

Foreword: Respiration

By definition, the word respiration means “the action of breathing”. On the 1998 hip-hop classic titled *Respiration*, Mos Def, Talib Kweli, and Common give a vivid account of life in the urban complex - New York City. Each individual is known for their lyrical prowess, and each gives a masterful depiction of the poverty, crime, despair, confusion, joy, and opportunity that awaits each individual within the concrete jungle. The signature soft-spoken introduction whispers in Spanish, *escuchela, la ciudad respirando* – which translates into English as, listen to it, the city breathing. In essence, their major assertion is that while citizens are engaging in their own routines, the city, as a living organism of sorts, is engaging in its own regimen. The city’s respiration is often something that gets lost as people go about their daily routines. The city is impacted by individuals’ decisions yet simultaneous it is impacting individuals’ decisions. This respiration per say indicates that the city is constantly in a state of expansion and retraction. From the artists’ perspectives, for one to begin to understand how different aspects of the city work cohesively, one must pause and examine what, why, and how we as individuals partake in our own respiration within the city. What we inhale from the city, is as important as what we exhale back into it (i.e., time, finances, energy, effort, etc.)

In the field of urban education, we as scholars require our own respiration, “the action(s) of inhaling and exhaling the contents, matters, issues, and opportunities surrounding education in urban communities”. The list of important scholars who have inhaled the essence of urban education to put forth critical and timely works is extensive. From W.E.B. Dubois’, *Philadelphia Negro*, Carter G. Woodson’s *Mis-Education of the Negro*, Patricia Hill Collins’ *Black Feminist Thought*, Sonia Nieto’s *What Keeps Teachers Going?*, Gloria Ladson-Billings’ *The Dreamkeepers*, Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and many others; each contribution has strengthened the conceptualization of what urban education is, and how – collectively – members of urban communities can work to make education more responsible and equitable towards all students. As years of research has explicated what constitutes the significant issues in urban education, as scholars, we are charged with reanalyzing these pertinent issues and incorporating other relevant topics that have relatively gone unnoticed. How we give voice to certain topics is just as important as how we reflect on the topic itself, within the totality of historical and contemporary factors that create these same topics. This type of critical examination serves two purposes. First, as critically conscious scholars, our work should directly benefit students, educators, and community members. Secondly, the work must also serve as the substance that expands the respiratory capacity of urban education. In other words, high-quality, asset-based contributions to the field should inspire urban education scholars to address age old issues with more vigor, and attempt to discover new challenges in an effort to prevent emerging issues from becoming systemic.

Present in this special issue are authors whose works inject a fresh analysis of issues and opportunities that exist in urban education. Collectively, they address a myriad of topics such as teacher preparation, standardized testing, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, teacher stress, and the operationalizing of high expectations for Black students. The first manuscript, *Black Teachers Matter: Examining the Depths of Seven Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCUs) Teacher Preparation Programs* by Lee, takes a reflective look at HBCUs as a viable platform to increasing the number of Black teachers in the U.S. teacher workforce. Furthermore, Lee’s analysis of HBCU is situated in Ladson-Billings’ (2000) framework, and sheds light on how all teacher preparation programs can incorporate culturally responsive/competent ideologies through course sequences. Following up on the immediate needs of teachers, Schmidt and Jones-Fosu offer a much-needed analysis of teachers in urban schools, and level of stress they

encounter. Their piece, *Teacher Stress in Urban Classrooms: A Growing Epidemic*, looks at profiles of stress and burnout to offer a glimpse, from the perspectives of teachers, of the level of stress they encounter in their positions. This work puts forth solutions for how school administrators and district level personnel can better support teachers in urban classrooms. Concluding the section on teachers Gilley and Aranda's, *Closing the Revolving Door: Year-Long Residency Prepares Preservice Teachers for Urban Schools*, delves into the experiences of four preservice teachers in Texas, who spent an entire year completing their clinical teaching assignments at Title I schools in Houston, Texas. As part of a pilot program through Texas A&M University, these individuals were immersed in multicultural teaching experiences, so as to better prepare them to educate students, regardless of where they secured employment upon gaining their teacher licensure.

Despite strong efforts to help teachers utilize the cultural assets that students bring into the classroom, the stagnant presence of standardized testing forces teachers in many low-performing and under-resourced schools to negate these assets and instruct students towards the test. Robinson and Dervin's, *Teach to the Student, Not the Test*, is a signature reminder that almost two decades worth of standardized testing as the result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has not served to improve education outcomes for students; rather it has worked to exacerbate the Black-White achievement gap, which was already an issue prior to this federal law. Another issue which arose from NCLB is the testing of English language learners on subjects, with the test content being provided in English rather than in their home language. Seeking to reaffirm the importance of cultural/linguistic diversity, Acosta and Sanczyk's piece titled, *Language or Cognition? Using Culturally Responsive Teaching with English Language Learners*, sheds light on the need to better prepare teachers to incorporate culturally responsive teaching practices as a manner to support the academic growth of English Language Learners. Acosta and Sanczyk offer tangible methods for teachers to incorporate students cultural and linguistic backgrounds into the content being offered. In conjunction, Hancock and Sanczyk's work, *Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness: Empowering Spanish-speaking English Language Learners through Dual Language*, explores the different connotations of dual language programs. In their analysis, they explicitly map out the different models and characteristics of dual language programs. Their work explores five large urban school districts, with a large concentration of Spanish-speaking English language learners to see which models are being employed.

The last article, *High Expectations: Increasing Outcomes for Black Students in Urban Schools*, Lewis and Hunt revisit two pertaining topics – educators' deficit-thinking and punitive school discipline practices – and the impact that each has on limiting academic opportunities for Black students in the classroom. Their analysis asserts that while there is a plethora of research on each topic, Black students are still in dire need of educators who view them as assets in the classroom, and who offer culturally relevant pedagogical practices in a concerted effort.

Contemporaneous, the works presented in this issue of the *Urban Education Research and Policy Annuals* seek to extend and invigorate the conversation on how to best meet the needs of teachers, Black students, and English Language Learners in urban classroom. There is still plenty of work to be done to eliminate numerous systemic and structural issues that contribute to inequities in K-20 educational environments. However, the information presented in this issue and the journal overall is the byproduct of scholars inhaling what is occurring in urban education and exhaling timely and valuable recommendations that can reconceptualize what urban education is today – and in the future.

Dr. John Andrew Williams III
Special Guest Editor

References

- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. (1899). *The Philadelphia Negro: A social study* (No. 14). Published for the University.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Greene, T. K., Smith, D. T., Lynn, L. R., & Tony Cottrell. (1998). Respiration [Recorded by Mos Def, Talib Kweli, Hi-Tek as Black Star and Common]. On *Black Star* [Vinyl], New York, NY: Rawkus Records.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Fighting for our lives: Preparing teachers to teach African American students. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 51(3), 206-214.
- Nieto, S. (2003). *What keeps teachers going?*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Woodson, C. G. (2006). *The mis-education of the Negro*.