



Harvard Educational Review

Volume 79
Number 2

Summer 2009

ISSN
0017-8055

Copyright © 2009 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved.

Note to Educators: Hope Required When Growing Roses in Concrete

JEFFREY M. R. DUNCAN-ANDRADE
San Francisco State University

In this essay, Jeff Duncan-Andrade explores the concept of hope, which was central to the Obama campaign, as essential for nurturing urban youth. He first identifies three forms of “false hope” —hokey hope, mythical hope, and hope deferred—pervasive in and peddled by many urban schools. Discussion of these false hopes then gives way to Duncan-Andrade’s conception of “critical hope,” explained through the description of three necessary elements of educational practice that produce and sustain true hope. Through the voices of young people and their teachers, and the invocation of powerful metaphor and imagery, Duncan-Andrade proclaims critical hope’s significance for an education that relieves undeserved suffering in communities.

The idea that hope alone will transform the world, and action undertaken in that kind of naïveté, is an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism. But the attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion. (Freire, 1997, p. 8)

Barack Obama’s presidential campaign positioned him as the leader who could help restore hope to the nation. Drawing heavily from his widely read memoir *The Audacity of Hope* (2006), the campaign used hope as a core principle around which Obama laid out his vision for “reclaiming the American

dream.” However, Obama was not the first to use a framework of hope to generate social movement. Historically, hope has been a theme in the lives and movements of the poor and dispossessed in the United States. During the civil rights era, as well as other key historical moments of social change, the nation’s hope connected moral outrage to action aimed at resolving undeserved suffering.

In the past three decades, however, there has been an assault on hope, particularly in our nation’s urban centers. This attack has taken place on numerous fronts, including disinvestment in schools and overinvestment in a prison industrial complex. Such policies have eroded true hope and given rise to false hope, a reactionary distortion of the radical premise of hope. Therefore, this essay begins by cautioning educators against three types of false hope often promulgated in urban schools: hokey hope, mythical hope, and hope deferred.

The second half of this essay attends to the work of educators in rebuilding the critical hope that has been worn down in our communities. Such educators deliver us from false hope by teaching in ways that connect the moral outrage of young people to actions that relieve the undeserved suffering in their communities. The spread of this kind of educational practice in our schools adds to hopefulness because it develops a transgenerational capacity for long-term, sustainable, critical hope in communities. Brazilian critical educator Paulo Freire (1997) described this kind of hope as an “ontological need,” especially in the lives and the pedagogy of educators working in communities where forms of social misery seem to have taken up permanent residence. And so, on the heels of a hope-filled, history-making election that comes sixteen years into my calling as an urban schoolteacher, I also wish to share some reflections on three elements of educational practice that can build and sustain critical hope in urban schools.

Enemies of Hope

Hokey Hope

Optimism, Cornel West (2004) argues, “adopts the role of the spectator who surveys the evidence in order to infer that things are going to get better” (p. 296), even when the evidence does not warrant such a conclusion. This *hokey hope* is peddled in urban schools all the time. It is akin to what Martin Luther King Jr. (1963) referred to as “the tranquilizing drug of gradualism” (para. 5): an individualistic up-by-your-bootstraps hyperbole that suggests if urban youth just work hard, pay attention, and play by the rules, then they will go to college and live out the “American dream.” I do not condemn this false hope because I doubt the importance of time and hard work for creating change. Rather, this hope is “hokey” because it ignores the laundry list of inequities that impact the lives of urban youth long before they get to the under-resourced schools that reinforce an uneven playing field.

Angela Valenzuela’s *Subtractive Schooling* (1999) provides a profound examination of how hokey hope is manifested in Seguin High School, a predominantly Latino school in Texas. She argues that Seguin is indicative of a national culture of ineffective schools that is “structured around an *aesthetic* caring whose essence lies in an attention to things and ideas” (p. 22). Relationships between school officials and students become pragmatic, the teaching and learning process is strained, and an “impersonal and objective language, including such terms as goals, strategies, and standardized curricula, is used in decisions made by one group for another” (p. 22). This leads to a culture of false

caring, one in which the more powerful members of the relationship define themselves as caring despite the fact that the recipients of their so-called caring do not perceive it as such. Valenzuela's aesthetically caring teachers drew heavily from the work-ethic rhetoric to describe "good" students and doled out care in proportion to students' willingness to be accommodating of an unjust society and an unequal school.

Ultimately, hokey hope projects some kind of multicultural, middle-class opportunity structure that is inaccessible to the overwhelming majority of working-class, urban youth of color. This, in turn, largely delegitimizes the pain that urban youth experience as a result of a persistently unequal society. It is a false hope informed by privilege and rooted in the optimism of the spectator who needs not suffer—a "let them eat cake" utterance that reveals a fundamental incomprehension of suffering.

Mythical Hope

Obama's election has the potential to contribute to *mythical hope*, what Roland Barthes (1972) might have described as a false narrative of equal opportunity emptied of its historical and political contingencies. The significance of the election of a black man as the president of this country is undeniable, especially given our past and present national failure to meet the challenge of racial equality. But immediately after an election that few would have predicted, the overstatement of its significance began; it became naturalized as the consequence of a fictitious color-blind society. In John McCain's (2008) concession speech, after referencing the white rage that followed Booker T. Washington's dinner with President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House in 1901, McCain proclaimed:

America today is a world away from the cruel and prideful bigotry of that time. There is no better evidence of this than the election of an African American to the presidency of the United States. Let there be no reason now for any American to fail to cherish their citizenship in this, the greatest nation on Earth. (para. 6)

McCain's insinuation that this election signifies the "end of racism" (D'Souza, 1995) is mythmaking. His statement ignores the fact that people of color trail their white counterparts on virtually every indicator of social, political, and economic well-being. Educators must not use Obama's election as evidence that we have emerged victorious in our battle with racism or with any of the oppressions (classism, patriarchy, xenophobia, homophobia) that continue to cripple our society. Obama (2006) himself preempted this argument by pointing out:

To say that we are one people is not to suggest that race no longer matters. . . . To suggest that our racial attitudes play no part in . . . disparities is to turn a blind eye to both our history and our experience—and to relieve ourselves of the responsibility to make things right. (pp. 232–233)

Perhaps this is why West (2008) describes Obama's election as sitting precariously between an example of the American dream coming true and "the grand exhaustion of the dream built on the success of any one individual" (pp. 58–59). Educators must understand that Obama's election gives us "hope on a tightrope," because a single event cannot, by itself, provide the healing and long-term sustenance required to maintain hope amid conditions of suffering. Obama's election *is* change, and

he may even give us some reason to be hopeful. Time will tell. But he neither embodies nor can he produce a fundamental departure from the inequities our children experience in the classroom. No president, no policy, and no program can do this for us. To claim otherwise is to peddle a mythical hope.

Mythical hope is a profoundly ahistorical and depoliticized denial of suffering that is rooted in celebrating individual exceptions. These individuals are used to construct a myth of meritocracy that simultaneously fetishizes them as objects of that myth. Ultimately, mythical hope depends on luck and the law of averages to produce individual exceptions to the tyranny of injustice, and thus it denies the legitimacy of the suffering of the oppressed. Educators must avoid the trap of overstating the significance of Obama's election for teaching and learning in urban schools, because, at the end of the day, we are the ones who create classrooms that instill in our young people the "audacity to hope" (Wright, 1990).

Hope Deferred

Hope deferred, constructed on a progressive politics of despair, is a common justification for poor teaching. It hides behind misinterpretations of research that connect the material conditions of poverty to the constraints placed on schools. Many teachers feel overwhelmed by the challenges urban youth face in their lives and consider themselves ill-equipped to respond with a pedagogy that will develop hope in the face of such daunting hardships. They are liberal-minded enough to avoid "blaming the victim," turning instead to blaming the economy, the violence in society, the lack of social services, the "system." These teachers have a critique of social inequality but cannot manifest this critique in any kind of transformative pedagogical project (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). They "hope" for change in its most deferred forms: either a collective utopia of a future reformed society or, more often, the individual student's future ascent to the middle class.

However, according to S. Leonard Syme (2004), professor emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health, hope should be thought of as "control of destiny" (p. 3), an actively present sense of agency to manage the immediate stressors in one's daily life. He argues that recent research into the importance of hope for life outcomes is a "major breakthrough in thinking" for scholars in public health and epidemiology (p. 3). Syme attributes the genesis of this breakthrough to the groundbreaking Whitehall studies, which led to revelations that the distribution of "virtually every disease in every industrialized country in the world" (p. 3) was remarkably well-correlated with social class. For a growing number of scholars, the most likely explanation for the unequal distribution of health is the unequal distribution of hope along the social gradient.

At the bottom of this social gradient, where urban youth are positioned, this "control of destiny" is almost nonexistent. David Williams, of the Harvard School of Public Health, argues that this results in the

accumulation of multiple negative stressors, and it's so many of them it's as if someone is being hit from every single side. And, it's not only that they are dealing with a lot of stress, [it's that] they have few resources to cope. (Adelman, 2008)

The exposure to chronic stress associated with living in these types of "socially toxic environments"

(Garbarino, 1995) is now thought of as one of the most—if not *the* most—significant contributors to poor health. This research helps us understand that many of the health problems plaguing poor communities result from “unnatural causes” (Adelman, 2008), confirming what we have known intuitively for years: inequality *is* making us sick.

The implications of chronic stress for teaching and learning are profound. Consider Abraham Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs, which defined a person’s primary human needs (food, clothing, shelter, and safety) as prerequisites for pursuing needs higher up on the scale (such as education). When we connect the dots between Maslow’s framework and the latest research on inequality, a serious dilemma is revealed for urban youth whose exposure to unremitting stressors leaves most, sometimes all, of their primary human needs under constant attack. When we are unwilling to confront these harsh realities of social inequality with our pedagogy—to cultivate their “control of destiny”—all we have left to offer youth is hope deferred. This offer comes when we ask our students to set their sights on some temporally distant (and highly unlikely) future well-being. There is nothing wrong with setting long-term goals with students, but hope deferred advocates that students take a path that the educator is unwilling to help them find. This student path is almost always individualistic in nature and requires a level of sacrifice that most teachers themselves are loath to make. Eventually students come to perceive a significant gap between their most pressing needs and the education we offer them. When they figure out that the teacher is unwilling and/or unable to close this gap, their hope is deferred. And just as Martin Luther King Jr. foretold of justice, hope too long deferred is hope denied.

Critical Hope: The Enemy of Hopelessness

On the flipside of these false hopes lies critical hope, which rejects the despair of hopelessness and the false hopes of “cheap American optimism” (West, 2008, p. 41). Critical hope demands a committed and active struggle “against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, and personal despair” (West, 2004, pp. 296–297). There are three elements of critical hope: material, Socratic, and audacious. Unlike the forms of false hope, which can operate independent of one another, these three elements of critical hope must operate holistically and, in fact, are mutually constitutive. I have wrestled them apart only for the purpose of analytic convenience.

Tupac Shakur (1999) referred to young people who emerge in defiance of socially toxic environments as the “roses that grow from concrete.” Concrete is one of the worst imaginable surfaces in which to grow, devoid of essential nutrients and frequently contaminated by pollutants. Any growth in such an environment is painful because all of the basic requirements for healthy development (sun, water, and nutrient-rich soil) must be hard-won. The ability to control, in a material way, the litany of social stressors that result from growing up in concrete is nearly impossible for urban youth. Educators committed to *material hope* engage their work by tempering this reality with the acknowledgment that there are always cracks in concrete. The quality of our teaching, along with the resources and networks we connect our students to, are those cracks. They do not create an ideal environment for growth, but they afford some leaking in of sunlight, water, and other resources that provide the material justification to hope. The courage to pursue the painful path of bursting through those jagged cracks in the concrete is what I call *Socratic hope*. The solidarity to share in others’ suffering, to sacrifice self so that other roses may bloom, to collectively struggle to replace the concrete completely with a rose garden is what I call *audacious hope*. The following sections discuss each of these

elements in turn.

Material Hope

Material hope is one element of the critical hope that teachers can cultivate in their students, and it comes from the sense of control young people have when they are given the resources to “deal with the forces that affect their lives” (Syme, 2004, p. 3). It seems like a simple point, but teachers who want to build material hope must understand that quality teaching is the most significant “material” resource they have to offer youth. The best of the research in our field defines “quality” in teaching by our ability to produce student growth across assessment measures (grades, social development, test scores, student engagement, etc.). To accomplish this, we have to bust the false binary that suggests we must choose between an academically rigorous pedagogy and one geared toward social justice. An English teacher participating in my three-year study of successful urban educators in Los Angeles put it this way:

Terms are not difficult to teach. The question, really, is will you take the time to make the things you teach relevant to students? The terms I teach are present in students’ lives every day. But most people try to teach them strictly by using textbooks, worksheets, or the literature. I teach them using life and then it’s much easier for students to connect them to what they are reading.¹

The most effective urban educators, in every discipline at every grade level, connect the academic rigor of content areas with their students’ lives (Duncan-Andrade, 2007). If we are serious about giving our children hope, we must reflect on how to connect our pedagogy to the harsh realities of poor, urban communities. An e-mail to me from Ms. Truth, a fourth-grade teacher in Los Angeles, reveals the magnitude of this undertaking:

Today was an almost unbearably sad day at school. According to my students (all of which were SOBBING) two young men were sitting in a car yesterday afternoon. Some men in a car rolled up, got out and shot one in the eye (his head exploded) there was a 3-month old in the back seat (she was left “unharmd”) the other got out and ran (they call him “baby” Marcus) the guys ran after him and shot him in the back and then more when he fell. . . . The nephew of one is in my class, the brother of the other is in Mr. [Randall’s] class. This is a close community so word spread pretty rapidly yesterday. For an hour and a half [this morning] the kids all just talked and cried. I felt ill-equipped to handle a crisis like this but, we got through it. . . . I said as little as possible, I cried with the kids, we all consoled each other, and others began sharing different stories of violence and loss. In the end, I did what I thought (and hope) was best, tried to empower them with the belief that they must work to become the warriors who combat the senseless violence and madness on the streets. . . . We’re making cards, and going to send a little money to the families. The kids all seem to feel a little better. How would you handle this? It looks as if many teachers didn’t say or do much. Feeling a bit weary today.

In most urban schools, there is no formal structure to prepare or support teachers to handle such tragic events. The result is that, as Ms. Truth mentions, most teachers avoid or ignore tragedies that take

place in the community. But the effective teachers I have studied do not.

Ms. Truth's class collected over \$100 for the family. She delivered the money, along with several cards expressing condolences, at the funeral of one of the murdered young men. Here, effective teaching included literally generating material resources, and in my research I have witnessed underpaid teachers providing laptops, housing, food, supplies, car rides, and links to legal and medical services. But, more importantly, an effective teacher is herself a *material* resource: an indispensable person who can connect schooling to the real, *material* conditions of urban life.

Socratic Hope

West (2001) describes "Socratic sensibility" as the understanding of both Socrates' statement that "the unexamined life is not worth living" and Malcolm X's extension that the "examined life is painful."² *Socratic hope* requires both teachers and students to painfully examine our lives and actions within an unjust society and to share the sensibility that pain may pave the path to justice. In my research, effective educators teach Socratic hope by treating the righteous indignation in young people as a strength rather than something deserving of punishment; Freire (2004) called this a "pedagogy of indignation." The moments of despair and rage that urban youth feel are not only understandable, they are, as West (2004) proclaims, an "appropriate response to an absurd situation" (p. 295). He goes on to argue that youth

are saying they want to see a sermon, not hear one. They want an example. They want to be able to perceive in palpable concrete form how these channels will allow them to vent their rage constructively and make sure that it will have an impact. (p. 296)

To show the sermon, rather than preach it, is the essence of Socratic hope.

Darnell, an eleventh-grade student of one of the effective teachers I have studied, explained that this type of teacher-student relationship forms as the result of pedagogy that prioritizes the humanization of students above all else:

In [Mr. Lapu's] class we bonded because we all gave each other a chance to humanize ourselves and let us know each other's stories . . . [and] after that we looked at each other different. After I told my narrative, I humanized myself and then . . . they stopped looking at me as just a gang-banger and they started looking at me as a smart black man. I don't want you to acknowledge me as a gang-banger, which happened. I want you to acknowledge me as [Darnell]. He helped us humanize each other, and that's how it was.

It was beautiful just knowing that my classmate that's sitting right next to me is fighting the same fight that I'm fighting. So, I got his back. That was beautiful, just knowing that we're going through the same shit. From the 'hood to school. When we walk to school, we gotta dodge a bullet like every day. That's your struggle? Well that's my struggle, too. Let's just handle this right here, so we don't gotta go through this four years from now. We felt comfortable that [Mr. Lapu] had our back, and that's just all it is.

Educators who foster this type of solidarity with and among students recognize the distinction

between being liked and being loved by their students. As Ms. Truth explained, being liked comes from avoiding unpleasant situations, whereas being loved is often painful:

Many of these teachers are so afraid that students won't like them if they discipline them that they end up letting students do things that they would never permit from their own children. They lower their standards and will take any old excuse from students for why they did not do their homework, or why they cannot sit still in class or do their work. Not me. You gotta work in my class. I can be unrelenting at times, probably even overbearing. Oh, I might give a student slack here or there, but most of the time I'm like, "go tell it to someone else because I'm not trying to hear that from you right now. We've got work to do."

For urban youth, their evaluation of which side of the loved-liked line an educator stands on is often based on whether we share the painful path with them: Do we make the self-sacrifices in our own lives that we are asking them to make? Do we engage in the Socratic process of painful scrutiny about these sacrifices? Do we have the capacity and commitment to support students when they struggle to apply that framework in their lives? Teachers who meet these challenges are beloved by students. The sacrifices they make and the solidarity it produces earn them the right to demand levels of commitment that often defy even the students' own notion of their capabilities. Teachers who fall short can be liked but not loved, and this means they are unable to push the limits of students' abilities; they cannot take them down the painful path.

With teachers I have studied, the move from liked to loved did not happen because of the demands they made of students. It happened because of the level of self-sacrifice, love, and support that accompanied those raised expectations. Sometimes this was simple encouragement, but many times it meant amplifying the material hope they were giving to students. This support took many forms: afterschool and weekend tutoring; countless meals and rides home; phone/text/email/instant messaging sessions; and endless prodding, cajoling, and all-around positive harassment. These additional investments of time and money clarified for students the idea that with raised expectations came the teacher's willingness to sacrifice in order to help students along the way.

The development of these trusting relationships also resulted in these teachers feeling indignant about student failure. They saw student failure as their own failure and, consequently, engaged in painful self-critique to determine more appropriate future actions. They never excused students from their responsibilities, and they never let themselves slip into despair—rather, the Socratic project contributed to their hope that they would be more successful next time.

Socrates said that "all great undertakings are risky, and, as they say, what is worth while is always difficult" (Plato, 2003, p. 220). As educators, we must take great risks and accept great challenges if we are going to be effective in urban schools. We must confront our failures and know that no matter what we do in our classrooms, there will still be forms of social misery that confront our students. This kind of self-reflection will be painful, but it is necessary all the same.

Audacious Hope

Our nation expends a good deal of effort trying to avoid what Carl Jung (1970) referred to as

“legitimate suffering,” or the pain of the human experience. The stockpiling of resources in privileged portions of the population so that they may be “immune” to suffering, while heaping the unnatural causes of socially toxic environments onto others, creates undeserved suffering while simultaneously delegitimizing it. In the face of these conditions, critical hope is audacious in two ways. First, it boldly stands in solidarity with urban communities, sharing the burden of their undeserved suffering as a manifestation of a humanizing hope in our collective capacity for healing. Second, critical hope audaciously defies the dominant ideology of defense, entitlement, and preservation of privileged bodies at the expense of the policing, disposal, and dispossession of marginalized “others.” We cannot treat our students as “other people’s children” (Delpit, 1995)—their pain *is* our pain. False hope would have us believe in individualized notions of success and suffering, but audacious hope demands that we reconnect to the collective by struggling alongside one another, sharing in the victories *and* the pain. This solidarity is the essential ingredient for “radical healing” (Ginwright, 2009), and healing is an often-overlooked factor for improving achievement in urban schools.

This is the inescapable challenge before us as urban educators, and it is often misunderstood. Too many of us try to create classroom spaces that are safe from righteous rage, or, worse, we design plans to weed out children who display it. The question we should be grappling with is not how to manage students with these emotions, but how to help students channel them. The way I take on this challenge is by thinking about my classroom as a micro-ecosystem. Ecologists would tell me that to build a healthy micro-ecosystem, I need to understand the principle of interdependency—in short, that both pain and healing are transferable from person to person inside the classroom. They would also note that the classroom is not a closed micro-ecosystem; I should be aware of external toxins that will be carried into it. I have virtually no control over the array of social toxins to which my students are exposed in the meta-ecosystem of our society, but I can control how I respond to them in my classroom. This gives me, and my students, the audacity to hope.

The pain that our young people carry manifests itself in my classroom in a variety of ways. Sometimes it takes an obvious form like an outpouring of emotion, which might even be directed at me or another student. Usually that pain reveals itself more subtly, in the classic forms of depression (fatigue, sadness, or self-deprecation). In these moments, when a child can no longer contain the pain she feels, my response has the potential to add to it or to begin the healing process. We may think that if we send out the “disobedient” child, we have removed the pain from our system. It simply does not work that way. Rather, when we exclude a child, we introduce another social stressor into the micro-ecosystem. We rationalize the exclusion by telling ourselves that we have pulled a weed from the garden, allowing for a healthier environment for the other children to grow. This ignores the fact that every student in our classroom is part of a delicate balance built on interdependency. K. Wayne Yang, an urban science and math teacher for more than seventeen years, and one of the finest educators I have known in my career, put it this way: “All my students are indigenous to my classroom and therefore there are no weeds in my classroom.”³ From this perspective, the decision to remove a child, rather than to heal her, is not only bad for the child but is also destructive to the social ecosystem of the classroom.

I have been teaching long enough to know the enormity of this challenge, particularly because these moments almost always happen when I am convinced we are doing something of the utmost importance in the classroom. But then I think to myself, how did I get to a place where I am prioritizing lesson plans over healing a child in pain? This choice not only ignores my most basic

sensibilities as a teacher, it also disregards years of research documenting the importance of self-esteem, trust, and hope as preconditions for positive educational outcomes. As educators we tend to seriously underestimate the impact our response has on the other students in the class. They are watching us when we interact with their peers. When we become frustrated and punish youth who manifest symptoms of righteous rage or social misery, we give way to legitimate doubts among other students about our capacity to meet their needs if they are ever in pain.

At the end of the day, effective teaching depends most heavily on one thing: deep and caring relationships. Herb Kohl (1995) describes “willed not learning” as the phenomenon by which students try *not* to learn from teachers who don’t authentically care about them. The adage “students don’t care what you know until they know that you care” is supported by numerous studies of effective educators (Akom, 2003; Delpit, 1995; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994). To provide the “authentic care” (Valenzuela, 1999) that students require from us as a precondition for learning from us, we must connect our indignation over all forms of oppression with an audacious hope that we can act to change them. Hokey hope would have us believe this change will not cost us anything. This kind of false hope is mendacious; it never acknowledges pain. Audacious hope stares down the painful path; and despite the overwhelming odds against us making it down that path to change, we make the journey again and again. There is no other choice. Acceptance of this fact allows us to find the courage and the commitment to cajole our students to join us on that journey. This makes us better people as it makes us better teachers, and it models for our students that the painful path *is* the hopeful path.

License to Hope Audaciously

Obama has given us license to reinsert hope into the mainstream educational discourse. He has called for a “radical transformation” of urban schools, placing emphasis on the “recruitment and training of transformative principals and more effective teachers” (Obama, 2006, p. 161). This will require serious attention to revamping teacher recruitment, credentialing, and support structures so that schools can attract, reward, and retain educators who come to the profession with demonstrated commitments to critical hope. Can we meet such a challenge? Only with a hard look at what hope really means in the lives of urban youth.

There is a well-documented changing of the guard taking place in teaching (NCTAF, 2003) as upward of one million new teachers, mostly in urban schools, will join the profession within this decade. This brings with it an unprecedented opportunity to swing the pendulum toward educational equity. We can, if we so desire, invest heavily in refocusing our efforts to recruit, train, and develop urban educators who are committed to shifting the tide in urban schools from despair to hope. Research in other fields identifies hope as one of the most promising responses to the conditions of urban inequality (Syme, 2004; Wilson, Minkler, Dasho, Wallerstein, & Martin, 2008), suggesting that hope has major implications for successful teaching (and for raising test scores). Educational research suggests that we can know what makes urban educators effective. We can name the characteristics of effective practice. We can link those characteristics to increases in engagement and achievement. If we fail to significantly invest in the support and development of these characteristics in this new wave of teachers, it will not be for lack of know-how but for the lack of determination to provide hope to all our young people.

The radical transformation that Obama is calling for will not occur unless we treat every classroom as having the potential to be a crack in the metaphorical concrete that creates unnatural causes in the lives of urban youth. For those of us who will be working alongside this next generation of teachers, we must purposefully nurture our students, colleagues, and ourselves through the cracks, knowing we will sustain the trauma of damaged petals along the way. It is essential that we understand these damaged petals as the attributes of indignation, tenacity, and audacity. They are *not* the social stressors we are trying to overcome, and they must not be misinterpreted as deficits in our students. We must implore our colleagues to recognize that our damaged petals, and those of our students, are not what need to be reformed out of us; they are what need to be celebrated about us. Each time we convey this—the true value of the painful path—we are building critical hope in the person next to us who wonders if they, too, can make it through the crack. Obama’s campaign has had this galvanizing effect for some, enrapturing the nation with a level of hope that we have not seen for quite some time, particularly among young people. But for me the success of his campaign has been yet another reminder that I teach teachers and I teach the youth in my community because I hope, audaciously.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, quotes from teachers and students are from interviews and conversations that took place during my study of exceptional teachers in Los Angeles between 2002 and 2005 (see Duncan-Andrade, 2007).
2. In his 2001 lecture, West credits Malcolm X with this statement. Socrates made this point in section 38A of Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*.
3. I am indebted to Mr. Yang for our extensive conversations about the development of the ideas presented in this essay.

References

- Adelman, L. (Executive Producer). (2008). *Unnatural causes: Is inequality making us sick?* [Television Series]. San Francisco, CA: California News Reel.
- Akom, A. A. (2003). “Re-examining resistance as oppositional behavior: The Nation of Islam and the creation of a black achievement ideology.” *Sociology of Education*, 76 (4), 305–325.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. London: Fontana.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people’s children*. New York: New Press.
- D’Souza, D. (1995). *The end of racism: Principles for a multiracial society*. New York: Free Press.
- Duncan-Andrade, J. (2007). “Gangstas, wankstas, and ridas: Defining, developing, and supporting effective teachers in urban schools.” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(6), 617–638.
- Freire, P. (1997). *Pedagogy of hope*. New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of indignation*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Garbarino, J. (1995). *Raising children in a socially toxic environment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Ginwright, S. (2009). *Black youth rising: Race, activism, and radical healing in urban America*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Jung, C. G. (1970). *Psychology and religion: West and east* (G. Adler & R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In G. Adler & R. F. C. Hull (Series Eds.), *Collected works of C. G. Jung, Vol. 11* (2nd ed.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

King, M. L. K., Jr. (1963, August 28). "I have a dream." March on Washington. Washington, DC. 28 Aug. 1963. Retrieved February 5, 2009, from <http://www.mlkonline.net/dream.html>

Kohl, H. (1995). *"I won't learn from you": And other thoughts on creative maladjustment*. New York: New Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Maslow, A. H. (1943). "A theory of human motivation." *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396.

McCain, J. (2008). "McCain's concession speech." Retrieved January 3, 2009, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/04/us/politics/04text-mccain.html>

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (2003). *No dream denied: A pledge to America's children*. Washington, DC.

Obama, B. (2006). *The audacity of hope: Thoughts on reclaiming the American dream*. New York: Random House.

Plato. (2003). *The republic* (D. Lee, Trans.). London: Penguin Press.

Shakur, T. (1999). *The rose that grew from concrete*. New York: Pocket Books.

Solórzano, D., & Delgado-Bernal, D. (2001). "Examining transformational resistance through a critical race and LatCrit theory framework: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban context." *Urban Education*, 36 (3), 308–342.

Syme, S. L. (2004). "Social determinants of health: The community as empowered partner." *Preventing Chronic Disease: Public Health Research, Practice, and Policy*, 1(1), 1–4.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling*. Albany: SUNY Press.

West, C. (2001). *Progressive politics in these times*. Mario Savio Annual Lecture Series. Berkeley, CA.

West, C. (2004). "The impossible will take a little while." In P. Rogat (Ed.), *The impossible will take a*

little while: A citizen's guide to hope in a time of fear (pp. 293–297). New York: Basic Books.

West, C. (2008). *Hope on a tightrope*. New York: Smiley Books.

Wilson, N., Minkler, M., Dasho, S., Wallerstein, N., & Martin, A. (2008). "Getting to social action: The youth empowerment strategies (YES!) project." *Health Promotion Practice*, 9(4), 395–403.

Wright, J. (1990). "The audacity to hope." *Preaching Today*. Retrieved February 5, 2009, from <http://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/audacityofhope.html>.



[Back to Table of Contents](#)



[Send a Letter to the Editors](#)



[Back to HER Home Page](#)