Don't we want to reach **_all_** students?

Note, the main complaints of Carter's *non-compliant believer*:

1. their school and teacher(s) fail to link the concrete values of education to the deeper understandings of their own economic, social and political realities; and in fact,
2. their own cultural "repertoire" and critical analysis of their every-day reality--and the need for action against these "social toxins"--are invalidated.

Professors Andrade and Morrell understand these complaints. Below they define what the challenge is and how meet it to improve urban education.

The biggest challenge

According to the Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation, the biggest challenge facing urban school reformers in regard to the more and most disengaged urban student is:

- **_the development of instructional practices that encourage students to invest in schools as a viable social Institution_**
  - enabling teachers to capture the minds and hearts of students
  - combining the interests of students with a critical focus
- providing hope and a sense that their investment will be rewarded
  - giving students something students can believe in.

~ *Two orientations/actions* necessary to meet the challenges~

FIRST: The starting point and motivator for urban schools are to

- **recognize the conditions of inequality**
- **enable the desire in students to overturn these conditions for themselves and all suffering communities.** For both educator and student, this means
  - discarding the framework of meritocracy
  - critically embracing the role of the "**_underdog_**."

It means framing a classroom and school culture utilizing a critical pedagogy to:

- *critique notions of equal opportunity and access,*
- *making education a weapon to name, analyze, deconstruct, and act upon the unequal conditions in urban schools, urban communities, and other disenfranchised communities across the nation/world.*

How to meet this challenge: *Enabling students to be successful while maintaining their identities as urban youth*.

What does it means to achieve: Different definitions of success
To begin, we must understand there are different definitions of success:

- one for the wealthy: how close one can replicate one's community
- one for the urban poor: how far away one can get from one's community

Defining success for urban students in terms of how far they live from where they grew up can connect their success with the suffering of others.

School funding currently focuses on improving instruction and learning conditions, with the goal of increasing the number of students who are able to

- "escape" poverty and attend college
- "better themselves" or to "move up" or "move out"

Researcher Angela Valenzuela (1999) has called this a **subtractive model of schooling**. Urban schools "subtract resources" from students by:

- dismissing their definition of education
- assimilationist policies/practices minimizing their culture and language.

Urban students are asked (sometimes indirectly, sometimes directly) **to exchange the culture of their home and community for the so-called "higher culture" of the school in exchange for access to college.** Such an approach often reduces the life choices of students into a <u>false</u> <u>binary</u>, that of

- choosing between staying behind as a failure, and
- "getting out" as a success.

Faced with the prospect of leaving their communities behind to be a success, many urban youth of all colors opt out of school. They choose to retain an urban and cultural identity they perceive to be in conflict with the expectations of schools, even if the cost of that choice is school failure

To be effective, urban education reform movements must begin to develop partnerships with communities that provide young people the opportunity to be successful while maintaining their identities as urban youth.

Valenzuela calls this an **additive model** of education. It focuses on the design of urban school culture, curriculum, and pedagogy that identifies the cultures and communities of urban students *as assets rather than as things to be replaced.*

The dilemma of society's desire for success for urban youth: The costs of academic success
We know only too well urban students can succeed academically yet, at great personal and social costs including alienation from

- family
- their home language

- their neighborhood
- progressive social values.

As a result of this tragic situation, a critical pedagogy in urban education
- strives to create spaces for students to learn as they also embrace and develop affirmed and empowered identities as intellectuals, as urban youth, and as members of historically marginalized ethnic groups
- relies on scholarship that views youth culture as a powerful, but oftentimes under-utilized, *point of intervention* for schools.

> "I failed your class 'cause I ain't with your reasoning. You tryin' to make me you."
> ~ Boogie Down Productions, 1989

So, it's not just about "acting white" or "straddling" cultures, or being non-compliant; it's also "playing for the other team"
As Prof Carter explained, "acting white" is a negative term usually applied to African Americans and Latinos referring to a person's perceived betrayal of their culture by assuming the social expectations of the dominant white society. Those most likely called "acting white" by their peers are the "cultural mainstreamers" and Carter stresses they expect, yet evidently ignore, this label.

Although "acting white" has to do with race, it's also a sense of "joining the other team." Andrade applies this aspect to many urban students of all colors who reject being successful in school if it means not supporting the "underdog"--turning your back on the home team, i.e., the neighborhood.

Andrade uses the example of an athlete for an urban school who is so good she/he gets "recruited" by a suburban team and the next year is playing for that "other team" against their former classmates, the "home team." In fact, after graduation from college, the player returns to coach for the "other team" and doesn't come back to his/her neighborhood school to work.

From the point of view of the "home team" the "other team" is the mainstream society/culture ("the system") whose members use their wealth, power, and social/political advantage to maintain their "higher status" and "keep us (the underdogs) in our place." The other team thinks they're "better" than the underdogs, and looks down on their neighborhood, its way of life, and use of non-Standard English.

SECOND: Schools should create a critical counter-culture community of practice in their classrooms and school programs
This counter-culture will deliberately study, critique, confront, and replace--with a culture of excellence and justice--any and all forms of
- low expectations
- social exploitation
- political exploitation
- economic exploitation

These efforts should begin by
- confronting the immediate material conditions of the community where the teaching is happening.
  - This means developing a curriculum and pedagogy
    - addressing the material concerns of students and their communities (education, housing, justice, jobs, etc.)
2. creating chances for students to use what they're learning in ways directly impacting their lives.
  - This means developing a curriculum and pedagogy
    - permitting and encouraging students to use what they are learning to act upon those concerns.
3. preparing students to develop common goals and ready them to work collectively toward them.

4. working to connect the local struggle for freedom to larger state, national, and global struggles over similar issues.

- **A counter-culture community of practice: Resisting dominance**

According to Professors Ducan-Andrade and Morrell, a major way for urban public schools to work for urban students is for neighborhood and community members, and school teachers/coaches to use their institutional capital to develop schools/classrooms/programs which

- counter the *negative stereotypes* that the very nature of the intellect and culture of urban families/students (especially Black and Latino) are
    - o inferior and defective,
    - o a source of social pathology
    - o non-intellectual
    - o the cause of poor school performance/ the achievement gap

In review, efforts must be made to create an (counter-dominance) educational counter-culture that makes the following qualities normal in the classroom:

- self-respect
- self-realization
- group achievement

- critical self-consciousness
- academic excellence

- **Critical pedagogy as a core principle of a counter-culture community of practice**

Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach which attempts to help students question and challenge domination (educational, intellectual, social, political, economical), and the dominant beliefs and practices of society. In other words, it is a theory and practice of helping students achieve critical consciousness so they can be educated in their own self-interest.

~ PART III ~

Major characteristics of a counter-culture community of practice

"The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom."
~ bell hooks, *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*

A counter-cultural community of practice recognizes the existence of a dominant set of institutionalized norms and practices in our public schools and classrooms. The community of practice intentionally sets itself up to counter those powerful norms and practices.

1. *The achievement of outstanding individuals is put in perspective*

The achievement of outstanding individuals using their success to escape the severe structural inequalities of poverty can't always be viewed as positive.

In fact, these isolated cases only reinforce the dominant negative stereotype which suggests that only an exceptional few "who have what it takes" can find success in urban schools and that success is partially defined by their ability to leave their community to join a more "successful" one. This is the story of *cultural mainstreamers*, and some *cultural straddlers*.

This concept is helpful because **the traditional model of success** *in America is built on individualism and* **does not include developing a social consciousness** *which leads to collective public action against inequities.*

Quite the contrary, this model of achievement contributes to reproducing the current social order by reinforcing a "survival-of-the-fittest" paradigm that legitimizes inequitable opportunities and outcomes.

To counter this traditional idea of success, a school/classroom counter-culture community must emphasize the development of structures supporting success and collective consciousness for **all** its participants rather than a select few.

As well, when urban students try to "go along to get ahead" and so no attempts are made to challenge and counter inequalities they face in school, consequently nothing changes. "Successful" students simply perpetuate pitfalls, barriers, and issues, leaving the school the same as it was and for those who follow.

Non-compliant believers know this directly disrespects the "Fight the power"/"keepin' it real; keepin' it right" political character of global youth culture by presenting a false choice: *"going along to get ahead" or school failure.*

2. *The concept and issue of "double-consciousness" is put in perspective:* **How critical pedagogy enables a critical consciousness**
A viable counter-culture seeking to make academic excellence and collective achievement normal in urban schools **raises the political awareness of African American students regarding the critical "double-consciousness" demanded of them if they are to succeed in school and the larger society.**

"Double-consciousness" (Du Bois, 1903-1996) is the effect black people in America experience by having to struggle with an awareness of one's self as well as an awareness of how others perceive them--the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, and measuring oneself by the values of others. This is a problem because the danger of double consciousness resides in conforming and/or changing one's identity to fit the perception of others.

A critical double-consciousness is realized when a person faced with this internal battle **is able to develop a critically conscious response** to these conditions. Such a person is able to acquire the
1. mechanical skills (**an explicit understanding of the rules and codes of power)** so necessary to navigate oppressive social conditions/institutions
2. critical skills to analyze and resist the hostility he or she endures and to develop a strong sense of self and community.

This means developing a "private self-consciousness" of acute self-awareness and introspection such that one is examining one's inner feelings and emotions and not preoccupied with how others view them.

Du Bois refers to the development of private self-consciousness as a means to empowerment. The critical pedagogy used in the counter-culture community helps foster this kind/level of awareness.

3. *The issue of oppositional behavior is put into perspective:* **Transformative resistance as a useful strategy for achievement**
Throughout the development of urban public education there is a history of urban students resisting and rejecting their schooling experience through their disruptive or oppositional behaviors. Dr. Carter calls these students *non-compliant believers.*

Now "*Rida"* urban teachers who seek solidarity with urban students regarding their resistance and rejection of public schooling, and for these non-compliant students themselves, there is now both understanding and support for their concerns in Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal's (2001) concept of "**transformative resistance.**"

What's brought to understanding the achievement gap is the idea that not all resistance is harmful (Akom, 2003). Non-compliance and/or oppositional behavior by students (forced by law to attend a dropout factory where in many cases they have less than a 50% chance of passing ISTEP and/or graduating) may not only be a political act, but a mentally healthy response to a situation where success has the possibility of being defined as shutting down one's "private self-consciousness" and critical awareness—denying one's personal experiences/reality and virtually becoming invisible—in order to graduate.

Through this powerful idea, Solorzano/Delgado-Bernal distinguish among forms of resistance—some of which are more personally and politically empowering for the student, other students, teachers, the school, and the community:
- **conformist** (self-serving): the student messes school up for themselves and everyone else too
- **self-defeating** (self-destructive): the student gets expelled
- **transformative** (self-actualizing/self-realizing): the concept of an individual and/or collective resistance resulting in positive and transformational change for the student(s), school, and the community.

"The right of all children to learn and become productive citizens compels each employee of IPS to contribute to an environment conducive to learning and instruction through the appropriate methodologies so that all children will develop life skills and become self-actualized individuals."
                    ~ IPS Instructional Mission, found during the fall semester 2005
                    on a wall in hallway just outside the main office at Northwest H.S.

Oppositional resistance can be conceptualized as a set of shared values, beliefs and attitudes that reject dominant social norms and thus can contribute to behaviors that make it difficult to do well in school and achieve in general.

   "It is the duty of a citizen in a free country not to fit into society, but to make society."
                    ~ John Holt, author *How Children Learn*

However, in a counter-culture community, resistance can be transformational and enable *non-compliant believers* to stand in opposition to oppressive, racist, or punitive school policies, making the curriculum relevant to the everyday struggles by challenging the negative stereotypes of them in school, and engage in local political struggles over quality of life issues in their neighborhood.

4. *The issue of an equal educational system vs. an equitable educational system is put in perspective*

"If our society did not have this social compact around unequal funding, then people would not make entire life choices on the basis of access to school districts, and realtors would not be able to use public schools as selling points."
                    ~ Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, *The Art of Critical Pedagogy*

Policymakers must find the courage to commit resources to addressing unequal and inadequate school funding policies. A policy for truly equal funding would be a step in the right direction. However, Andrade/Morrell do not believe the ultimate goal is an equal education for all. Instead, to be

a truly great society America must have an **equitable educational system**.

An *equal education system believes* that everyone should get
- the same education (America has not done this yet)

An *equitable education believes* that people should receive
- an education specific to the needs (social, economic, linguistic, political) of the people being served as defined by their circumstances
- *this would not mean less or more, but different*
- the resources and pedagogy would match the specific community needs.

An equitable educational system: The end of "one-size-fits-all" normalcy

"If such a thing as a psycho-analysis of today's prototypical culture were possible…such an investigation would needs show the sickness proper to the time to consist precisely in normality."
~Theodore Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

A great and enlightened 21st century public school system would have an *equitable educational system* which would automatically
- move away from educational practices that primarily measure student achievement on the basis of assimilation into white middle-class norms.

The ability of a student to read, write, and do arithmetic at the highest levels is *not* what is being referred to as white middle-class norms. It is much deeper.

The use by our current educational system of curriculum, pedagogy, and measurements of these skills centering around white middle-class epistemologies. (Epistemology is the study or theory of the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge; how (the ways) we understand everything; how we create knowledge.) Most urban educators, administrators, and school boards assume without question the "superiority" of such white middle-class ways of knowing.

Thus, the path to acquiring those skills (K-12 public education) is automatically associated with the belief that the "skills" will be and/or must be applied in the service of the existing power structure (economic, social, and political). This is not an issue for the *cultural mainstreamers*. It can be an issue for "*straddlers"* but is definitely a barrier for non-compliant believers.

Now this would be fine if all students in US public schools were white and middle-class. The problem is in urban districts, most students are not; yet, the system has continually served the interests of middle-class whites over them. (See Watkins' 2001 book, *The White Architects of Black Education*.) This is so powerful and pervasive, and thus dominant and persuasive, some families, students, and teachers of color see the trade-off as worthwhile. Even fewer see the system for what it is and consciously maintain a critical consciousness.

But, for most, our existing public school system translates into poor students of color and (even working-class urban white students) choosing between two distinct cultural worlds, that of
- their family and community
- the existing power structure.

No educational system in a multi-cultural democratic society should force large portions of its children to make such a choice.

An equitable education system nurtures students' cultural identities, promoting the use of their school success in the service of their communities--educating urban students in their own self-interest.

- **Critical Pedagogy and one-size-fits-all**

Not all children learn at the same pace or in the same ways, even though schools mostly operate as if they do.

"Our Alliance is proposing a shift away from high standards for uniformity to high standards for diversity."
  ~ from Lynn Stoddard, Founding Member Educating for Human Greatness Alliance

Thus, inequitable outcomes of schooling that result from one-size-fits-all pedagogical practices **should be attributed to social design rather than student inadequacies.**

Almost all schools in America sort students on the basis of age, and they frequently sort them even further using faulty measurements of ability. See Oaks, (1986): *Keeping Track: How schools structure inequality.*

The application of critical pedagogy requires educators to challenge the existing one-size-fits-all pedagogical and assessment models. This requires an understanding that students enter public schools with different zones/levels of development and preparedness which provide tremendous opportunities for educators who are prepared and willing to:

- **diversify the strategies they use for**
  - motivation
  - instructional pedagogy
  - academic support
  - social support

- **Organic intellectualism: Strength-based orientations to help urban students stand out**

  "all [people] are intellectuals ... but not all [people] have in society the function of intellectuals."
  ~ A. Gramsci

According to Gramsci, each person has a level of intelligence that results from the interaction with the world and that these interactions are most always constrained by such factors as race, gender, and class.

The fact that each student experiences the world differently means each comes to school with different forms of intellectualism. However, school is often ill-equipped to identify/develop a student's "organic intellectualism." Instead they end up sorting so-called intellectuals from so-called non-intellectuals through teaching methods that value the ability to acquire and reproduce information-- using specific formats within rigid time frames, leaving organic intelligence of urban students unrecognized, unappreciated and thus underutilized in school.

Gramsci also argues that public schools are often the social institution used to validate this unnatural social division, one where an individual is cast as either

- *Homo sapiens* (one who thinks/works with his or her mind) or
- *Homo faber* (one who labors/works with his or her hands).

Gramsci's concept should bridge the division between thinker and worker and **replace it with a paradigm that values the intellectual potential in all people.**

To help our urban public school educators (especially the *wankstas* and *ridas)* move toward an appreciation of the variety of individual "organic intellectual" natures, they must consider Arnold Skromme's 1989 book, *The 7 Ability Plan: Seven Bell Curves for Each Student.* It supports the "organic intellectualism" concept with 6 hidden abilities not tested in school which go beyond the academic (memory/analytical abilities):

- creativity
- dexterity
- empathy
- judgment
- motivation
- personality

"Funds of knowledge" Teachers and schools must be better equipped to identify the most acute issues in the social context of urban schools so they can develop and implement **pedagogy that investigates and draws from the lives of urban youth.**

Remember, this is exactly what Carter noted was why some students don't want to be in school: "Non-compliant believers don't relate to school because it fails to link the concrete values of education to the deeper understandings of their own economic, social and political realities."

Rather than presenting the neighborhood as a place students such as *cultural mainstreamers* or *straddlers* **rise above,** Luis Moll has referred to these contexts as a student's "funds of knowledge." That is:
- **schools must equip themselves to draw from the knowledge students bring with them to school**
   - knowledge that is often not in their textbooks but is acquired from the streets, family cultural traditions, youth culture, and the media.

5. *Going to college is put in perspective:* **The limitations of the "college going" culture: A middle-class ideology which ignores pertinent problems of urban communities.**
The liberal model of urban education reform makes the mistake of attempting to replicate the schooling ideology of the middle class, emphasizing a "college-going culture." In so doing, it all but
- **ignores the material conditions of urban communities, which are more pertinent to the lives of students and are far removed from the rhetoric of college.**

   An education with relevance: Increasing college eligibility
Let's be clear, urban students should go to college at rates equal to their more affluent counterparts. The point here is a schooling environment that emphasizes the relationship between education and the most pressing conditions in the community, **an education with relevance**, *is most likely to produce notable increases in college eligibility.*

Those truly interested in the (personal, cultural, social, economic, political) self-determination of urban students advocate for an urban education model that
- **utilizes critical counter-cultural communities of practice (4Cs),**
- **developing a critical and engaged citizenry with**
   - **a democratic sensibility that**
      - **critiques and acts against all forms of inequality.**

A **counter-cultural community of practice recognizes** *the existence of a dominant set of institutional norms and practices. The community of practice intentionally sets itself up to counter those powerful norms and practices.*

   Making college a realistic option for *non-compliant believers*
The unique lives and conditions of urban youth deserve an education system that accomplishes two goals in concert with one another:
- preparation to confront the conditions of social and economic inequity in their daily lives, and
- access to the academic literacies (reading, writing, math) that make college attendance a realistic option.

This approach to reform is a **double investment in urban communities**:

- it provides pedagogy and curricula lending immediate relevance to school in the lives of urban youth.
- it also works to break the cycle of dis-investment of human capital in urban communities by
  - creating graduates who recognize their potential agency to improve urban centers and their neighborhoods,
    - rather than seeing them as places to escape.
- These prospects offer:
  - urban students--a renewed sense of purpose with regard to school,
  - urban neighborhoods--the necessary human and institutional capital to contribute to its social, economic, and political revitalization.

7. *The place and purpose of Standard English is put in perspective:* Language of Wider Communication (LWC) and social justice: Standard English as the language of power

Urban students need to understand, interpret, and produce in LWC, developing linguistic competencies and literacy skills for jobs, school, and citizenship. It is also an important prerequisite for critical pedagogy and the Cycle of Critical Praxis. If urban students cannot read and write in the LWC, they cannot:

- adequately critique or refute texts they do not understand
- reason with and/or critique the *status quo* in its own language.

Powerful literacy vs. domestic literacy

Since public schools are institutions designed to maintain the *status quo*, literacy is different for the working classes than it is for those who are expected to achieve powerful status in society. Therefore, students of the upper middle classes receive powerful levels of literacy reflecting the positions they will inherit. *Powerful literacy* concerns the ability to analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and apply. —

> "Education is never neutral, Freire informs us; it either domesticates or liberates"
> ~ Patrick Finn *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating working class children in their own self interest*

Finn, in his 1999 book, *Literacy with an Attitude*, notes most urban students receive instruction in *domestic literacy*, a combination of

- performative literacy--decoding, sentence structure knowledge
- functional literacy--reading *USA Today* or completing a job application.

Finn suggests schools maintain a basic level of literacy so the masses are employable and content, but not so much that they will seek power. There is no effort to educate the masses to such a high level they'll want to change anything.

Learning how to read and write as a political act

This aspect of the LWC (aka Dr. Lisa Delpit's "Language of Power"*)* reveals the political importance of literacy. Historically, urban residents lack the political capital to look out for their own self-interests. As a result, for urban students, learning how to read and write--enhancing the potential of political power-- becomes a political necessity, and thus a political act. Literate citizens can

- know the basics of democracy and self-rule
- better understand and engage in public issues
- elect virtuous leaders
- sustain the delicate balance between liberty and order.

We can't forget in the mid-1950s, Septima Clark ("freedom's teacher"/"Queen mother" of the Civil Rights Movement) and Miles Horton (Tennessee's Highlanders School) began a literacy program on John's Island, SC. This Citizenship School **related the idea of literacy with liberation** and was created to organize/promote voter registration and civic involvement for social justice. Later Ella Baker and Charles Cobb organized the SNCC Southern Freedom Schools in 1964. The Mississippi schools also related literacy and political power.

8. *Pedagogy of poverty:* **Responses to unruly students by urban teachers are put in perspective**

In many urban classrooms students simply refuse to just sit still, be quiet, and listen. Urban children recognize the importance of learning, but some are unwilling to assume a submissive posture in rigid schools which routinely deny them a sense of curiosity, autonomy, culture, and self-worth. Consequently, in many instances, educators are unable to engage students in meaningful learning experiences. Students become bored, alienated, or disruptive. This is the case for *non-compliant believers.*

Some students refuse to recognize the authority of the teacher to the point that the teacher gives up on the class or the teacher shifts to the role of uncompromising dictator, regaining some semblance of control, and then interpreting the authoritarian approach to be the most effective one for urban students. This is the typical "*Wangsta*" scenario.

Due to the negative stereotype of the unruly inner-city child unable or unwilling to stake a claim to her or his education (Hass, 2010), it's usually students and families who get blamed for these discipline issues, and the stereotype is reinforced.

Pedagogy of poverty: Penal pedagogy

Insert into this scene the culture of poverty "experts" who place the causes of problems with students and their families. Their solution is a pedagogy of poverty:

- one-size-fits-all standards-based instruction
- "back to basics" drill-and-kill scripted instruction
- tracking
- high-stakes testing
- zero-tolerance discipline policies
    - enforced by threats of placement or actual placement in "soft jail" alternatives for those who do not "fit in" (Tailoring teaching sites, 2007).

This view of urban students is particularly disturbing because they come from those educators and policy makers *who live outside urban communities.* As well, the pedagogy of poverty enables the "school to prison pipeline" with which Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow* (2010) is concerned. Finally, a new study has further complicated the challenge of discipline in urban schools, determining little correlation exists between zero-tolerance policies and well-behaved students (Goodwin, 2011).

Ruby Payne, the more widely read educator associated with this view, claims teachers should teach their students to examine individuals who have attained prosperity, learning the hidden rules of wealth creation. Payne believes teachers should be trained to "provide a window of escape" for individuals who are intent on improving their economic lot. Her model promotes a concept of success based on

- individualism,
- "escaping" the neighborhood, and
- wealth accumulation rather than on critical thinking and social change.

This goes against the values of a school community counter-culture of practice and characteristics of *Rida* teachers,

9. THUG LIFE Pedagogy: Engaging the non-compliant believers

To engage Carter's *non-compliant believers*, Andrade and Ernest Morrell suggest urban educators investigate the use of pedagogy responding directly to the "social toxins" facing students in areas where graduation and college eligibility rates are low, and seemingly "intractable poverty and violence exist." In contrast, in some areas outside urban districts, school grad rates are 90%, college eligibility rates are 85%, the median income above $100,000, and violent crime is virtually non-existent.

School board members and staff who want to engage _all_ students must develop a pedagogy that is critical and balances their concern over these inequitable conditions with a critical hope that their work will change their students. This means providing students with an education preparing them to analyze their world critically by putting the skills and tools of critical thinking, research, and intellectual production in their hands so through their own self-determination students can enable social justice for themselves and their neighborhood.

This is what Andrade/Morrell call THUG LIFE pedagogy. They borrow the term "THUG LIFE" from Tupac Shakur. Although some messages Tupac delivered were controversial, critically conscious urban educators should be aware that even after his death in 1996, Tupac remains wildly popular among young oppressed peoples everywhere. The longevity and extent of this popularity can be attributed to the portion of his work speaking to "the righteous indignation that festers in almost every person who detests injustice."

Andrade/Morrell show where Tupac (just 25 at his death) was developing a theory of humanization for oppressed peoples that drew from their indignation. He argued oppressed people needed to search within themselves and their communities for freedom and this required adults to pay special attention to children born into a society that hates them. This hate is passed on to children through the cycle of social inequity and destroys communities. He gave his theory an acronym, THUG LIFE (The Hate U Gave Little Infants Fucks Everyone), a deliberate use of a phrase having associations with the racist stereotype of urban men of color as street thugs. Andrede/Morrell quote Tupac:

"*By 'thug' I mean, not a criminal or someone that beats you over the head. I mean the underdog. The person that had nothing and succeeds, he's a thug because he overcame all obstacles. It doesn't have anything to do with the dictionary's version of 'thug.' To me 'thug' is my pride, not being someone that goes against the law, not being someone that takes, but being someone that has nothing, and even though I have nothing and there's no home for me to go to, my head is up high. My chest is out. I walk tall. I talk loud. I'm being strong. We gonna start slowly but surely taking our communities back. Regulate our community. Organize. We need to start taking care of our own. We gotta start somewhere, and I don't know about anything else, but this, to me, is a start.*" (See Lazin's 2003 book, *Tupac: Resurrection*)

Much like Tupac, Andrade/Morrell understand hatred, rage, hostility, and anger--resulting from any group of people systematically being denied their right to food, clothing, shelter, schooling and justice--will ultimately cause a society to implode. Likewise, properly channeled, those legitimate feelings can develop into the courage to act and basically change the direction of a society. In fact, Andrade/Morrell believe the courage, dramatically and justly necessary to alter the direction of America, might be found only among those who suffer under its oppressive weight. This is the type of young person a THUG LIFE pedagogy aims to nurture.

20

~ Schools as major sites for major social transformation ~

Educators have long testified and research has long demonstrated that schools with large shares of economically disadvantaged children become overwhelmed by factors that interfere with learning.

According to Andrade and Morrell (2008), one cannot examine and become intimate with the problems of American urban schools without also becoming aware that *the answers are much broader than simply improving the academic achievement of a subset of students.*

Simply put, our serious social ills--particularly the inherent "social toxins" which characterize urban poverty--are major factors influencing school success. These "social toxins" are (Ginwright, 2010):

Inter-personal
- violence
- fear
- shame
- uncertainty
- nihilism
- loss of control

Structural
- poverty
- family dislocation
- health care
- racism
- nutrition
- exodus of jobs

What is profound and challenging, when a student and teachers create and carry out on a continuous basis a counter culture community of practice, our urban public schools **become important sites of intervention,** interventions the intent of which is to remove the social toxins.

Andrade/Morrell recommend: resources be used to address directly the context of urban life/poverty shaping the lives of students and their community; focusing on pedagogies which challenge the social-economic inequities confronting urban youth; helping schools, and teachers most directly in the development and implementation of a *critical pedagogy* and curricula that address the conditions of urban life, and so *develop a sense of power among students for altering those conditions.*

Thus, this is neither about, "Can children of poverty learn?" Of course they can. Nor is it not about success as defined by overcoming poverty and leaving the neighborhood. Here, say Andrade/Morrell, schools and students will actively survey, study, evaluate, challenge, and diminish--through *urban school activism*--the very issues/barriers of poverty that can hinder their school success. Why encourage students to escape the neighborhood and leave it as it was or even worse for those who follow? Why not use the school as the site of intervention and social change, and academic success as the purpose of this intervention? This way the children get educated and the community improves.

~ Why black males don't want to teach in urban schools and what to do about it ~

Although over 20% of the US school population is African American, Black men make up just 1% of the 3 million US K-12 public school teachers, according to a 2008 report from the National Education Association (NEA).

The NEA report also states the achievement of black male students begins to decline as early as the 4th grade and, by high school, they are the most likely to drop out! And, we know how important it is for black students, particularly boys, to see positive black male teachers as role models.

"The Turnover Gap"
Researcher Betty Achinstein (2011) says Black and Latino teachers are leaving the profession "in droves." Joanne Jacobs describes a "turnover gap" where the turnover rate for minority teachers in

urban schools was 24% higher than for whites in 2008-09. Difficult working conditions drive teachers out. The reality is, the minority teachers are **not** more likely than white teachers to stay in those tough places (Jacobs, 2010).

In light of what has been discussed, this make sense. Keep in mind to many so-called minorities our public schools represent a history of colonialism and repression--making public schools "the enemy." Urban students, arrive at school recognizing the importance of learning, but soon become unwilling to assume a submissive posture in rigid zero-tolerance schools which routinely deny them a sense of curiosity, autonomy, culture, and self-worth. Such a scenario begs the questions:

- Why would any African American male want to be a teacher representing the legacy of public schools which have provided minorities with mis-education, un-education, or no-education?
- Why would they place themselves right in front of the classroom where it can be construed they represent the "oppressor" as agents of social control--there to enforce "the system"?

Prof Duncan-Andrade points out *Ridas*--teachers who accept this scenario--realize that no matter how good their intentions, as staff in an urban school, they're connected to that legacy of public education and social control. This awareness allows them to be conscious of this obstacle as they build trust with students and the community.

Therapist: "What is the purpose of school?"
Student: "To make us proper."
Therapist: "To make who proper?"
Student: "To make Negroes proper."
> ~ From a conversation between an often suspended Sp Ed 15 year old African American male student from IPS Arlington and his family therapist during spring semester, 2011.

The main issues for black male teachers
This is the issue for black male teachers: some urban minority students (mainly *non-compliant believers*) will reject any teacher (black/white) if they think he/she is "playing for the other team"—i.e., the system where minorities are at the bottom. A teacher may want to play for the home team (the neighborhood/the "underdogs"); yet, in many cases for a teacher to survive, they will have to "play for the other team" or get transferred, even fired.

Certainly black male teachers who arrive to the urban classroom from the *cultural mainstream* approach to success will not get respect from the *non-compliant believers.* Those cultural straddlers who became teachers may be helpful to their students who are trying to straddle both sides of the fence to be successful.

It's interesting in cases where black urban public high school teachers are ex-athletes. Sports is how they "made it out" (of the neighborhood). Regretfully, most are certainly not academics. In many cases, these men bargained away any chance for oppositional behavior or critical consciousness in school (and especially political actions outside school) for sports recognition and academic support. They may have identified with the non-compliant "troublemakers" but knew that would not lead to the type of fame and fortune they were promised if they behaved "properly." At worst they become either "wangsta" coaches or "gansta" disciplinarians taking roles as deans of boys.

Few teachers can hide the fact they are not playing for the other team and so get the respect of students (notably regarding spoken English—proper or black—in or outside the classroom) while making those on the other team think she/he is on their team. Many black males who want to go into teaching know this and decide against it—they can't be inauthentic. Ironically, recall *non-compliant believers* face the same dilemma and also decide against being in public schools. From what has

been presented so far, these teachers most likely either quit, or if they stay, change to "wankstas" due to negative feedback from "gangsta" teachers or *non-compliant believers.*

Yet, if provided a transformative approach through the critical pedagogy and the "Rida" ethos, they'll chose urban teaching and want to stay. They can "keep it real" while looking out for the interests of the "underdogs" who also want a critical conscious teacher.

Even if African American teachers come ready and committed to be "change agents" reforming the system, research by Achinstein & Ogawa (2011) reveals but many work in "culturally subtractive" schools with strict policies and structural barriers. Teachers internalize these conditions and contradictions, resulting in them becoming "change(d) agents."

In the spirit of **Dr. Ron Edmonds**, Andrade strongly asserts:
• we can know what makes effective urban educators,
• we can name the characteristics of their practices, and
• we can link those characteristics to increases in engagement and achievement.

What we have now is a more realistic understanding of why certain students choose not to engage in schooling—the so-called "*noncompliant believers*" who reject learning in a school with a climate that rejects them:
• school staff view their urban African American family culture, urban youth culture (also known as global hip hop culture), and community culture, as well as neighborhood issues around social-economic justice as liabilities which have no place in the school or classroom curriculum.

Also, we have an awareness and understanding of the characteristics of certain teachers who do very well with those *non-compliant believers*--the "Ridas" who also critique and reject the same type of educational climate oppositional students do by offering another definition of success--one that
• sees the students' culture and community as an asset and something belonging in the classroom,
• does not repress criticisms or oppositional behavior by students, but nurtures a resistance that is transformative for the student, their classmates, the teachers and the school.

"Ridas" truly embrace the challenges of teaching in urban schools and therefore understand their duty to connect their pedagogy to the harsh realities of poor, urban communities.

Universities, along with urban districts, educators and communities can, if they so desire, invest heavily in refocusing efforts to recruit, train, and develop urban educators that are committed to being "Ridas." Then we have to find principals who:
• will let the black male teachers be Rides—be critical of the school system and not get in trouble;
• understand that it's important for "Ridas" to stand in opposition if district school policies are oppressive, racist, punitive, and glaringly reproduce the cycles of social and economic inequalities districts are supposed to eliminate
• support a counter-culture community of practice in "Rida" classrooms because this helps teachers build trust and engagement with the more dis-trustful students and community members.

We now have some urban schools where teachers encourage and prepare urban students to graduate from high school, go to college, find employment, and move out of the city. In many instances this is what these teachers have done and where they live. They want the same for their students. This is admirable, the American Dream in action.

At the same time, **let's also create an alternative story** which questions and reveals the limitations of this model of success for the African American community since it promotes a concept of

achievement based on individualism, "escaping" the neighborhood, and wealth accumulation rather than on critical thinking and social change.

Let us prepare black male "Rida" urban teachers who are enabled to encourage and prepare neighborhood students to be successful while maintaining their identities as urban youth, graduate from high and college, and return to the inner-city to live, work, and improve their community through helping its members practice personal, cultural, educational, economic, and political self-determination. *Then urban districts will have the African American male teachers it has always wanted and deserves.*

~ Review, Conclusions, and Recommendations ~

"What is unequivocally helpful from Prudence Carter's inquiry is the assertion that these young people's way of being and the concepts of achievement and mobility need not be mutually exclusive. That is, as a society perhaps we need to meet these students where they are culturally so they can participate in the opportunity structure without having to compromise their sense of self."
~ *Harvard Education Review* (Summer, 2007)

It is notable that Dr. Carter tries to reason through solutions to the problems urban students face. She gathers the variety of responses to the demands and challenges of public urban education into a format of 3 types: *non-compliant believers, cultural straddlers,* and *cultural mainstreamers.* It's these differences in action which influence how urban students "reconcile" their social identity—namely racial, ethnic, class and gender—with the dominant mainstream culture, and thus how this identity is expressed in the level, amount and type of commitment to their education.

What's also worth noting is her recommendations seem to be more concerned with ways to enable the *cultural straddler*'s ability to maneuver between school, where the dominant culture reigns, and their own community. Here, as was stated, Carter envisions teachers and/or community mentors as "multicultural navigators" who accept and value different cultures. Understanding the interplay between competing cultural ideologies, she argues, will help parents and students navigate ("code-switch") through the often difficult processes of success involved in schooling and later in the workplace.

Carter believes in the important value of social capital and so tries to provide via her *multi-cultural navigators* critical social ties for students who are less affluent or less successful in "navigating mainstream expectations." These mentor-guides show students how to write a college essay, perform during a job interview, get internships, discern different cultural rules and expectations within multiple environments, and how to negotiate these rules strategically.

Now, the *cultural mainstreamers* will likely take care of themselves, but the *non-compliant believers*, who already have the odds stacked against them, may plainly not be interested in the *cultural straddler* role/lifestyle via a relationship with a multicultural navigator. Here Carter's approach seems limited if the more *non-compliant believers* don't what to conform (won't "pull up their pants" in any manner--literally or figuratively) even if they're educated or have advanced degrees. *Is "straddling" her only option for urban students who are resisters and rejectors?*

Andrade and Morrell do not oppose Carter's ideas, but they do offer alternatives for *straddlers* and *non-compliants* to be successful in *(or out)* of the mainstream, and improving their neighborhood--all while "keepin' it real."

While they, like Carter, may be more interested in *cultural straddlers* rather than directly supporting *cultural mainstream* students, Andrade and Morrell propose urban teachers set up a counter culture

of practice in their classrooms where they might reason with successful *straddlers* to return to their communities. They propose these Rida teachers do so by not being "multi-cultural navigators" so much as being "insiders" enabling personal emancipation with their social-political "cellmates" and potential "neighbors."

A liberating education with a "Rida" teacher, a critical pedagogy education style, and a counter-culture community of practice classroom may be what is needed to help *non-compliant believers* deal with their dilemma:

a. reject the cultural expectations of school/mainstream social organizations, and suffer academic failure with its consequences,

<div align="center">~ or ~</div>

b. conform to these dominant cultural practices and in doing so invalidate your own cultural "repertoire" and critical analysis of your every-day reality, and suffer the consequences of such in-authenticity.

Consequently, *non-compliant believers* must disengage from school because it fails to link the concrete values of education to the deeper understandings of their own economic, social and political realities, and so the immediate need to lessen and/or eliminate these "social toxins."

Andrade and Morrell suggest a type of critical pedagogy for the *non-compliant believers* because they are by "nature" critical*. Urban young people have to be; this is matter of survival.* The "liberatory education" mentioned above focuses on the development of a critical consciousness which will assist students in recognizing the connections among their individual problems and experiences, and the social, political, economic and historical contexts in which they are embedded.

Adrade (and Morrell) offer a way for students who are "keepin' it real and keepin it right" (authenticity and social justice are the essence of hip hop global youth culture) to get "an education," while improving their life and neighborhood. In doing so, this "education as the practice of freedom" connects academic identity (how children and youth see themselves as students) to the broader struggle for national racial justice and global human rights.

If this is exactly what the non-compliant male students say is missing from their urban classrooms, then this defines exactly what African American male teachers must be. *If we want more African American males to go into teaching, they have to be encouraged and enabled to be Ridas--and protected once they arrive in the urban classroom from those who are threatened by such a powerful student-teacher-community alliance.*

Recommendations

- Districts must validate and foster the K-12 academic and post high school career and advanced education pursuits of *cultural mainstreamers* and their families.
- Districts must validate and foster the K-12 academic and post high school career and advanced education pursuits of *cultural straddlers by* providing them and their families programs where they are matched up with mentors from a corps of *multi-cultural navigators.*
- Districts must validate and foster the K-12 academic and post high school career and advanced education pursuits of *non-compliant believers* by providing them and their families with "Rida" teachers (of any color or gender) who use a critical pedagogy in a cultural community of practice where students can "keep it real" and get an education.

- Schools of education must create special urban programs which will attract high school students and college education majors who understand the "Rida" mentality, politics, and ethos. This will provide an alternative narrative to Teach for America programs.
- Districts must provide assistance for teachers to live in the neighborhood of the school where they teach.
- Districts must work with universities to set up programs which prepare urban students to return to their neighborhoods after graduation and continue the local improvements they were making as members of their K-12 school's counter-culture community of practice.

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"Resisters, Rejectors, and Ridas: How to make urban education work for disengaged students and critical conscious educators" is a compilation of direct quotes and concepts from, *Keepin' It Real: School Success beyond Black and White,* by Dr. Prudence Carter*, "*Gangstas, Wankstas, and Ridas: defining, developing, and supporting effective teachers in urban schools" by Dr. Jeffery Duncan-Andrade, and *The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools* by Dr. Jeffery Duncan-Andrade and Dr. Ernest Morrell.

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