

The cycle of Urban Education

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Abstract

This paper goes through three different aspects that I believe contributes to one of urban education's problems. I begin by explaining the common-sense view of race as well as the consequential discourse view, I follow this up by touching base on the different philosophies teachers have. Finally, I explain the different kinds of teachers that are seen in urban education. I conclude the essay by tying all these things together and explaining my view on how it's all a chain reaction that continues to support the way urban education is viewed today.

Keywords: urban education, philosophies, common sense

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The term “urban education” is one that is often misunderstood. It holds a negative connotation and people often find themselves blaming everyone from the teachers to the students about its poor track record.. For years, people have told the same tale about teachers who don’t do their job correctly and students who aren’t capable of success. This group of teachers and students are all clumped together to form what is known as Urban Education. Over the last few weeks I’ve come to wonder how there’s been no change in this very obvious issue. Through some readings, I’ve found that there is a chain reaction occurring within the school system that might be the answer.

One of the main issues in Urban Education has been in the making for years and the likelihood of it changing anytime soon is very slim. This issue is known as racism. Racism has had a profound impact on the lives of minorities for centuries. In Marcus Croom’s article regarding a Post White Orientation, he comments on the fact that race is viewed in two distinct ways: common sense and consequential discourse. A common sense take on race can generally be considered as the physical characteristics of people that can be seen such as their skin color or even hair type. On the other hand, a consequential discourse view applies to the things we do as people in regards to race such as labeling groups and placing them in a hierarchy. Croom notes that a common-sense view on race isn’t the approach that should be taken; if any change is to really be made then race needs to first be viewed as what it truly is, a consequential social practice.

Before reading this article, I had never considered race in the two ways Croom lays out here. However, it is shamefully true that we all look at one another and the first thing we see is the color of our skin and sometimes make assumptions based off of that. These assumptions can sometimes be simple and maybe even harmless without having any ill intent. However, when it

comes to education, the problem is that a teacher who views their student through common sense lenses has a greater chance of placing them in a very specific box. This sets up that teacher's expectations of the student's capability and often times it's negative. I agree with Croom that race should instead be viewed as a consequential social practice. If this perspective is adopted by more teachers there could potentially be a change in the way they view their students. To see race as a consequential social practice is to recognize our own wrong doings when it comes to race and realizing that a change is needed. The problem isn't the students race, it's the way we perceive their race and let it influence our view on them. Teachers who realize that race is in fact an issue that leads to negative consequences can begin to try and reshape their classrooms by adjusting their approach towards students of color.

There are multiple approaches a teacher can take when it comes to their students. Two popular approaches noted by Mary Rhodes Hoover are known as the deficiency philosophy and the vindicationist philosophy. Through the deficiency philosophy, it is believed that the "genes, language, history, and culture of people of color are deficient" meaning that they're faulty. This philosophy is one that goes back to the times of slavery; it is an "anti-black ideology" that now continues to oppress people of color through different institutions such as schooling. Hoover later mentions a cultural deprivation that follows the deficiency philosophy by believing that it is the culture of deprived children's fault, for a school's inability to teach them. As a consequence, to this way of thinking, unfortunate education decisions can be made that affect the way teachers behave towards students. A direct counter to this argument is the vindicationist philosophy. This philosophy believes that black students are no less capable than white students of having academic success and having high achievements. The vindicationist philosophy is believed by Hoover to correct the deficiency philosophy.

I agree with Hoover that taking a vindicationist philosophy approach to teaching could be the answer to solving the wildly incorrect idea that is the deficiency philosophy. To keep an outdated thought such as the deficiency philosophy in the twenty first century is no different than moving backwards in a time when the main focus should be to improve. Things such as the deficiency philosophy are a large reason as to why urban schools are viewed the way they are. Teachers who have low expectations on students of color, because they doubt their ability to perform, further fuel the incorrect notion that the only race capable of success is white. If a teacher is displaying this mentality to their students, even if they don't mean to, the students will eventually catch on and view themselves as what everybody else around them says they are. It's time educators begin to adopt the vindicationist philosophy into their teaching because if they never do the same story that's been told will continue on a loop with no end in sight.

Just like there is a variety of approaches that can be applied to teaching, there is also a variety of teachers that can be produced based off of the approach they choose to follow. These teachers are identified by Duncan Andrade as Gangstas, Wankstas and Ridas. All three of these together form a balance within the school system. On a scale gangstas would be viewed on the far end of the spectrum, wankstas in a constant middle and ridas on the opposite far end of the spectrum from gangstas. Andrade refers to the Gangsta teachers as those "with a deep resentment for most parents, students, and community members." According to Andrade these teachers are very dissatisfied with their jobs and even advocate for things such as zero tolerance policies. The next type of teacher is known as a Wanksta teacher, Andrade explains how these teachers make up the majority of teachers in Urban Schools. These are the teachers that always talk about the changes they want to make but never do anything about it. The final kind of teacher is considered a "Rida", these are the teachers that are there for their students and can be seen as confidants. They demonstrate a close understanding of all their students regardless of

their background. It is usually these teachers that follow the five pillars of effective teaching that Andrade lays out.

Andrade's article gave examples that I was able to easily relate to and that I'm sure anyone whose had an education could relate to as well. The gangstas, wankstas and ridas that are mentioned was something I found very interesting because it has a lot of truth to it. It's a bit worrisome how much influence a gangsta teacher has when you think about it. The difference between a gangsta teacher and a rida teacher in urban education can make the difference between a successful student and a student who falls to the low standards society has set for them. I have a mixed view when it comes to wanksta teachers; these teachers upset me in a way because they are the dominating factor on the scale that have the potential to have great influence. However, all they seem to be doing is going back and forth without taking a definitive stance. What needs to happen is that gangsta teachers should eventually be weeded out completely, wanksta teachers should decrease and a rise in rida teachers should be seen. These are the teachers with the greatest chance at making a difference in the way urban education is viewed.

Of course, it's easier said than done to just completely change the structure schools have followed for years. One of the reasons its persisted so long is because of the relationship that's been established consisting of: a certain view on race, the philosophy a teacher chooses to adopt and the type of teacher this philosophy produces. Before a teacher can be considered either a gangsta, wanksta or rida, they must first have a philosophy they follow. This is either the vindicationist philosophy or the deficiency philosophy. It's no surprise that a gangsta teacher would fall under the category of deficiency philosophy, a rida under the vindicationist philosophy and the wankstas are a bit of both. The philosophies they have is what greatly influences the way they teach and thus gives them a specific label. These philosophies don't just happen out of nowhere. They originate from the lens in which they view race. Those who view

race as common sense have a greater chance at adopting a deficiency philosophy and becoming either a gangsta or a wanksta teacher. This is because they take in what they see from a student and automatically begin to stereotype them. Once this happens the view the teacher has tends to be set and it has an effect on the way the student will perform. If a teacher takes on a vindicationist philosophy, it is more than likely that they don't just view race as common sense. Instead, they see it as a consequential social practice, so they are able to avoid doing things such as labeling their students based off of their skin color. As a result, they become what is known as a rida teacher and have the most success in producing high achieving student.

As you can see there is a relationship in the school system that can account for some of the problems in urban education. It starts with the way a teacher views race, based off of this they choose one of two paths, a vindicationist philosophy or a deficiency philosophy. These philosophies shape these teachers and have a direct influence on the role they take on as teachers. The roles are categorized as gansta, wanksta or rida. Since there is an overflow of wanksta teachers who don't care enough, there is also an overflow in students who don't succeed. This is a large contributor to why urban education is the way it is and why people view it so negatively. We cannot blame the student whose race has no effect on their intellectual capability, and we cannot just blame the teachers though they are at fault in their own way. We as a society need to look in the mirror and blame ourselves as a whole. We continue to view race as if it was common sense, we all do it and as long as that first stepping stone doesn't change then neither will the rest of the pyramid. The system is damaged because the foundation was built off of poor ideals that have continued to be supported despite evidence to the contrary. There can be no real hope for urban education and the students that represent it until something changes within this cycle that has gone on for far too long.

References

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