“Culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exists in society. The teachers I studied work in opposition to the system that employs them.”

Gloria Ladson-Billings

5 Practices of Highly-Effective Urban Educators

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Author: Allie Gross, May 23, 2014

In his seminal research paper “Gangstas, Wankstas and Ridas,” Duncan-Andrade argues that, rather than chasing after the quantifiable “equal,” we should be demanding a qualitative “equitable” — a model where students are encouraged to embrace where they come from instead of viewing it as an obstacle to overcome. He argues that the equal education model — and its failures — is exacerbated by the current makeup of urban schools, where educators fall into three categories:

- Gangstas: A small but vocal portion of staff who often gripe about their jobs. Dissatisfied, they are "haters" who express disdain and distrust for the communities they work in. They often push for zero-tolerance punishments and other punitive practices.
- Wankstas: The majority of urban teachers, Duncan-Andrade says, fall into this category. Rapper 50 Cent originally coined the term "Wanksta" as someone who talks a big game but never follows through. In this case, the Wankstas are less complicit in their failures, and are rather the result of missing support systems. They are teachers who come into the classroom with aspirations of becoming highly effective but the realization of poor training combined with the lack of professional guidance quickly drains their hope. Over time, they detach from the school and their students, sticking to the status quo without much thought.
- Ridas: Based off the popular rap expression "Ride or Die," Ridas are a small portion of urban teachers who are willing to take risks and build deep emotional connections with their students, even if they may be let down in the process. These are the highly-effective urban educators.

It is the unwavering balance of these three that has led to the current status quo and predictability of urban schools, according to Duncan-Andrade.
My biggest turn around this year has been with my highest-need students. Originally, there were 28 students in the class. After several months, the school “redistributed” many of them. I was then left with just 15 students. At that point where I saw an opportunity to make a big change. I made it my job to get to know each one of them on a more personal level. I figured out how to motivate and engage each student-- and significantly improve their achievement.

One way that I engaged them was by earning their trust and showing them how much I cared. I began holding them more accountable for everything they did. I showed lots of tough love, and when they had successes and challenges in my class, and other subject areas, I took the time to talk to them about what happened. I spent my preps and lunch checking in with other teachers as to how they were performing in their classes. I gave my students consequences, and they no longer argued. They looked visibly upset to disappoint me. I also worked to speak to each of them individually when they were working independently or after class. For teacher appreciation week, I got notes from four students in this class. The students know I care about them a lot-- and spend more time producing quality work as a result.

Another strategy I have used to improve achievement with this class was to allow the students to dictate the topics. The topics had to be linked to the standards, but could also be based on their individual interests. This required a lot more work because it became a third, separate prep--but it paid off. The students have demonstrated much more understanding of the scientific concepts and ideas as a result. In our cancer unit each student chose a different type of cancer to research and then produced an informative brochure. One female student chose to research breast cancer because of her Aunt’s diagnosis. The student was concerned it could be genetic. Other students conducted research on risk factors like environment, pollution, and inheritance. In class we discussed how the Ironbound neighborhood of Newark, where East Side and many of our students reside, is one of the most polluted in the city. Many students also showed interest in medical marijuana and the pros and cons of it as a cancer treatment. Students read texts about the benefits of cannabis extracts and the effects of patients using marijuana to relieve pain and aid in other treatments.

In conclusion, I can say that this group of students, as a whole, showed significant improved achievement and engagement in my class as a result of building strong personal relationships with them as individuals and supporting their learning about things that interested them. While this required much more time and effort on my end, I am so proud of my students and the growth they have made this year--not just as biology students, but as responsible young men and women.
Backward Planning for a Culturally Sustaining Curriculum: A Unit-Planning Work Session

This workshop will allow you to work with experienced mentor teachers in both revising and rewriting several of your curriculum units to create assessments, learning tasks, projects, and lesson plans that question status quo, affirm student identity and experience, and engage students in being agents of positive social change in their communities. Using Grant-Wiggins Understanding By Design model, you will work with mentor teachers in your subject area to hone your units and create lesson plans to reflect Gloria Ladson-Billings’ Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, building from essential understandings and skills.

June 16th
9:30 am to 1:00pm
Bradley Hall, Rutgers-Newark Campus

All UTEP grads are welcome to join and we also extend this invitation to any of your colleagues at school who are interested. Please encourage them to join you! Coffee & pastries will be served, followed by a working lunch.

Please RSVP by Monday, June 11th at Induction.UTEP@rutgers.edu
1. Critically conscious purpose

In all four of the classrooms that Duncan-Andrade observed, the teachers believed that their low-income minority students were destined to be agents of change. The fact that the student body was largely disenfranchised from mainstream systems meant that it had the least to lose and was therefore most likely to stir things up. This thinking gave weight, seriousness, and purpose to the role of the educators who, in turn, treated every moment in the classroom as training time for future leaders and change-makers.

An important note, however, is that these teachers were not driven by a romanticized vision of change, but rather the sobering reality that their students faced a difficult journey. As Duncan-Andrade pointed out, the teachers took time to research issues affecting the communities they worked in and set up their classrooms to address those needs, in part by not attempting to mirror a stereotypical middle-class classroom. This also meant teachers redefined what success meant in that environment, framing education as a way to return and help shape the community instead of as a means to escape it.

Key Takeaways:
- Highly effective educators share with students their belief that those pupils will one day be agents of change.
- Creating meaningful, rigorous lessons allows students to critically think about issues and solutions affecting their lives.

2. A sense of duty to students and the community

Instead of viewing themselves as "leaders in the community," Ridas viewed themselves as "servants of the community." This shift in thinking is attributed to humility, where these teachers work not out of empathy, but through solidarity. While not always possible, a key to making this happen naturally is by living in the community one serves. Duncan-Andrade noted that not all of the Ridas lived where they worked, but they all made themselves visible in the community by attending neighborhood events on weekends or staying after school so parents and students could have face time with them. A teacher who is able to show they too have a stake in the game will go far when trying to earn their students' trust and respect.

Key Takeaways:
- Highly effective educators view teaching in an urban school as a way of life and not just what they do.
- They are not afraid of the community they teach in and can therefore build meaningful relationships with students and families.

3. Preparation

While teaching takes a lot of work and preparation in general, Duncan-Andrade found that Ridas took this to new heights. They were constantly reflecting upon and reworking their lesson plans to be better prepared. He attributes this attention to details to pillar No. 2, where teachers feel teaching is not just what they do, but who they are. Many of the teachers would find resources — a book, film, artifact — on their own time and later embed it into their lesson plans. Their classrooms, and what they could do with their students, were constantly on their minds.

Key Takeaways:
- Highly effective educators view their lesson plans as mutable and working documents. Even if they are teaching the same course or subject the next year, they go back and reflect on ways to improve.
- They are constantly searching for new resources to bring into their classrooms.
Socratic Sensibility

The term ‘Socratic Sensibility’ was coined by American philosopher and academic Cornel West. It is an amalgamation of Socrates' belief that "the unexamined life is not worth living" and Malcom X's statement that "the examined life is painful." The idea is that we must examine all of life, as painful as it may be, and use the injustice and pain as a strength. Teachers who embody this pillar "understood their duty to connect their pedagogy to the harsh realities of poor, urban communities,” Duncan-Andrade wrote. This also means that the teachers exuded a healthy balance of confidence and reflection when it came to their teaching skills.

Key Takeaways:
- Highly effective educators have an open-door policy for their classrooms, believing that more visitors means a greater chance for improvement and perspective.
- They teach students that "righteous indignation" is a strength and not a punishment.

Trust

Trust is probably one of the most critical aspects of teaching in any environment, and it is also something that is earned and not demanded. Duncan-Andrade found that Ridas earned trust with students in two ways. On a macro level, they gained trust through awareness of where they fit into the bigger picture of their students' education. "These teachers understood that government institutions, such as schools, have a negative history in poor and non-white communities," he wrote. Being cognizant of their position as school "ambassadors," these teachers gained students' trust by fighting against school policies that could be viewed as oppressive.

On a micro level, the teachers gained trust through "positive harassment." By giving students rides, tutoring them after school, eating lunch with them, and calling their families, teachers were able to not only show they cared, but that they were there for students every step of the way as they worked to meet their academic goals.

Key Takeaways:
- Highly effective educators don't just demand high expectations, but show true love and support as students worked to meet those expectations.
- They feel frustrated and partially responsible when their students fail, but also hold students accountable for their work and effort.

As Duncan-Andrade explains, and as is seen in the pillars he identified, positive self-identity and purpose are the key to achievement for urban educators, and it is nearly impossible for students to...
Culturally sustaining educators connect present learning to the histories of racial, ethnic, and linguistic communities, to the histories of neighborhoods and cities, and the histories of the larger states and nation-states that they (students) are part of.”

Django Paris & H. Samy Alim
in Education Week Teacher

Upcoming Professional Developments

If you are interested in these or any other professional development opportunities in the tri-state area, please email us to let us know and we will sign you up— and cover the costs!

Induction is here to support your growth as a teacher!

Teachers College Columbia University Continuing Professional Studies:

• Reimagining Education: Teaching and Learning in Racially Diverse Schools 
  **July 16 - 19, 2018**, 8:30am to 3:45pm Monday-Thursday
• Keep the Kids Talking: Shifting from Q&A to Q&D  
  **September 10, 2018 - November 30, 2018**, Format: Online (asynchronous)
• Surviving the Semester: Meeting the Needs of Early Career Teachers
  **July 9, 2018 - August 17, 2018**, Format: Online (asynchronous)

[http://www.tc.columbia.edu/cont]

Facing History & Ourselves

• The Civil Rights Movement: Expanding Democracy  
  7.23.18 – 7.26.18, 9am to 4pm
• The Reconstruction Era & the Fragility of Democracy  
  7.9.18 – 7.12.18, 9am to 4pm
• Democracy at Risk: Holocaust and Human Behavior  
  8.6.18 – 8.10-18, 9am to 4pm
• Immigration in a Changing World: Identity, Citizenship, & Belonging  
  7.30.18 – 8.2.18 or 8.20.18 – 8.24.18, 9am to 4pm

[https://www.facinghistory.org/profe]

New Visions for Public Schools

Seminar Topics:

• Speak Up!
• Assessment Literacy
• Literacy for ELLs
• Google Apps for Teachers Level 1
• Facilitation (all dates TBA)

[https://advance.newvisions.org/microcert/#courses]

American Museum of Natural History

Investigating the Evolution of Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria: 7.17.18 – 7.18.18

[https://www.metmuseum.org/events/programs/met-studies/k12-educator-programs]

The Right Question Institute

Log on to “watch” conference videos for free, flexible date & time

[http://rightquestion.org/educators/seminar-resources/]

Liberty Science Center

Professional Development Workshops

• Varied Dates & Times

[https://lsc.org/education/forteachers/professional-development]
I am a history teacher that teaches beyond the textbooks I am given. I aspire to be the change I want to see in the world, like Mahatma Gandhi says. My purpose is not for students to get the highest score on their standardized tests, rather it is to make them have a strong sense of self and be agents of change themselves.

One way I do this is by creating a warm, trusting space, where we can have difficult, but critical conversations. As a white woman, I am aware of the privilege I have and how my students may perceive me—so I work hard to get to know my students on a deeper level so they understand I care about them as people. I showed my students a video clip of the Doll Test where young children were presented a white doll and a black doll. They had to choose which doll was good or bad. In our discussion, students reflected on stereotypes and how those biases impact our behavior. This was not an easy conversation for many of them—but as a result, they became more aware of their own judgments and those of others. Students worked in groups to address ways they themselves can work to fight this prejudice. They suggested that teachers talk about different cultures from an early age, review what it means to be empathetic, and to also speak out if they hear a person being biased.

I also work to affirm my students’ own identity, by incorporating their culture as a fundamental part of our classroom. I do not teach from the narrative of “HIS story,” as my students refer to it, but instead we analyze multiple cultural perspectives. One class of mine researched a group of people for a historical dramatization of the 50’s and 60’s. One group chose to dramatize the Chicano Movement and created a bilingual skit, using their Spanish, a mother tongue for many of them. In another lessons students analyzed the music from the Harlem Renaissance. They learned the Lindy Hop, the Charleston and even participated in the school’s talent show. I also have a class DJ, who emails me a student playlist for class work-time, based on student preferences. All of these activities motivate students to work diligently because they feel they have a voice and a choice.

Finally, I embrace the social media literacy that my students are facile with and participating in. I use memes to analyze ideas and my students have created their own memes. My students have written Snapchat stories discussing causes of the American Revolution. When teaching the Declaration of Independence, I created a “text thread” from K.G. (King George) and A.C. (American Colonists) about their “break up.” This mirrored the colonists declaring their independence from King George and the grievances listed out in the Declaration. Students were engaged, motivated, and affirmed that their own form of regular communication was also a valid source for learning.

I am a passionate urban educator and incorporate my students’ lives into the content I teach. This type of pedagogy is key to building a better bond with my students and creating a classroom environment that makes them feel safe and understood-- and allows them to achieve their best.
Classrooms are more diverse than ever before. In our interconnected world, students bring a range of languages, literacies, and cultural practices into their schools. As educators, we’ve often thought about culture as something associated with a student’s ethnic heritage. However, a newer approach to teaching and learning called culturally sustaining pedagogy challenges us to promote, celebrate, and even critique the multiple and shifting ways that students engage with culture.

Django Paris, associate professor of language and literacy in the College of Education at Michigan State University, developed culturally sustaining pedagogy to extend asset-based teaching approaches such as culturally relevant pedagogy for the 21st century. His approach challenges us to go beyond acceptance or tolerance of students’ cultures and to move instead toward explicitly supporting aspects of their languages, literacies, and cultural traditions. Culturally sustaining pedagogy also encourages us to consider the term “culture” in a broader sense, including concepts such as popular, youth, and local culture alongside those associated with ethnicity.

Recently, educators have taken up culturally sustaining pedagogy within particular academic content areas. My colleagues (Rebecca Woodard, Andrea Vaughan, and Rick Coppola) and I have examined what culturally sustaining pedagogy might look like in literacy classrooms in Chicago, IL. We’ve found a few practices that literacy teachers might try as entry points to this work.

Seek out nontraditional texts. In our research, literacy teachers sought out nontraditional read-alouds and mentor texts for writing. We’ve documented teachers going beyond canonical texts and incorporating videos, student writing, poetry, and more into culturally sustaining units. Teachers might also consider using blog posts, memes, podcasts, and other artifacts as reading material or writing models. In addition to potentially promoting students’ cultures, languages, and literacies, these texts encourage broader ideas about what counts as reading and writing in schools.

Explore and model meshing languages. Language is a critical part of culture. Rather than require only “standard” English in the classroom, culturally sustaining literacy teachers explore, model, and support the meshing and blending of language varieties. We’ve documented teachers speaking and writing in ways that blend languages, dialects, and formal and informal registers. In addition to helping students see themselves in the texts they write, this approach helps students note complex power dynamics surrounding language use.

Encourage students to explore alternative cultural affiliations. Culturally sustaining literacy teachers understand that students engage with a wide range of cultural groups and encourage them to explore these affiliations. In our research, we’ve seen students explore Chicago culture, culinary culture, digital culture, and more. Teachers can ask students about spaces, places, and communities where they feel like cultural “insiders” and can help them connect with these communities in person or online. This practice helps students and teachers understand the complexity of culture and the multiple affiliations of every student.

These suggestions just scratch the surface of what it means to teach literacy in ways that are culturally sustaining. Teaching, like culture, is complex. However, by approaching our practices with this cultural complexity in mind, we may be able to see and understand our students’ languages, literacies, and cultural practices in deeper and more meaningful ways.
Come join your fellow UTEP graduates for a Friday Happy Hour “Chalk & Talk”
77 Ferry Street Newark, NJ
https://www.mompoutapas.com

This is a social catch-up, hang-out, fill-us-in on what’s new with you and your upcoming summer event. All UTEP grads are welcome—especially those we have not heard from in a long time!

We believe that by sustaining relationships between one another your teaching practice will grow exponentially!

Hope to see you there!!
RSVP by June 18th at induction.utep@rtugers.edu

Friday Fun Anyone?!?!
June 22nd 4pm
at Mompou Tapas Bar

Be sure you find some time this summer to take a break from thinking about teaching—and your students. Often when we let go of something and spend time experiencing and growing in other realms of our lives, we return to that something with new vision, new ideas, new inspiration. Here are a few local spots—and some just a train ride away—where you can rejuvenate, re-inspire, and re-boot in preparation for next fall.

1. **YMCA of Newark: 600 Broad Street, Newark NJ**
   http://www.newarkymca.org/
   Spin! Weights! Swim! Squash! Racquetball! Steam Room! Massage! Get your energy out, get your body in shape, and get your mind settled.

2. **Newark Museum: 49 Washington Street, Newark NJ**
   http://www.newarkmuseum.org/
   Whether it’s exploring the Arts of Global Africa, attending the Newark Black Film Festival, or listening to Jazz in the Garden, this place will surely fill your soul and your mind.

3. **Newark Yoga Movement:**
   https://www.newarkyogamovement.org/free-yoga
   Free yoga folks!! All over the city of Newark—all through the summer! Check it out! And don’t get caught figuring out how to plan for your students to be part of this…(wait until late August to do that©).

4. **Liberty State Park Summer Fest:**
   http://jerseycityculture.org/event/summer-fest-sunday-concert-series-4/
   Enjoy live music and dance under the stars with at NYC skyline view. Not to mention kayaking, barbequing, walking, biking, and touring in the park itself!

5. **498 Tui-Na Center:**
   498 6th Avenue, Manhattan
   This no-frills massage salon is clean, professional, and gives absolutely amazing massages—just what all of you deserve after a year’s work! And there aren’t many spots where you can get one hour for just $60!!

6. **Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge**
   Hiking, Wildlife Watching, Nature Center, Padling, & Great Meditation Spots! This is a very special place...

TAKE A BREAK!! YOU DESERVE IT!!