



# **URBAN PUBLIC EDUCATION**

## **What Can We Do?**

### **Principles of a New Model**

A TREATISE

Dennis Kevin Gregory

## Introduction

There is general agreement by most that the public schools in our urban areas are, for whatever reasons, not creating the desired student outcomes that are desperately needed. In addition, there is also little disagreement that without a quality education, especially for young adults, there is almost **no hope** that the socially stressed neighborhoods that these public schools exist in will ever experience a change for the better. I happily admit that there are indeed scattered high success stories that need more public exposure. These, unfortunately, are few and far between.

The futures of young people in our inner cities will continue to be bleak unless we find new workable, and possibly radical, ideas to improve public school education. One could credibly argue that *society as a whole* will continue to suffer in multiple ways as the crime, drugs, teenage pregnancies and violence in these economically and socially stressed neighborhoods spiral out of control with no end in sight. According to Michael Porter, “the economic distress of America’s inner cities may be the most pressing issue facing the nation” (1). This statement clearly supports my conclusion that improving urban public school education must be a priority for this country if we are to continue to thrive and be competitive in the global economy.

Additionally, who would disagree that *their hard earned* taxpayer funds could find more positive uses than to continue to support the increasing costs of prisons, social services, health care, police, rehabilitation centers and housing subsidies that are the direct costs of sustaining these unfortunate environments? The fact that our great country has the largest percentage of its population in prison in all the so-called advanced societies is quite telling.

This research paper looks to understand and address the problems of improving public school education in these urban areas. I am one who believes that improving urban public education is one of the best investments in the future of our country.

In truth, the main intent of this research paper, besides accelerating the public discourse, is to create a working design concept and set of philosophical principles to be used in proposing an alternative model of public education in urban settings that is fully aligned with the very challenging complexities and dynamics of our increasingly interconnected world. This new concept will introduce a new technology infrastructure and its usage that is based on and supported by the findings from this research paper. I will officially present, for discussion and analysis, a radical departure from the current physical student classroom learning environment by unveiling a new state-of-the art student desktop specifically designed around the findings from this research and my own vision.

## **Research Findings**

### The Literature Review

This literature review will be divided into four main sections. The first section will discuss the complexity of the problem itself. It should be noted here that this research into public education is being analyzed initially from a business perspective inasmuch as the intent is to view it as a complex organization with various inputs needed to create a desired output; which, in this case, is student outcomes. The second section will focus on the principles, theories and analysis of past, present and future models of public school education. The third section will be a

reality check and examine actual data and information to see what all the recent reform efforts and movements have truly accomplished. The fourth section will be a recap from other research methods including storytelling and question and answer. Let's rock.

### The Complexity of Public Education

I believe that before one decides to make a career out of improving public education in urban areas, a healthy respect for the level of the complexity of the problem should create a real sense of humility in him or her. One should quickly realize that the issues are gigantic in scope and that there is no one size fits all solution. I will begin my analysis on the complexity of the problem itself with the intent to show that an entirely new thinking is in order.

My initial examination of the complexity itself began with a more theoretical and holistic look at education. According to Roger Lewin and Birute Regine, "where once the natural world was viewed as linear and mechanistic, where simple cause and effect solutions were expected to explain the complex phenomena of nature, scientists now realize that much of their world is predominantly nonlinear and **organic**, characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability"(16). They further argue that with the world becoming much more complex and difficult to predict outcomes, a new thinking is required. I am in complete agreement with them on this. Just as *I* suggest, these authors are not giving specific solutions to today's problems, but instead are claiming that old thought patterns and ideas need to be discarded in favor of completely new thinking.

As an example of this new thinking, principles of the new sciences of complexity and chaos theories have the potential of adding fresh new insights, and can be of great value as a means of alternative thinking in solving modern urban education problems. Chaos theory,

according to Dictionary.com is “the study of unpredictable and complex dynamic systems that are highly sensitive to small changes in external conditions.” This definition surely fits well in regards to the external social, technical, financial, human and political systems that have huge sensitivities in their relations to urban public school systems.

Vicente Valle Jr. links both chaos and complexity together when he says that “a complex system is one in which numerous independent elements continuously interact and spontaneously organize and reorganize themselves into more and more elaborate structures over time” (5). In my opinion, this is precisely what happens in large complex organizations like the Chicago Public School system. In addition, Speaker John Goodlad, during a conference at Southern Illinois University, told the audience “we are slowly coming to realize that many of the principles and models that have guided such things as our economic development, land use, energy use and distribution, and management are anachronistic. As we come to better understand, we will presumably align our practices with more appropriate theories. The same thing must occur with regard to education in the schools.” In other words, he is telling us that our current models and thinking about education are outmoded. I could not agree more.

Adding to this analysis on the complexity of public education, John Meyer, in a paper on educational system complexity by Stanford University, analyzes “the effects of the changing American institutional context on the administrative load built into school district structures” (6). The author goes on to say that there has been a significant change in the environment of public education over the last century where funding and control has moved away from the local community to both state and federal agencies. He further states that “by many lines of theory, organizations facing multiple and complex environments tend to be complex in their internal structures” (7). He probably should have added that when you factor in the wholly unpredictable

interactions in the human relationships, those internal structures tend to get *even more* complex over time.

If these thoughts and findings are true, and I believe that they are, one can easily conclude that time is not on our side, and that if no solutions are forthcoming, the future of urban education will simply become too complex to solve; hence my rationale for the urgency of this issue. Current economic headlines proclaim the fact that some of our corporate institutions are simply too big and too important to fail. Unfortunately, this is indeed true and is used as the rationale for the enormous federal bail outs to keep them afloat. I emphatically state that the institutions of public education fall into that same category. Their failure will, in my opinion, have catastrophic long term effects on this great nation of ours. If they are allowed to continue to deteriorate and eventually fail, we will see ourselves returned to the days of the Wild West where guns made law and killing and violence was the norm. One does not need to be a fortune teller to see that this is indeed coming; as our school age children being gunned down in the streets in broad daylight by gun toting gangs have already become barely newsworthy.

These awful cold-hearted actions and the general gun violence that is proliferating around the country, may placate the blood thirsty lust of the powerful NRA, and proponents of the sanctity of the right to bear arms in the second amendment, but in *my* opinion, they represent a frightening, maddening and **impious** recipe for our own demise. Have mercy on us all!

Continuing with my claim that we need completely new thinking in solving the problems of urban public education, Bela H. Banathy, in a systems study on educational reform, discusses human activity systems of which an educational system is included. He defines a human activity system as “an assembly of people and other resources organized into a whole in order to

accomplish a purpose. The people in the system are affected by being in the system, and by their participation in the system, they affect the system. People in the system select and carry out activities individually and collectively that will enable them to attain the collectively identified purpose” (14). This definition is then used to map a purpose-seeking and purpose-fulfilling relational interaction and integration of people in the system and interaction with the environment of the system. With this diagram in place, purpose, process, interaction, integration and emergence are the key factors in understanding this human system. He then uses this model to help people understand the true nature of education as “a complex, open and dynamic human activity system that operates in ever-changing multiple environments and interacts with a variety of societal systems” (17). In our case, the variety of societal systems that interact with a public school system would be community organizations, parent groups, law enforcement agencies, private companies, political parties etc. For many, this highly technical approach would not seem applicable to public education. I would strongly beg to differ. This is yet another example, as radical as it may appear, of the new thinking that I believe is required in urban public education.

In a more detailed look into the complex structures of modern schools, Valerie E. Lee and Julie B. Smith discuss the organizational dynamics of two primary types of schools: the bureaucratic form and the communal form. The bureaucratic organization characteristically includes a “top-down hierarchy of decision making, a formalization of goals and expectations into affectively neutral rules and codes of behavior” (4). They further describe this type of school as being where normal everyday teaching breaks down knowledge into a curriculum composed of discrete and fixed subjects. The aim of teaching then, is to impart specialized knowledge which in turn is organized into standardized and sequenced patterns within the various subject matters. Reforms such as increasing academic standards and graduation requirements fit into this

model. In the communal organization, on the other hand, tasks are less certain and conditions are more changeable and unpredictable. These forms of schools typically emphasize shared responsibility for work and a commitment to a common set of goals. In addition, instead of top-down, there is lateral communication and power in decision making with expectations and behavior driven by greater personalization and individual discretion. In these schools knowledge is seen as multidimensional and interdisciplinary where teaching is responsive to student's opinions, talents, and tastes. Learning is thus built more around concrete problems than abstract subjects; and assessment is more flexible and less standardized.

These authors go on to say that these two fundamental structures have been well documented and established in American education over the last century and have gone through historical and theoretical debate as to which direction school reform should take. I am of the opinion that the latter model, altered to a degree, would be more in tune with what is needed today.

The hypothesis being argued and presented here is that a large organization such as the Chicago Public School System is, by the above thinking and definitions, both complex and chaotic and consequently requires solutions that are derived from completely new thinking. The intent here is not to claim that these specific examples of alternative thinking should or should not be used, but to hopefully show that we should not become locked into the thinking that may have worked in the past, but have, for whatever reason, become outdated and thus ineffective for today's complex world.

## Current, Past and Alternative Models of Public Education

Supporting my earlier claim of impending doom, H.G. Wells once said that “human history becomes more and more of a race between education and catastrophe.” For an additional look into where we are now, we find David T Kearns, a businessman and Denis P. Doyle, an educator, discussing our outdated educational system from a global competitive perspective by claiming that while our competitors are continually improving, we need to understand that “being good will not be good enough, not in business and not in education. We must set our sights on being better” (3). They further point out that schools today are the product of early twentieth century management science where raw materials were processed in a repetitive and regimented fashion in an effort to obtain efficiency.

Transferring this theory into the arena of public education, the teacher would be seen as the worker manning the production line with the student seen as the product. The school principal is then the foreman; and the superintendent, the CEO. Last, the school board is seen as the corporate board of trustees with the citizens as the shareholders. These authors finally argue that with this old dynamic still in place in many schools and school districts, a basic restructuring is in order.

Business people care about education, not for reasons of philanthropy and altruism alone, although they are important, but for bottom-line hardheaded reasons”(136). Accordingly, these authors claim that there are two basic theoretical foundations that the schools of the future should emulate. The first is that schools need to look less like factories and more like modern high tech companies that have lean structures, flat organizations and push decision making down to the lowest possible level. Second, these schools should develop performance standards to show the world what it does and how it measures it. According to them, “the idea of performance

measurement is probably the single most important contribution that corporate America can make to the schools” (50). They also claim that student knowledge must be measured more sensitively and accurately. The thinking of these authors also ties into the earlier discussion by Banathy on the interactions between public school systems and other external societal systems. In this case, the external system is corporate America.

In a compilation of studies on educational reform, W. Steven Barnett discusses three promising models: Accelerated Schools, Success for All and the School Development Program. Each of these models begins with the premise that educational achievement of poor and minority students can equal all other students. You would think that everyone would agree with this, but sadly there are many who still believe to this day that poor inner city children simply do not have the intellectual capacity to learn to the level of their ‘economically superior’ counterparts; who just so happen to be mostly, but not all, white.

Each specifies a school wide change process to achieve increase student outcomes. In addition, and of great importance, the developers of these models claim that they can produce large improvements in educational outcomes *without large increases in educational costs*. While each model has the same basic goal, they approach it from three different perspectives:

- The Accelerated Schools model was the result of a 1986 five year study of the education of at risk students and focuses on the need to reorganize and restructure school organization and governance and to tie in this new structure with fundamental changes to the way they approach teaching. Parental involvement in all aspects of the school is encouraged.
- The Success For All model focuses on a pedagogical approach by implementing specific technology changes in the way lessons are taught. This model also

specifically prescribes two basic activities for elementary schools: prevention and early intervention. In support of this, they use high quality pre-school and kindergarten programs and one-on-one tutoring for those students who still do not improve for whatever reason.

- The School Development model originated from a joint effort by the Yale University Child Study Center the New Haven School District to reform two of the most troubled elementary schools. According to them, children from low-income families behave in school in ways that teachers often interpret as deficiencies in their abilities or serious problems with their attitude and motivation. However, they concluded that these behaviors often reflect family stress and social skills that are appropriate for other outside environments, but not for school. As a result of this, inner-city schools become divided institutions with adversarial relationships between teachers and their students/ families with everyone winding up with very low expectations.

We now take a look at Laudan Y. Aron, who uses the U.S. Department of Education's definition of an alternative education school as "a public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education" (3). The author also admits that the many different types of alternative education that fall within this very broad definition have yet to be developed and accepted by the education establishment. In an attempt to bring more focus and specificity to this nebulous definition of alternative education, the author uses several

characteristics that can be used to identify them: program purpose, physical setting relative to a regular school, educational focus, credentials offered, and how it is funded. In addition, the author discusses a three-type typology that can be used:

Type 1- schools offer full time, multi-year education options for students of all kinds, including those who need more individualization, those seeking innovative or more challenging curriculum, or dropouts wishing to earn their diplomas. Examples in this category would be magnet schools, charter schools, schools-without-walls, experiential schools, job-based schools, dropout-recovery programs, career-focused schools and after-hours schools; to name a few.

Type 2 – these schools distinguishing characteristic is discipline. The objective here is to segregate, contain and reform disruptive students. For the most part, students do not choose these schools, but are sent to them for specified time periods or until agreed upon behavior standards are met.

Type 3 – these schools provide short term therapeutic settings for students with social and emotional problems that impede the learning process. They also usually have access to counseling and social services. Students can choose not to go to this type.

The last typology for alternative education models this author discusses is a four type definition of the students themselves:

1. Students who have fallen ‘off track’ because of trouble they have gotten themselves into. They need a recovery path to return to regular schools.
2. Students who have prematurely transitioned into adulthood due to several reasons like pregnancy, homelessness, family stress, etc.

3. Older students needing to return to school for credits to transition into various programs, community colleges etc.
4. Students who have fallen substantially behind academically, such as very low reading levels, and are far over the age for their current level of achievement.

Next we have Eric Bettinger where, in a quantitative assessment of charter school impacts on student outcomes, found that “charter schools do not improve test scores or passage rates as rapidly as public schools with similar ‘pre-charter’ test scores” (145). The author begins by defining charter schools as public schools exempted from state and local regulations that are often contracted out to the private sector. According to him, there were only two charter schools operating in the United States in 1992 that grew exponentially to 2,372 schools by 2001. He further argues that a combination of the public media and those who advocated charter schools insisted that charter schools were more innovative and therefore more effective than public schools. They also claimed that charter schools not only improved student outcomes, but as a result of competitive forces, also improved the neighboring public schools in the process.

The author points out that even though student enrollment completely determines annual budgets, “charter schools still receive substantially less money than public schools” (135). He points to one study that showed that charter schools receive over one thousand dollars *less* per student than comparable public schools. He also says that in Michigan, where this study was done, state law allows governing boards of community colleges and state universities to operate charter schools. As a result of this, of the 170 charter schools operating in the state, state universities operate 150; the maximum under state law.

The data in this study comes from test scores created by the Michigan Department of Education, where 70% of charter schools are elementary schools. As a result, the author focuses

his analysis exclusively on the reading and math scores of 4<sup>th</sup> graders. As a benchmark, he uses ‘pre-charter’ test scores from all respective schools including public schools within a 5 mile radius. According to the data, “charter school students show .65 standard deviations (statistical mean) *lower* on math scores than students in the nearby public schools” (137). Reading scores also showed similar results.

To determine the impact that charter schools have on public schools, the author uses a statistical technique known as the ‘difference-in-differences estimator’ where outcomes are measured for two groups for two time periods. It also contains various methods that remove biases from the data. The author’s data suggests that the “estimated effect of charter schools on public schools is negative, insignificant and small” (142).

The author’s conclusion is that “charter schools do not improve test scores or passage rates as rapidly as public schools with similar pre-charter test scores” (145). His data also highlights the fact that charter schools attract students who have lower ‘pre-charter’ test scores than neighboring public schools. Finally, there is no evidence that test scores increase or decrease in neighboring public schools as the number of charter schools increase.

This data supports my own thinking that is, for the most part, against *the Platonic idea* of charter schools. While I am in complete agreement with the sentiment and desire to improve student outcomes in urban areas via new methods and approaches, I do not believe that the problem will be solved *for all students* by using the approach of charter schools *as an idea*. Since this is far more philosophical than practical, I do not wish, at this time, to translate this thinking into a specific statement that we should not have charter schools. Far from it!! In fact, *starting* with a charter school makes good sense to me as a *first phase* of a long term solution to public education in urban areas. In other words, I am saying that a charter school can serve as a

laboratory for a new model of public education with the intention of spreading the concepts that work to the general urban public school systems nationwide.

**I am not interested in solutions that only target fortunate segments of the student population.** Students do not choose their parents or their circumstances. In many cases, the student *majorities* who, for whatever reason and no fault of theirs, are not included in alternative models of education, only wind up suffering more from the withdrawal of the best and most valuable resources. I have heard several people, *including educators themselves*; tell me that they believe that it is better to save a few than to risk losing the many. **This is very dangerous thinking that I do not agree with it.** Such thinking, while clearly logical and understandable, is pure defeatism in my opinion, and will, over the long run, only serve to make matters much worse.

Moving along, we find additional data on comparing reading and mathematics proficiency differences between public schools and charter schools in a study by Caroline M. Hoxby. The author, like Bettinger, uses the test scores of 4<sup>th</sup> graders in her analysis. She states that elementary students usually travel the shortest distance to schools, therefore her analysis matches charter schools to the schools their students would most likely attend. According to her data:

- Charter school students are 5.2% more likely to be more proficient in reading and 3.2% more likely to be proficient in math; clearly a contradiction to what Bettinger claims.
- In states where charter schools are more established, the differences are even greater. Only in North Carolina, are the proficiency scores for charter students statistically significantly lower than public schools.

- The longer the charter school has been operating, the greater the proficiency advantage over matched public schools.
- Charter schools are more likely to have a proficiency advantage if the school is funding is near equal to the funding at the matched public school.

The author also presents several important facts that mute these findings:

- Charter schools only register 1.5% of all American students
- Several states have no charter schools
- Only seven states and the District of Columbia have charter schools with more than 2% of all students

I find these statistics, along with additional admissions from this author quite meaningful in several ways:

- They support my long term plan that considers charter schools *only as laboratories*. They will **not** be looked on to replace general public school education.
- With less than 2% of students nationwide enrolled in charter schools, there is little if any long term impact that one can confidently conclude in terms of the effectiveness.
- The author also admits that her ‘matched-schools’ study should be used in conjunction with randomization-based studies; which are the better scientific way to determine the effects of charter schools over several years and do a better job of comparing apples to apples.
- According to her, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) recently promoted statistics that compared fourth graders in charter schools to those in public

schools, where people interpreted the results as evidence that charter schools actually reduce achievement. She labels the study as “crude and misleading” and that even a slight attempt to compare apples to apples from the study itself would show how incorrect it was. Furthermore, the study was only based on a 3% sample of students and since charter schools enroll only 1.5% of students nationwide, a 3% study is inadequate in determining how charter schools affect achievement.

The following research was extremely critical in validating my own perspective on solving the issues with urban public education. Roel J. Bosker and Jaap Scheerens conducted a study on what they term ‘school effectiveness’ models which they define as outcome-oriented models that explicitly contain school-level variables. They conclude that there still exists a wide gap between the many theoretical models of educational effectiveness and actual research presented in this field. They further claim that “empirical research often fails in explicitly formulating propositions as to how school-level factors might influence pupil attainment” (178). In other words, there is no clear cut model that can be declared as best in terms of predictive power.

These thoughts, at least to my small mind, are saying that the confidence that one would expect from all these different ‘scientific models’ should be considered suspect at best. It also speaks to the inherent difficulties in coming up with an agreeable measurement of school effectiveness. This unfortunately leaves the door wide open for politics as usual and finger pointing in all directions, which in turn only perpetuates the current status quo; while time marches on and urban public schools deteriorate even further. His analysis is depressing, but true; and is a key to how I intend to move forward with this debate. I say forget these fancy

schmancy quantitative methods of measuring results. Their results, no matter what they conjure up and conclude, will only serve to increase the schism of opinion and add even more fuel to the already contentious debate. The only beneficiaries will be those whose livelihoods surround the debate itself. I am of the strong opinion that when people and situations are *transformed*, one will not need a microscope or a scientifically correct quantitative analysis to see and verify what has happened. In other words, specific mathematical constructs that attempt to determine and predict student outcomes will become irrelevant, under the right environment.

Bruce R. Joyce discusses the missions and reasons for the existence of alternative schools in urban areas. He begins by claiming that enculturation, which he defines as that which permits cultural growth and variation, “is much more complex than the enculturation that simply perpetuates the existing social order” (34). In other words, for young students in urban areas replete with well known social dysfunctions, *educating and extending their cultural growth beyond their environments* is a very complex and difficult task; but the very reason these schools exist. He discusses the fact that vested interest groups use political maneuvers to intentionally fix school attendance lines to perpetuate economic and racial segregation thus creating the need for the complex enculturation those students in urban areas need. The author states that “it is extremely hard work to develop a unique educational program and that deviation from the typical school program is not always greeted with approval” (9). This forces me never to be naïve about the task in front of me. He further discusses how things like tradition and sensitivity can impact the shape of an alternative school. For example, in America, it is a tradition that elementary school teaching is seen as a job for young women. In many communities there are topics like segregation and abortion that are very sensitive and can create significant negative feedback

from the community; making the implementation of remedial programs in these areas problematic at best.

In the creation of an alternative school model, the author says that there are several questions that need to be addressed in defining its mission that I absolutely agree with:

- What purposes will the school serve?
- Will it foster creativity or conformity?
- Will it produce social activists or placid acceptors of the status quo?
- Will it produce intellectuals or practical people?
- Will it help students develop confidence and flexibility or concentrate on other things and allow them to grow on their own?
- I would add: how will the successful elements of this model be incorporated into the general public school system?

In a book on how to create an alternative school, authors Robert D. Barr and William H. Parrett discuss a wide range of topics, from why such schools are needed to how they are created. They begin by saying that in today's public schools "more are poor, more are handicapped, more are students with English as a second language, more are teen parents and more are violent" (3). This, right from the beginning, introduces the greater challenges in creating an alternative school in an urban area. Added to this, these authors discuss a study that shows data to support "archaic practices that continue to polarize public education into rich districts and poor districts, creating a structure of educational apartheid that destroys our goal of providing free and equal education to all"(3).

These issues aside, the authors go on to discuss why alternative schools actually work and how to create them. They begin by stating that "alternative schools are the single most

effective way to reform and improve public education that has ever been tried”(12). They begin by presenting a short discourse between a high school dropout reluctantly returning to complete the requirements for his diploma, and an alternative school principal. The points illustrated here are that the ideal alternative school is one where both the students and faculty share the same vision in their education and that the needs of each and every student are met. In my opinion, this is **critical** and will become central to my own model. While, in all honesty, I don’t yet have completed specifics on how this is to be accomplished, it nevertheless suggests that I will need to create a completely different perspective of educators and administrators; one in which respect for the minds and imaginations of the students **has real value to them** and that they understand and truly believe that they can learn quite a bit from the students; as well as the students learning from them. For many educators, this will be very difficult.

Finally, the question of who can start an alternative school is addressed by the authors. They claim that “history has shown that **one determined person** or a small group willing to persevere can successfully create a public school alternative”(84). It was great for me to read this; as my own drive and hopeful success is clearly supported by history. Every time I discuss and elaborate on my passion for this problem, I garner additional support from a great range of people indicating, at least to me, the actual feasibility of making this a reality. I have become very confident, not so much that it is my own passion at work, but that it represents what I believe to be a growing ‘simmering beneath the surface’ from the general public that something must be done to improve urban public education and that significant support therefore exists.

In an effort to broaden the range of thinking on alternative schools concepts, this analysis on alternative models reviews Robert Banks, as he explores the need for alternative models of

theological education. In chapter three, the author discusses developing a far more comprehensive approach to the discourse on alternative educational methods. He states that “alongside mastery of objective content or critical methods, not just our intellects, **but our whole selves need to be formed and transformed**” (47). This will be a guiding principle for me, the students, the teachers and the administrators of urban public education. It will be abundantly clear that we will eventually be paid adequately, as I will elaborate on later, but it is far, far more important to understand what the impact of what we do for others, does for us **as individuals**.

I firmly claim that a person *transformed* is a miraculous thing to see. No lecture, no textbook, no computer can come close to positively impacting the lives of students as much as the daily demonstration of personal love, determination and character by teachers and administrators. Many teachers of course do this today. This is why I reject the idea of saving a few; though I understand the rationale. The boldness and courage needed to save each and every student requires a degree of *personal transformation* for all teachers and administrators; but the payoff is absolutely tremendous; as we will all seriously **improve ourselves** in the process. This is what I believe Banks is talking about; and I agree with him completely.

Banks further argues that the way toward this goal is to view theological education in its most basic sense as *inquiry*. He claims that critical inquiry need not be a manifestation of human pride, but that it can be conducted in a spirit of humility. This, to my small mind, is a very profound point that can garner remarkable positive changes in the public’s perception of urban education. While I intend to minimally invade the arena of theology, I simply *must* say that accomplishing something without one’s pride as the driver, is a wonderful action that has the potential to change very difficult things in a remarkable way.

Finally, and in my opinion more importantly, and very germane to my own thinking and specific plans, Banks discusses the analysis of Rebecca Chopp, where she rejects a highly accepted view of the academic model when she says that “it is less the product of modern rationalism than of masculine reasoning and that foundational studies should have a more pragmatic, relative and fallible flavor” (Banks 55). From this, she calls for a more rhetorical rather than objective interpretation of scripture as prototype and not archetype.

In applying her brilliant thinking to urban public education, teachers need to become much more fallible, inquisitive, open and flexible in their instruction approach. This means that textbook content needs to be questioned more and not rigidly accepted and taught in a blind stoic and dogmatic fashion. For example, questions like: What do you think about this author’s point? Do you agree or disagree? Do you think the founding fathers vision of the constitution fits today’s world? If you were a Supreme Court Justice, how would you interpret the constitution? Would you use the issues of today and your own thinking and feelings in your interpretation, or would you simply apply what the law says under all circumstances regardless of the human impact and how you feel as an individual? Can you see a different use of this physics formula and is there any relation to human behavior? What if this historical fact is proven wrong centuries later and what would that mean to everything we’ve been taught?

I also believe that instructors should be permitted and even encouraged to give his or her own personal take on any and all textbook content; even in the sciences like math and biology. In following the thinking of Rebecca Chopp, whom I agree with, such a more ‘pragmatic, flexible and fallible flavor’ as a teaching method will produce students with stronger levels of inquisitiveness and responsiveness that will ignite their own opinions; precisely what we should be after as educators. This will be very difficult for many educators; which is why Banks is

correct when he says that we need to be *transformed* as individuals. Said transformation will lessen our individual **pride** and make us more acceptable to the fact that students have a lot to teach us; just as of course, we have a lot to teach them.

We should never, in my opinion, be creating robot students who simply think and understand as we do. In truth, **we are not that smart**, though most of us believe the contrary. **The current state of the world is proof enough of my position.** I firmly believe that our thinking needs **major** changes. This change is the challenge of the young; with our help of course. After all, it is *their* future; not ours.

An interesting quantitative perspective on alternative models of public education is discussed by Elchanan Cohn and Geraint Johnes where they use a study by Edwin G. West, who is critical of the ‘Coleman debate’ on true cost efficiencies of public versus private schools. West refutes those who analyze the lower salaries of Catholic school teachers compared to public school teachers who claim that they are below market value. He says that “because public school teachers are strongly unionized, there are likely to be significant monopoly elements in their salaries that place them well above market levels” (165). For already underpaid teachers, his analysis is truly depressing and very hard to swallow; even if true. In my opinion, this is a critically important topic and one that should not be overlooked. Let us spend a few minutes looking into this matter a bit further.

From a strict economics and mathematics perspective, West is of course correct. Union demands on teacher compensation create what economists call an externality. Conceptually, teacher compensation, as in all price levels in a free market economy, should be set at the point where the supply and demand curves intersect. Within this well known economic construct, the higher the demand, the higher the price for a given level of supply. In lay terms, if the demand

for teachers were to skyrocket, *for whatever reason*, teacher pay would increase significantly, as a *natural effect* of the law of supply and demand. The problem, as I see it, is on the demand side. Society simply does not put a high demand on qualified teachers. Even with this, there are still many great humans who teach because it is their love to do so; regardless of the low compensation; thus still putting numbers on the supply side. This in turn creates the economic reality of high supply and low demand, which in turn creates downward pressure on teacher compensation, again from a free market perspective according to the law of supply and demand. **The result of this is the need for unions.** Negating this law of supply and demand is the externality spoken of, which puts a floor to teacher compensation *by force*; i.e., the threat of teacher strikes.

The question now becomes, what can we do? In my opinion, the only hope is on the demand side. Fortunately, though ultimately sadly, the results of the deterioration of urban public school education will force society into placing upward pressures on the demand side. The rapidly increasing violence that is the natural offspring of poor education in these urban areas will soon reach the ‘good’ communities and suburbs. THERE WILL BE NO ESCAPE AND NO ONE WILL BE SAFE. Once the violence spreads to the public transportation systems, including rail and bus, safely getting to and from those good neighborhoods will become a roll of the dice. As this is already starting to happen, the initial public reaction is simply more guns for everyone; i.e., protect yourself!!

Without question, this new public dynamic is supported and encouraged by the Supreme Court, the powerful NRA and mean spirited right wing ideologues; all of whose main source of their own prosperity is fear. I clearly see the prophetic wisdom in H.G.Wells, when he said that human history is becoming a race between education and catastrophe. Have mercy on us all!

Returning to our economic analysis, as the killings and violence continue to spiral out of control and into ‘good’ neighborhoods, and as the costs of prisons, teenage pregnancies, law enforcement, jobs moving overseas continue to rise; people will be **forced** to see the need for many more high quality teachers to get our children educated and properly see this as the only way to combat these crushing social ills that will **bury us all** if something drastic is not done; and done soon.

I believe that the recent presidential election is the first step in this direction to save us all. There was not a single credible person, myself included, plus the so-called political experts, who predicted the rise of Barack Obama. This is, in my humble opinion, ample proof that we should never forget that **GOD IS IN CHARGE** and when HE decides to change things, HE will..... *you can bet your life on that.*

Lastly, and I know this will surely create those who will, after reading this, be strongly against me from the very beginning, in my model of a *transformed* system of urban public education, there will be no need for unions. **That’s right, I said it.** I completely understand the need for unions within this sad current environment. However, if the environment can be transformed, **GOD willing of course**, teachers will be fairly compensated according to the natural law of supply and demand as discussed. Furthermore, teacher compensation will be based on merit, causing a very strong incentive for individual teachers to teach well and use their imaginations, gifts and new found decision authority coupled with a radically different technology base, which will be elaborated on later, to actually excel at what they love to do; i.e., the best of both worlds! This will also cause highly qualified professionals from the private

sector to reevaluate what they are doing with their lives and consider bringing their abundant talents and skills where it is needed most; and be fairly compensated.

No doubt, many union leaders will at first want to throw stones at me, but I ask them to hold back and let us talk and work together for the future of our children. I am not against unions per se, for one would have to have had their head in the sand not to recognize the need for them; *in the current environment*. As I've stated many times in this treatise, I am not interested in past thinking or past solutions. It is high time to look towards a new future, lest we all **together**, fall off the precipice.

In this final look at alternative models of education; if we examine the lives of Robert Gordon Menzies, former Prime Minister of Australia, Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of Little House On The Prairie, Alan B. Shepard Jr., first American in space, Jimmy Wiles, co-founder of Wikipedia, and Herbert Hoover, 31<sup>st</sup> President of the United States, we find one thing they all have in common; they were all educated in one-room schools. It is no secret that ideas from the past can sometimes become good concepts in devising solutions to modern problems.

## The One-Room School



Between 1919 and 1928 Pierre S. du Pont personally financed the construction of more than 80 one-room schools for African Americans. By 1938, after many of the schools for whites and all the schools for African Americans had been rebuilt, Delaware had advanced to eighth place out of the 48 states in terms of the quality of its public education system. In 1926, when asked by the editor of *Afro-American Magazine* why he had funded these schools, du Pont replied:

“If the Delaware experiment proves satisfactory, which I am sure it will, it will be a great incentive to go ahead more quickly in other States. The progress of Delaware schools will bear watching, for on their success must hang the fate of Negro public school education in the United States for many years”.(1) The question now becomes what are those principles of the historic one-room schools that might present useful ideas for today?

Wayne E. Fuller, history professor emeritus at the University of Texas at El Paso, tells us that one-room schools located in small, independent school districts in the Midwest “were sustained with the barest of resources by civic-minded farmers who voted taxes, set budgets, constructed schools, elected school boards, hired teachers, and approved curricula. Their efforts virtually wiped out illiteracy, strengthened their children's devotion to democracy, and opened up new vistas beyond the borders of their lives”. Fuller goes on to tell us that these schools were the center places of their respective communities and were also used as polling places, churches, sites of political caucuses and meeting places for various local organizations.

How and what did they teach? Let’s take a look at a typical day: As the children were seated, the teacher took attendance and then often began the day by reading to the students. In the nineteenth century the text read was almost always of a religious character, usually from the Bible. The day would begin with first reading **moral tales** and then subsequently on to significant works of fiction. For example, during the 1940's at the Frost School near Stanton, teacher Veda Flinn began her school day by reading from Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House on the Prairie. If you recall, that is a wonderful and classic tale of humans helping humans. Miss Flinn would pace her reading of the book so that the book was always completed on the last day of school. In some schools, a song or two might also be sung *before the day's studies began*.

As the day progressed, each class was called to the ‘recitation’ bench. There the teacher worked exclusively with those children for a period, while the other students busied themselves studying or doing an assigned lesson. Normally there was a brief morning recess of about fifteen minutes, followed by more classes, and then an hour for lunch. The afternoon was spent much like the morning with classes and a short recess. At the hour of afternoon

recess, the younger students would be dismissed for the day. The last hours of the school day was spent by the teacher working with the more advanced fourth through eighth graders.

Taking a more detailed look into the daily operations of one-room schools, we find that students sometimes put the mixed age of their schoolmates to ingenious uses. In one instance, a teacher recalls a student that she first believed had extraordinary reading skills. Each day she would write new words on the blackboard and each day, by the time this students' opportunity to read came around, he had already learned the new vocabulary. Eventually she discovered that he was ingenious, but in a somewhat sly way. Rather than seriously studying the board, each day he would quietly borrow the book from which the day's reading would be taken, look in the back where the new words were listed, and then ask one of the older students to help him with the next day's new vocabulary.

In another teaching concept, *unit teaching* was a very popular technique; well suited to the one-room school. The teacher would select a topic, or unit, to study, such as pioneer days, trees, safety, or some other broad topic that each student could address at their own appropriate level. Over time, units evolved. For example, in many one-room schools, agriculture slowly gave way to science, and physiology evolved into health and hygiene.

Students would also be united for various school events, such as pageants or plays. Virtually every one-room school put on a Christmas pageant that was well attended by parents with the school decorated with objects made by the children. The program often featured short poems or songs performed by the younger students, with short play enacted by the older students. The event would end with a holiday party in which gifts were often exchanged.

What do all these historical one-room school practices tell us?

- First, I was pleasantly amazed with how much many of these old one-room school educational methods and practices mirrored indigenous African knowledge and customs. Raymond Sambuli Mosha, in his brilliant book, *The Heartbeat of Indigenous Africa*, tells us that “indigenous African education tries to empower its people to come closer to each other and to respect everyone” (181). He goes on to say that “the separation of knowledge and morality is a fatal shortcoming because not only does it give a picture of a fractured universe, it also separates intellectual formation from spiritual formation, with over concern for the former and little attention to the moral virtues and moral living”(184). As far as the Christmas agendas from the one-room schools, Mosha says “the combination of song and dance is a powerful formation tool, because, according to the indigenous Chagga people, it spontaneously engages a person’s body, mind and soul” (166). Recall that the one-room school daily teaching practices always began with reading moral tales to the students. Mosha points out that the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye writes that “good character is, in the Akan moral thought, the crucial element in morality, for it profits a society little if its moral system is well articulated intellectually and the individuals in that system nevertheless have bad character and so do wrong things” (167). I am of the opinion that the historical one-room school practice

of reading/teaching moral tales *as the first thing each day* to all students is rock solid and effective as a tool of using education as a means of maintaining a current, and obtaining a future, moral society. A quick look at our society today will reveal that our morals are completely bankrupt.....and we wonder why our school age children are being gunned down in the streets in broad daylight to the point where it is already beginning to approach a common event that is barely newsworthy. **Have mercy!** As a component of a new model of urban public education, I would begin stories and tales of moral behavior to those in kindergarten. In addition, and I can already hear the rigid thinking and thunderous opposition, I would also have **a minute of silent prayer each day** in class as part of the pre-content period. Why? In my opinion, what is a critical lacking in the individual growth of our inner city youth is a sense of personal identity. For it is **identity** that precipitates self introspection. And it is self introspection that in turn questions one's behavior to oneself. Sobonfu Some, in her powerfully warm, tender and uplifting book *The Spirit of Intimacy*, tells us that "in a place where spirit has been forgotten, a true sense of identity is likely to be missing" (125). She is absolutely correct. Prayer also invokes spirit, which in turn invokes identity which in turn invokes self introspection.

I will go so far as to say that the political philosophy that says that there should be a separation between church and state is actually dangerous. Nevertheless, I am in agreement that teaching the *doctrine of a specific religion* should be left out of the public schools and should remain the responsibility of the parents.

However, **the concept of faith is general and inherent to human intellect;** even for those who claim no faith at all. It is the pillar for self introspection and therefore above specific doctrine, in my humble opinion. I myself am a Christian. For me, Jesus Christ is as real as the ground I walk on. I also know that I can really love a Jew or a Muslim and believe deep in the recesses of my heart that they can get to heaven; just as I hope to one day through Christ. In other words, their religion is just as true to them as mine is to me.

While this point goes well beyond the scope of this treatise and dives into the arenas of both theology and philosophy, I feel compelled, at least for now, to say that the nature of truth, once understood in the Platonic sense of an idea, is that ***truth is completely real to the one who believes***. What does this mean?

Our interpretation of scripture, with this understanding of the nature of truth, can be a very divisive and dangerous thing. Once again, a quick look at life today will clearly support this conclusion.

- Amazingly, the different ages among students is used in a very positive and constructive way with the result of increasing knowledge among *all* students.
- While not explicitly expressed, teachers obviously need a real conceptual understanding of content knowledge as *form and idea* in the Platonic sense. This is how specific content can be made relevant and understandable to a wide range of ages and abilities at the same time.
- Organization of time and content is absolutely critical to success.

- Parental involvement is always a behind the scenes pillar.

I of course am not suggesting a return to the old one-room school concept of education. Such an idea would be silly given the changes in society since then. I am however claiming that installing and adjusting some of these principles, like teaching morality, more use of song and dance, more parental involvement, more students helping other students, more community involvement etc., can be used to great success in solving some of the modern issues facing urban public education today.

#### Reality Check and Perspectives:

Placing this complex issue of reforming urban public education in perspective, columnist Peter Schrag once said “No society has ever, at any time, tried to bring such a variety of people to so high a level of proficiency as this country has, or come as close to success as we have. American educational criticism suffers from a shocking lack of perspective; both historical and cross-cultural.”

David Tyack and Larry Cuban state that “policy talk about educational reform has been replete with extravagant claims for innovations that have flickered and faded” (10). This statement is used as a backdrop for their book. They begin by discussing that since the Great Depression, there have been two central themes that have been pervasive among American educational leaders:

1. Progress was the rule
2. Better educated students would lead to a better society.

Public opinion on the effectiveness of public schools has changed dramatically. According to these authors, in 1940, a Gallup survey found that 85% of those interviewed thought that their children were receiving a better education than they received when they were school age. At about the same time, a Swedish survey found that only 38% of fathers thought their sons were being better educated than they were. In 1946, another Gallup poll found that 87% of parents were satisfied with their children's schools; up 7% from a similar poll conducted in 1943. In addition, a poll in 1946 found that 60% of teachers were given top ratings, 29% middle ratings and only 8% poor ratings (12-15). Furthermore, recognizing that teachers had low pay and overcrowded classrooms, a mid 1950's survey found that 66% of citizens polled said that they would be willing to pay higher taxes if that money went to pay teachers higher salaries. Finally, a 1946 poll found that 40% of the respondents said that there was absolutely nothing wrong with public schools.....nothing; and that they would not change anything.

Since 1969, criticisms of public education have mushroomed. Year by year, schools and teachers received lower and lower rankings. In 1978 41% of Americans said that schools were worse than they used to be and only 35% thought that they were better. A New York Times study in 1983 found that 38% thought schools were worse and 38% thought that they were better. In the most influential report of the 1980's called 'A Nation At Risk,' they claimed that "for the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents"(14). Finally the authors state in this report that "a litany of dismal statistics purports to show regress, not progress, as the trend in public education" (14).

In a guardedly optimistic analysis, Charles M. Payne, a significant thinker in my opinion, begins his book by saying that we should never lose sight of the *over determined nature of*

*failure*. He also tells us that we need to recognize that some urban schools are indeed showing signs of progress. He makes a point about how the very best of reform programs are destined to fail due to the lack of appreciation of the social problems inherent in poor performing schools. Specifically, he claims that “the sheer inability of adults to cooperate with one another is a major cause of so much reform failure” (6). I cannot stress enough how important this point is. I was not surprised at how little data and thinking there is on this specific aspect of urban education in general.

It has been said that the **human equation** is by far the most complex of equations. This is certainly true and the reason why so little has been said on this. This will be my future job; GOD willing of course; addressing that very human equation Payne so wisely discusses.

The author uses Chicago as the city where the most documentation exists on school reform; with the Consortium on Chicago School Research being the closest thing to a Manhattan Project on urban schools. The findings of this research group concluded that the social barriers to school change were:

- A lack of social comfort between parents, teachers and administrators
- Low mutual expectations
- Suspicion of ‘outsiders’
- Belief in failure, since so many failures have occurred
- Distrust of colleagues
- Generalized anger
- Tendency to put a good face on things regardless of the facts
- Poor internal communications
- Not learning from experience

- Fragile emotions
- Disproportionate leverage of negative teachers
- Teachers do not share professional information

All these findings tie back into the beginning section of this literature review, where I claim that the ‘*complexity of the problem itself*’, warrants a separate, distinct and radically new approach to understanding how it can be solved. These points concluded from this study group are all serious, and without resolution of them in some fashion, improving urban education will, in my opinion, never happen.

What’s the solution? In my opinion, the single largest component *towards* a solution is that we need to build new interpersonal relationships, skills and dynamics between **all** the stakeholders; and if you think about it, *we are all stakeholders*, in some way. I believe that it is possible to overcome the basic stereotypes and general ignorance that is at the heart of the uncomfortable, ineffective, passionless, loveless communications that Payne so smartly points out. Nothing will get much better without this new dynamic; as it will be the true pillar of this proposed model.

I suppose that you can tackle large problems from starting with the easiest issues first, **then** work your way to the more difficult ones. To solve the pressing problem of urban public education, I humbly submit that such an approach will not work; at least not work if your goal is for far better education for ALL urban students. I state unequivocally that **the** most difficult issue is that of interpersonal relationships between all the stakeholders; for this requires transformation of humans, myself included of course.

If the absolutely proper question now arises from the readers of this treatise to ask, what qualifications do I possess to think that I can handle this issue? *Suffice it to say for now*, that I will not be alone, and that my partner is **infinitely smarter and more powerful than I could ever hope to be**. This is the absolute truth. I am confident that there are many who understand the daunting level of complexity of this urban education problem and therefore know precisely where I'm coming from.

As stated many times over in this report, the problem of urban education, **for all students**, not just the fortunate ones who escape, is complex *almost* to the point of unsolvable. Many very intelligent and caring educators and politicians have already given up; as they try to save the fortunate few and leave the majority to their fates. Again, time is not on our side and the ugly tentacles of this failure. i.e., the violence, drugs, teenage pregnancies, dysfunctional families and crime, will impact us all; regardless of where one lives. I personally know that it is already spreading into the 'good' neighborhoods with parents not knowing what to do. It is just not reported in the media, so the public still believes that it is confined to the urban areas and consequently, nothing to be seen as a social priority.

With these points in mind, as I introduce this new model of urban education, let us not forget the indigenous African knowledge and wisdom that claims that everything in the universe is interconnected and therefore if this new model is founded in divine reverence and human virtues, what is good for urban areas will be good for all areas.

Finally, understanding *and acting* upon the fact that we all have far more in common than we do differences is the key. This will be, if successful, a truly major breakthrough in urban public education as it will release a level of mutual respect, cooperation, and even a higher

degree of love and kindness towards each other that can propel urban education to heights once thought unimaginable. It **CAN** happen! I feel it in my bones.

#### Findings from Other Research Methods:

In addition to the many scholarly sources concerning the complexity and alternative models of urban public education, I thought it made sense to interview several stakeholders who have direct interests in urban public education. I interviewed friends, family members and networked acquaintances that are all in the field of education in some capacity; be they administrators, teachers, parents or students. These interviews were private, friendly and **very** informal, and did not use the lifeless scripted analytical questionnaires that are normally used in an official quantitative survey research methodology. It is my strong opinion that such an informal setting has the best chance of eliciting *truly honest* opinions; precisely my objective. Of equal importance, it should be noted that these interviews constitute a very small sample size and therefore do not represent a scientific sampling of information; thus having no statistical validity. The intent here is just to present several heartfelt opinions from these various stakeholders in the field of education to get their views on what is going on and how they feel about it.

For the most part, I came out of this part of the research process with a far more practical understanding of the major issues facing urban public education today. It also became apparent to me that scholarly sources look at these same issues from an entirely different perspective. My best guess on why this is the case is because most of the scholarly authors do not have a **personal stake** in it, but are looking at it the way a scientist would study a disease. In other

words, think of the huge difference between analyzing a disease and actually having to live with that same disease; the perspectives would naturally be dramatically different.

The truth however is that both perspectives have great value and are sorely needed if a solution is ever to be forthcoming. I therefore do not think it wise to compare them against each other in any depth, as we would be trying to compare apples to oranges. Finally, I give them equal weight in the sense that one by itself would be woefully insufficient in any successful corrective strategy design.

Moving along, I believe that one powerful and time tested means of getting at the truth and understanding complicated issues, is through the indigenous African custom of storytelling. It has a way of bypassing a lot of technical, potentially confusing and contradictory details and gets right to the heart of the matter at hand; often in a very emotional way that invokes passion about the subject under discussion. Another means of getting at the truth would be that of question and answer. This too bypasses a lot of unnecessary analysis and gets right to the heart of the matter. I will divide the findings from these other research methods in urban public education into these two main categories.

### Stories

My first interview took place in New York City, my hometown. I interviewed Cheryl , a long time friend and French teacher at a school in an urban area that reminds me of the south and west sides of Chicago. She began by telling me of a story about one of her students. If I recall, her name was Shaniqua.

Cheryl, like most teachers, would always begin her day by taking attendance. Befitting of a French class, everyday as each name was called, the student was required to stand and say

“Bon Jour Mademoiselle!” Shaniqua, being one of the class ringleaders, simply refused to stand and speak French to her. Cheryl allowed her intransigence to continue for a few days. On the third day when Shaniqua’s name was called, she again adamantly and defiantly refused to stand and speak French. This time, Cheryl told her that if she didn’t stand and greet her in French tomorrow morning, she would send her to the principal’s office. Needless to say, this caused serious drama among the class for the rest of the period with Shaniqua fuming at being singled out by the teacher in front of everyone. Shaniqua must have continued to brood over this impending confrontation all night.

The next morning Cheryl, punctual as always, called her name right on schedule. This time, Shaniqua stood up in front of the class and brazenly said, ‘**Bon Jour, Bitch!!**’ Cheryl, being a very seasoned teacher, responded brilliantly, in my opinion. She told Shaniqua, “your pronunciation was excellent, but you can leave off the profanity next time. Well done!.....and thank you.” Shaniqua became one of her better students after that day.

To be honest, when I was first told of this story, I laughed out loud; especially realizing that it was indeed a true story. Cheryl also gave several stories of how parents practically attack school teachers when their children do not do well and are asked by the teachers to come in and discuss their situation. This, she claims, makes many teachers literally afraid to confront many parents for fear of their physical and emotional well being.

This next story is one which I admit I am very uncomfortable with; mostly because I am a man. Shirley gave me several stories about how absent and poor parental involvement spilled over to classrooms, after school activities and teacher-parent meetings. She told me of one young girl who always asks for her to act as her mother, because her own mother could care less about

what she did or did not do in school. This young lady was known by her classmates as always having a bad body odor about her. They would always tease her about that behind her back. Shirley pulled her aside one evening after the parents-teachers meeting where this young girls' mother, as usual, did not show up. She also noticed the bad body odor coming from her. Investigating this, she said that this young lady was completely ignorant of specific female personal hygiene products. Shirley decided to intervene in this young girl's life and not only buy her these products, but instructed her on why they were needed and how to use them.

I would like to add my own story to this mix as it was truly a wild and unique experience for me. Pamela, a special reading teacher, asked me if I had any clue what I was getting myself into by seeking public education in urban schools as a second career. She thought that I was simply being well intentioned, but naïve. I was told horror story after horror story of what teachers actually go through. She arranged, with the permission of her Principal, for me to visit for a half day. She was convinced that after I saw what 'the read deal was', that I would come to my senses and change my mind. I told her that I would take her up on this. She agreed and set up my visit.

I arrived about 30 minutes before the students were scheduled to come. I was first introduced to the teacher whose class I would attend. He was an African America male just about my age, which I found relaxing. I sat down in an unassigned seat, chatted with him about why I wanted to get into teaching and other things before the students arrived. Since almost all of the students come from right across the street in the projects, they were all on time. It took over twenty minutes for him to gain control of the class enough for him to take attendance. I only wished I had a hidden camera to show the general public what actually goes on in some of these urban schools.

I was flabbergasted with what I was witnessing with my own two eyes. These students, who never saw me before in their lives, were acting so wild, that I could not believe what I was seeing. For absolutely no apparent reason, some of them just started slamming their wood and metal desktops up and down making thunderous noises while throwing loose paper all over the place. One young man got up from his seat, went to the front of the class where a large waste paper basket was, opened the top, then spit in it in the most loud, gruesome and disgusting manner you could imagine. Right after that, I saw another young man get up from *his* seat only to grab one of the young girls in the most explicit adult sexual manner that shocked me to no end; and believe me, I am nobody's prude! I recall thinking to myself that I see jail cells for the boys and teenage pregnancies for the girls as their futures. The incredibly reserved teacher, clearly burned out from this daily barrage, finally got the class to attention and began to take attendance. All this; and not even twenty minutes had gone by!!

The rest of the half day was not quite as unruly. It was as if they tired themselves out and had nothing better to do, so they might as well do their lessons. The thing that impressed me the most was that in this class of nearly 30 students, there were about four to five that who the clear instigators of all this incredibly self destructive behavior and that the rest of the students would not dare *not* to follow their leads. It was stunning to see.

The randomness of this visit was what impacted me the most. This was no announced visit and I physically looked like I myself could live in the projects as their neighbor! I left there in a state somewhere between shell shocked and angry. As a man of strong faith, I've never had so vivid an experience as that. It was crystal clear: GOD wants me to **act** and to use the skills that I've been blessed with to help these lost kids.

These stories tell me several things:

- Teachers dearly love what they're doing. It is a societal disgrace and crime at how they are underappreciated and undercompensated.
- W. Steven Barnett is absolutely correct when he says that educational achievement of poor and minority students can equal all other students. Without question, Shaniqua was a very bright young lady.
- Peer relationships need a far stronger analysis and response. A solution here will have tremendous positive impacts.
- Adults who are 'faint at heart' should stay away from urban education. The challenges from students can be frightening to many teachers and burnout can come easily.
- **Security is a critical issue.**
- The rewards far outweigh the risks in teaching.
- The 'solution' is extremely complex. Only a holistic approach from the top down can change things. Bottom up will never work.
- If we do not learn to love these kids, *and see us in them*, there is no hope.
- There is also no hope unless we find a way to strengthen the new family structures that make up these communities. I believe that **life- long learning** is the key to this. A treatise on that will be forthcoming.

### Question and Answer

Dennis: Barbara, what are issues that concern you most?

Barbara: The parents themselves are a significant issue in schools in urban areas. The lack of male role models is also a huge problem inasmuch as many young boys do not have

fathers at home and desperately need that often stern male discipline to keep them in line and steer them towards a better path more conducive to education. [We both quickly agreed that this is not a knock on single mothers as many of them are doing wonderful jobs raising young men by themselves] In addition, the lack of males in urban public schools presents a relationship challenge between the mostly female teachers and mostly female administrators. [Her biggest complaint centered around low compensation for extremely difficult, and at times, hazardous work that often results in teacher burnout.]

Dennis: Sharon, what concerns you most with your son's school?

Sharon: The parents of many of these at risk students either have no desire to be active in their children's education progress, or are ready at the drop of a dime to verbally criticize the teacher and administrators; many times in very offensive and abusive manners. She also said that peer pressure was a big factor in how many of these kids behave. She also mentioned that safety was an enormous concern of hers and that even though her son is old enough to go to and from school by himself, she takes the time out of her job to drive him there and pick him up each day for fear of the violence that is ruling the streets these days.

Dennis: Claudia, what are your thoughts from an administrator's perspective?

Claudia: The bloated bureaucracy and intense political environment of the central board makes improving education an extremely difficult and near impossible endeavor. [In her opinion, segregating those students with caring and supportive parents to 'better' schools was the only valid method to improve student outcomes inasmuch as she saw no workable solution to the many ills that exist in many of these poor performing school districts. In short, in her opinion, it is 'better to save a few than to risk ruining the many.' In addition, she revealed to me that administrators often suffer burnout just as teachers do.]

These next set of questions were directed to three young students thirteen to fifteen years of age, including an adult, while having dinner in a Chinese restaurant. It should be noted here that I had already established a strong *personal* relationship with each of them prior to this meeting; as they were all students of mine who attended a tutoring and mentoring program I founded and managed at the Bank I worked for. It was called Saturdays One-On-One.

My first set of questions to them surrounded what they wanted to be when they grew up and the increasing violence in the schools, including the rash of recent killings; among other topics. I dearly wanted to get their opinions and somehow instinctively knew that what they would tell me, would impact me significantly.

Since I had not seen them in several years, I was extremely impressed and wonderfully hopeful with the intelligence, thoughtfulness and logic behind their answers to my questions. When I asked them about the recent killings of students their age Robin, one of them, broke down crying; as I had no idea that the most recent killing was a student in two of her classes. My own heart felt awful for her and myself. After she composed herself, they all took turns, each with a sadness and total disbelief in their voices, that none of the violence in their schools and surrounding neighborhoods made any sense to them. They also knew and realized that they were completely helpless to do anything about it.

Christopher, one of the three young students, told me that he personally witnesses someone getting beat up in the school yard each day. I said Chris, do you really mean *each* day? He said yes, and that he was always being asked to join in but refuses. Chris also told me that when he was old enough, he would definitely own and carry a gun. I asked why? He thought for a minute and soon after, he *totally floored me* by saying: **“Dennis, the right to bear arms is**

**part of the second amendment in the constitution!”** I was shocked beyond belief at his answer, and nearly speechless.

Another very interesting and revealing thing was that they told me that they always thought that I was very wealthy. I of course told them that I am a far cry from being wealthy and wondered why on earth would they think that? They went further and told me that since they knew that I drive a new Lexus and live near Navy Pier, they assumed that I carry a gun at all times to protect my valuables. They seemed *very perplexed and even somewhat disappointed* when I told them of my own personal disdain for guns or weapons of any kind, and that all my so called valuables meant very little to me. Their *disappointment* in hearing this was striking and hit me very, very deeply.

The next set of questions related to how they felt about the education they're getting. Two of them said that their teachers have little or no time to ask for questions from them to clarify things, and that all they seem to do is give out assignments without explaining things clearly. Whether or not this is indeed true, I have no idea, but it at least gives a degree of insight from a few obviously intelligent young students.

Robin had an impressive vocabulary, oral ability and command of her thoughts and seemed quite sure that she wanted to be a lawyer or psychologist. Her reasons were quite logical, meaningful and clearly thought through. I asked her what her GPA was and was told 2.5. I responded quite seriously that that simply was not good enough; when she quickly responded that she knew that.

Finally, it should be noted that Liz, Shirley's daughter, goes to a local Catholic school. Shirley, an incredibly capable and caring parent, thought that sending her daughter to a parochial

environment would be better than that of the local public school; only to find out that it was just as bad, if not worse.

These questions and answers tell me several things:

- The increase in violence may be having a far more serious long term impact on these kids than we realize. Deep down, even though most of these young students do not show it, I believe that it is scaring them to death. **IT MUST BE STOPPED!!**
- These students are far more intelligent than we realize. Unfortunately, their understanding of life in general appears to be *well below* their **ability** to rationalize and begin the process of evaluating the benefits of peace and contentment *for themselves*. They are constantly bombarded either with stoic and dry facts about our society on the one hand, or the hard core realities of material gain on the other. Their significant intellects receive nothing to serve as catalyst for reason and self introspection. This falls within the thinking of Rebecca Chopp, when she speaks of the need for a more pragmatic and fallible flavor to teaching content. For example, in my mind, it is very sad and troublesome to teach these young students dispassionately about the right to bear arms in the second amendment, without questioning the merit or lack thereof, and eliciting their opinions about the right or wrong of this; knowing all the while that guns are killing their friends at an alarming rate. For me, this is a heartless and passive madness on the part of teachers and administrators. These kids have developed a frightening logic, backed up by what they are learning and *how they are learning it*, to protect themselves with guns in order to maintain ‘the material good life’. I

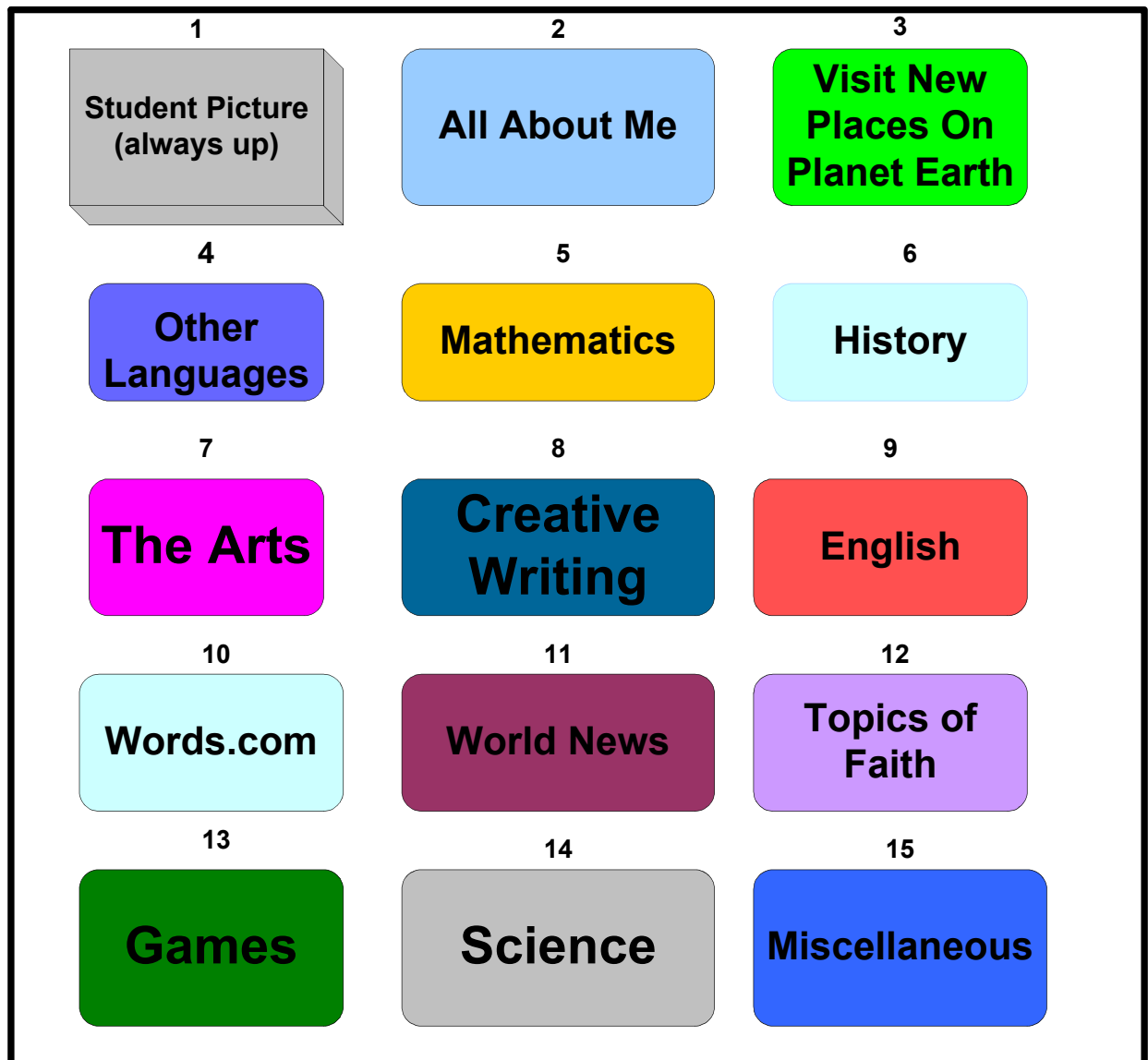
cannot tell you how sad and hurtful this is to me personally and how utterly destructive it is to society and our future. Have mercy!

- Class size is also a more serious issue than we may think. Teachers need manageable class sizes in order to increase the level of detail to ensure that clarity of content is achieved for each and every student.
- There is a real disconnect between student's intellects, dreams and the necessary scholastic achievement required to fulfill those dreams.

# The New Urban Education Concept and Model

## The New Classroom Desktops For All Students

### STUDENT SCREEN



### High Level Details of the New Student Desktop:

1. Student Picture - This will be a high resolution picture of the student that is always up and showing while the student is logged on. The idea here is to continually personalize the experience of learning with the student as the center of everything he or she understands. This is in line with the philosophical thinking that says that all existence gets filtered through the eyes and mind of the beholder; thus making the individual the center of their universe. I am in complete agreement with this philosophy. The picture can be changed as many times as the student wishes, as we want the students to begin to like what they look like *to themselves* as one does when one looks into a mirror. This is not a vanity concept, but the first step in igniting self introspection.
2. All About Me – I am of the belief that behavior and self-introspection are inseparately linked as day is to night. One of the things that I've learned recently is that constant journaling is a very powerful way for one to get to know oneself better. Years ago, many young women would always keep a daily a diary of their personal experiences, dreams, fantasies etc. While I cannot speak for any women, it is my best guess that this diary helped them tremendously in understanding their inner most thoughts, their likes and dislikes and who they are as individuals. **Our students need to do this!!** This is not a feminine concept or idea. It is a human concept. It is a therapy. In my opinion, it will be very difficult for our students to grow into productive and loving adults without really understanding who they are to themselves. It is also something befitting people of all ages, as we change daily with subtle new knowledge from the day we are born to the day we exit; at least to some degree. Teachers will have a required journaling session each morning before content learning begins. This will be the time and place where students have the opportunity to update their thoughts and ideas on themselves and how they feel deep

inside their world. These thoughts are private in nature and only to be read by administrators, clergy or parents only with the permission of the student in very personal one-on-one growth sessions. Teachers will acquire the necessary skills to encourage daily journaling. If successful, students will, over time, begin to not only enjoy this new concept, but see its great value to them as young adults. The sessions can be as frequent or infrequent as the student wishes and will require serious psychoanalytical skills from administrators, educators and parents to work effectively with the students to reveal what their journaling says about them and how that can be used positively in their maturation. Their dreams, wonders, loves and hurts in life will be critical elements in this daily journaling. I cannot emphasize enough how important this new concept will become. I restate with absolute confidence that the only way to correct degenerative human behavior is by the **humans themselves** deciding to act in positive ways because they see it as in *their own best interests*; especially in actually achieving their dreams.

3. Visit New Places On Planet Earth – In this module, with the use of advanced video-conferencing, telecommunications and satellite technology, using software like Google Earth, students will have sessions where they can actually see in detail places on this planet they didn't even know existed and eventually interface in real time one-on-one with their counterparts from around the globe. I am certain that this new capability will excite urban students like never before and see it as *a real treat and reward* for their advancement in basic content learning topics like math and English. This capability is specifically designed to respond to the enculturation issue discussed by Bruce R. Joyce. This author states that for our young students in urban areas replete with well known social dysfunctions, *educating and extending their cultural growth beyond their environments* is a very complex and difficult task; but the very reason these schools exist. Imagine a young urban student excited to go to school because he or she will be

looking at and talking to someone his or her own age in Jerusalem, or London, or Bangkok, or Soweto, or Paris, or Peking, or Mexico City, or Cairo....you get the picture. Recall our question and answer session with young Christopher, where he told me of kids getting beat up each day in the school yard and that as soon as he was old enough, he would own a gun. His bright young mind has become reactionary to the mean spirited realities of his local environment. **WE NEED TO LIFT HIS MIND OUT OF HIS LOCAL ENVIRONMENT AND ON TO THE GLOBAL SCENE.** That is the intent of this module. This will also force us to rethink school hours. In my opinion, there is nothing sacred about students *always* going to school between 9am and 3pm. With the right security in place, we need to remember that a day has **24 hours** where we can do things; and including learning and having fun. I see shifting our sleep patterns from time to time for the sake of global learning and communications as an awesome step forward in addressing the enculturation issue.

4. Other Languages – This module, while content in nature, is also designed to address the enculturation issue. As an adult who only speaks one language, I am painfully aware of my local and global disadvantage. I've noticed that there are many people who speak up to six, or even more languages with amazing fluency and ease. Even they will admit that they are not geniuses. In my opinion, we need to make learning more than two languages a requirement. As far as I am concerned Kiswahili, Chinese and Spanish should *all* be required other languages for our students to graduate from high school. We should start these urban students learning these other languages in kindergarten. We need to develop new technology based methods for teaching these languages and invoke our telecommunications module to begin to immerse our students in the lands where these languages are spoken. I strongly believe that speaking Kiswahili with students their age in Soweto or speaking Chinese with students in Peking, or Spanish with

students in Mexico City will have dramatic results. Our students will find out for themselves that they have far, far more in common with their counterparts from around the globe than they ever realized. Making friends with students their age in these distant lands will also aid in the **personal transformation** that Banks discusses and what I so dearly believe in.

5. Mathematics – I will admit that as one who has had a degree of success in this field since childhood, this module has a very special appeal to me. Math is a very unique and special content topic inasmuch as it represents, at least to me, a real flexing of the intellect in ways that touch on almost all disciplines like no other content subject can. While I'm sure there are many who would disagree with me on this, the problem, in my opinion, comes in with how it is taught. I do not believe that only a select number of mostly male students can be good at math. A look at the various Kolb learning styles can shed some light on this. People learn often by very different means. The point here is that one learning style is not better than another; it is just different. In my opinion, the very fact that math is a *universal concept* means that humans in general can, and should be able to, learn it. For instance, I believe that we should start young students in the very early years in principles of plane geometry as a *beginning* math content topic. Why on earth plane geometry? Such a starting place, in my opinion, will have students using their **non-boring inner visualizations capability** very early, thus invoking an early inquisitiveness about our world in spatial ways never before conceived. This is will have the effect of taking these kids minds to Bally's for a good workout. I believe that it is that same inner visualization that sparks the self introspection of our behavior that is being mentioned in this report time after time. I really believe that math is the *higher language of the mind* which is why it is universal in nature and which is why in this new model of urban education, it will be, besides languages, given the very highest priority of all the content topics taught. Along with this math module, we will need

a radical new means of teaching math. For example, I believe that practitioners in the field will make very interesting new teachers. While I will discuss this in more detail later, let us remember for now that we are talking about this new student desktop working in conjunction with an entirely new way to educate our urban students. Keep in mind that a car with a powerful new engine will not go very far or fast on flat tires. Having come from the private sector, I am very sure that there are many firms who would not only be willing, but will see the great benefit in sharing their most talented employees with urban students; given the right technology based opportunity. Returning to the idea of teaching principles of plane geometry to let's say 4<sup>th</sup> graders, engineers from some of our great engineering firms can, via video conferencing, show students how buildings are built and why they don't fall; how those giant cranes they see all over are used to lift very heavy objects in the air, why bridges do not collapse in the middle over the water where there are no pillars to hold them up etc. The advanced mathematics behind these concepts will be much easier taught and understood *after* the inquisitiveness and wonder has been sparked in their minds and not before; as is the case now. We focus almost exclusively on correct answers with the way math is taught currently. No doubt, there is a real value in doing that. However, because of the universal nature of math, I am suggesting that we also focus on *more questions and observations*, when teaching math. For example, it is fine and valuable that a student can calculate the area of a given object, or the distance travelled by a train going at a specified speed. Along with the correct answers, students should be asked what other things that formula can be used for. The manipulation of formulas in math is a real manifestation of its universal nature, and should be rigorously encouraged by teachers. Please keep in mind that I am in no way looking to stop basic math teaching; far from it! I am simply saying that we need to

spark student interests in math first by some exciting new technology based methods and universal applicability approaches.

6. History – I see this as probably the most sensitive of all the modules. Without question, young urban students need a history of their own ancestors and culture as well as the history of their great country and the world in general. The sensitivity is based on the fact that some very ugly human truths must be taught, if we are determined to be honest as educators. I believe that a good starting place for urban students as far as learning history is the now proven fact that the very first humans were central sub-Saharan Africans. I also believe that an early content topic of 4<sup>th</sup> graders on what history itself really means, how it comes to be recorded, what are the motives of those who record it, and how we come to know it, is essential before specific required history segments; like U.S. or European history. The intent here is for students to look at history, which is almost always heavily biased towards those in power, with a very healthy degree of skepticism and not to see it a gospel truth. For example, I've recently been amazed at the lack of history on the major contributions of women in almost all cultures. Going forward, we as educators need to correct this terrible and intentional injustice. While this will be discussed in more detail later, keep in mind that students will not be just sitting in front of a computer screen all day and learning their lessons from it alone. Hardly!! Invited guests will be a significant part of the learning process with the firm belief that adults from all professions, beliefs, customs, ideologies, races, religions etc. can make excellent teachers to our children. YES, I am unequivocally saying that there is nothing sacrosanct about requiring people to go through a formal education certification process to become an effective teacher to our children. Our certified teachers need help from teachers *doing their thing* in the real world. University professors, corporate executives, law enforcement officials, professional athletes, ex-gang members, clergy,

community activists, politicians, artists, musicians etc. will become teachers to our children. Returning to history content, we will have visiting scholars in African culture teach our students about how families are the pillars of the communities, or visiting Rabbi's discuss the history of Jewish Americans, or visiting Muslim clerics discuss the history of the Nation of Islam in our country, etc. Testing a students' memorizing ability of lifeless stoic facts will not be seen as critical in measuring that students' ability to understand and appreciate history. We should instead be measuring their vitality level of engagement of what they've learned via discussion, writing, play acting, dancing etc. This is a good place to remind the reader that this model is indeed a radical departure in the education of urban students.

7. The Arts – The intent of this module is based on my firm belief that all humans have, at least to some degree, an artistic component to their very being. As educators, our job is to ignite that artistic component *in each student* to whatever level is comfortable to that student according to what they *feel* inside. If you recall our discussion on some of the principles of the historical one-room school, you will see that the brilliant idea of grouping content topics with students of differing ages and abilities is a proven and effective method of instruction. Applying that concept to the arts, we can now find a way to group students who have an interest in specific arts together. For example, those students who like dance, whatever their ages and abilities to dance are, need to be brought together as a group. Students who like singing, or who like painting need to be placed in similar groups with students who share the same interests, regardless of their abilities. We now bring in outside artists representing those specific artistic disciplines to work with these groups on some scheduled time periods to nurture those with a personal interest in that art. In other words, dance instructors for all students who like to dance; whatever their age and even if they have two left feet; for it is the exercising of their individual artistic love that we are

after. The students can now journal their experiences and we as educators can then track their progress with the understanding that it is not about how good a dancer they become, but how dancing makes them feel.

8. Creative Writing – The intent of this module is similar to the ‘all about me’ module. I firmly believe that expressing oneself through creative writing *that is public* is a huge builder of one’s confidence. It is also, in my mind, a prelude to effective public speaking. Creative writing has the ability of realizing that there are an infinite number of ways to express how you feel about a given topic. This in turn causes you to ‘dig deeper inside’ about that feeling to find even more insightful and deeper meanings to that same feeling. As a playwright, I can attest to the fact that creative writing is also an anguish, inasmuch as soon as you put an idea or thought to words, you are dissatisfied; knowing that you could have said it better. Such anguish is a good anguish, especially for us humans, as we all possess that infinite reservoir of feelings that seem to grow without end with new meanings. I am therefore of the opinion that there is no such thing as a student who cannot be a very creative writer and who will not benefit tremendously from such an endeavor. Creative writing will also invoke the self introspection these urban students so desperately need and spoken of so often in this report. This will be a very important module in this new model of urban education.

9. English – In today’s urban neighborhoods, a new dialect of the English language has emerged and become widespread. It is commonly referred to by ‘educated’ people as Ebonics. I’ve heard many well intentioned, caring and very intelligent public figures truly slam the use of this street talk; some with a degree of real anger. Brand new words like ‘fitna’, as in I’m ‘fitna’ hit you; is looked upon with pure disdain by our ‘upper’ brethren. While I respect their opinions and believe that they are based on caring for these urban folks, I am not in agreement with them.

As a matter of fact, I see the use of Ebonics quite differently. Critics of non-standard English always conveniently seem to leave out one fundamental fact; such language, including profanity, not only works, but is more efficient than standard English as a means of communication between humans. Clearly, if I wish to convey to you my intent, the fewer the number of words that are required to do this, the more efficient such language is. In addition, if these fewer words transport the full impact of my emotions, the efficiency in communications skyrockets. This is why profanity is such a powerful means of human communication. Now, I am not for one split second suggesting that Ebonics be taught or studied in this new model of urban education. In my opinion, profanity should be discouraged for other various reasons. My point here is that the intelligence and efficiencies of these urban dialects needs to be fully and seriously respected. I emphatically claim that there is no way to completely separate one's disdain for a person's use of specific language from that same person. In other words, once you judge a person by how they communicate, you pretty much judge that person in the same light; which is a terrible mistake, in my opinion. Furthermore, these urban students, like all humans, have the innate ability of deciphering a person's feeling towards them with remarkable accuracy. All this now said, my position is that proper English still needs to be a requirement, but taught as a dialect for a proper time and proper place. Standard English, in my opinion, should not be taught as a *corrective* language. Its value should not be seen as better or worse than how these urban students currently speak, but as a means to communicate effectively, not efficiently, within a specific environment. The vastness of that environment, including the wonderful world of literature, needs to be thoroughly expounded upon as a means to explain to students why it is so important for them. This new approach to teaching standard English is founded upon the teachers REAL respect for the intelligence of these urban students and not the disdain and disrespect that comes from

inadvertently judging them on how they speak. For me, I find that using Ebonics in certain situations quite fun, effective and relaxing; giving it real value to me.

10. Words.com - This module is really a sort of an adjunct to the Creative Writing and English modules. Once we are successful in getting students to see the great value in standard English, and that *mastering it* will bring them significant personal benefits, the next logical step is to use the technology we have at our disposal to increase student vocabulary. Teachers can easily build creative uses of this internet site to aid students in being more powerful as individuals with an increasing command of the English language. What we are after here is the inquisitiveness of a student quickly recognizing that he or she does not know what a specific word means, and that they can add to their vocabulary at lightning speed. It will be a really cool way for these students to build their vocabularies.

11. World News – As part of the significant enculturation effort to get these urban students to begin to think of themselves not just as citizens of the United States, but as **world citizens**, we will have specified periods each day for students to go online and read about what is going on in *their* world with lively and passionate debate to follow. I am always amazed when I travel outside of the U.S. and find myself in a hotel room listening to the news how unbelievably different the perspective is of a BBC for example, compared to the ABC or CBS news programs here. My point is that these urban students need to get different perspectives on what is going on in *their* world. I can already envision the positively heated debate among the students that such an exercise will bring each day, or at least each week. I can see students staying past their time in school to make sure their thoughts and opinions are heard by their fellow students **and their teacher** about world events. These are the kind of things that will lift their minds above their local circumstances and encourage them to become a positive force for change. I can also see

teachers themselves fully energized and encouraged by this debate and passion from their students.

12. Topics of Faith – Please bear with me, as this content module, which I consider **the** most important of *all* the modules, will take some effort to properly explain. Knowing the extreme difficulty of introducing such a powerfully sensitive and divisive concept into this new model of urban education, I pray deeply that my explanation will, at the very least, make sense to the readers of this treatise. Remember, the ultimate goal of this new model of urban education is the ***transformation of people***; as the problem is so complex that nothing else will change things; again in my very humble opinion. I am very certain of this. I will also keep to my promise of minimizing my intrusion into the world of theology; for the sake of brevity. From a constitutional perspective, I am in agreement, at least partially, with the principle of a separation between church and state. The supporting philosophy of this doctrine goes way back to such men as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. I find that their philosophies are, for the most part, based on relatively sound logic and common human behaviors. In addition, history clearly tells us that theocracies, where church and state is the same, are for various reasons, some of the very worst forms of government. The problem, at least to my own small mind, is that a complete omission of the full breadth of what ‘church’ means in this constitutional separation principle is **even more dangerous**, over the long run. For those of you astute readers already seeing that I am trying to have my cake and eat it too, you are absolutely correct. My means of accomplishing this surrounds the very large difference between faith and religion. For the record, I am a man strong in both. After surfing all over the internet for a good definition of this difference, I came across a site called Wiki.Answers.com that had a definition that seemed to me to be the closest one to my own thinking and one that I believe is not too complicated for the average person to

get a good grasp of. They say that “Faith is something anyone can have in anything. You have faith that your car will start in the morning, that your wife will not sleep with another man, that your plane won’t crash into the ocean. It is a way of believing in the outcome of forces, events and sciences **that we do not personally understand.** Religion, on the other hand, “is an organized society of people who believe in the existence of (insert name of favorite God here) and who go about their lives in a manner that would please that God”. With these definitions in mind, Faith per-se, is an irrefutable prerequisite to religion, but **in itself bears no direct relation to the worship of any God.** I am in complete agreement with this definition and will use it as part of my rationale for including the Topics of Faith module in this new model of urban education. We will use the ‘topics of faith’ module as a discussion and writing center to address such questions as: Is there a right and wrong? ; Does the Golden Rule make sense? ; What difference does it make how we treat people? ; Why should people get married? ; Why do people pray? Why should I pray? Why do people sometimes really hate each other when they don’t even know each other? Why do people sometimes really love each other when they really don’t even know each other? ; What happens to us after we die? Is it right to execute people for capital offenses? The point here is that no one, the teacher included, has a ‘right’ answer to questions like these. The objective here is to **generate self-introspection** in the intelligent minds of these young students about human behavior; especially their own. Forgive me for sounding like a broken record, but in my humble opinion, the only way for these young people, and all people for that fact, to avoid the degenerative and destructive behavior like gun use, drug use, teenage pregnancies, gang participation, perpetual poverty and the general violence that is spiraling out of control right before our eyes, is for **themselves** deciding that positive behavior, caring for

the well being of *all* people and envisioning a better life for themselves is in their best personal interests. Teachers will have a great deal of latitude here. No two sessions will be the same. Students and teachers will learn much from each other. Special invited guests will also become a big part of this module either in person or via video-conferencing to spur student excitement and curiosity about various topics of faith. Professional athletes, high profile artists, psychologists, reformed gang leaders, community activists, clergy of all faiths, concerned parents and new thinking educators will all be invited to speak and engage students in some of these difficult topics. I can even see video conferences between the students and various jails from around the country with carefully chosen inmates speaking to these students about their lives behind bars. This entire ‘topics of faith’ module is, without question, radical thinking and a fundamental departure in the basic objectives of public education; but with a mission of ***transformation***, absolutely required.

13. Games – There is no denying that young people love to play games. As a matter of fact, these games are actually replacing television viewing for many of these students. In my opinion, that is absolutely fitting for them. I am much older, but still love playing games. I am not a psychologist, but it seems to me that stoically watching television is far less taxing on brain function than the complete two-way engagement required of video games. Many adults try to link today’s video games that have mushroomed among our children with degenerative behaviors of all sorts. It is true that these modern games contain way too much violence and even viciousness, but I maintain that the use of these technically amazing games within a school environment can yield positive results. First, students need balance. Most of the modules discussed, like math, English, history, world news etc., are serious in nature. I believe having fun

is also important. We of course will choose games far less violent and more intellectually stimulating and challenging than the ones for sale to the general public. Remember, our new student desktop is lying atop state of the art internet and telecommunications technology as a foundation. I can envision two way games being played between our students in the same classroom or between them and their counterparts all over the globe. Imagine urban students here in Chicago playing chess or other strategy games with students in their own classroom or with students in London, Soweto, or Jerusalem. Olympic style competition can eventually be built. I am confident that video game makers will jump at the opportunity to develop advanced games that are fun, challenging and fitting for an educational environment. I am very excited about this module because it is one that I believe will boost the desire to master the content modules like English and math.

14. Science – This module is desperately needed by our country. We have fallen far behind many countries in developing young minds in the sciences. This has major long term implications. If the future holds that new technologies will be created and developed abroad, and that the U.S. will simply become a consumer of the new products that these technologies bring forth, our standard of living will unquestionably deteriorate due to the pressures from our trade deficits and other economic factors. The desire to ‘come to America’ will vanish along with the American dream. It is not a far stretch to imagine, in the not too distant future, seeing young students in South Korea, China, Brazil, Australia and Chile mastering sciences like physics, electrical engineering, energy creation, environmental engineering *while at the same time*, our students are mastering new weapons and new drugs for control of their local streets. Have mercy! For those of you who have not had your heads in the sand over the past twenty years, you know that this is already happening. What to do? During my tenure in the private sector, I often

successfully argued against the idea of best practices. My rationale is that it is a fundamental recipe for mediocrity. From my small mind, it is a defeatist and lazy concept based on a lack of confidence in your own original thinking and mixed in with a slight dash of cheating. Recall the words of authors David T Kearns and Denis P. Doyle where they comment on our outdated educational system from a global competitive perspective by claiming that while our competitors are continually improving, we need to understand that being good will not be good enough, not in business and not in education. We must set our sights on being better. I am in complete agreement with them. From this thinking, I conclude that trying to emulate what these other countries are doing to educate their young in the sciences is not the correct approach. The problem with using best practices is a lack of understanding that organizations are not static concepts. They do not create smart things in vacuums. Once you duplicate what they have *already done*, they have moved on to an improvement or discarded it all together. This is why the result for you is mediocrity. I say let them be. We need to think for ourselves. Proficiency in science must begin with an overdose of reward for our young students who show interest and proficiency. I also believe that we can use this new technology base to tap into our great universities and technology firms to come up with new and exciting ways to teach science to our urban students through these new student desktops. Learning the sciences of biology, chemistry, physics, engineering, *with the use of high definition imagery* I believe can excite our students in these fields like never before. I am certain that the science teachers themselves, with their new found autonomy and authority, will savor the challenge of making these topics fun and challenging to our students while also being fun and challenging to them as well. I am well aware that not all students will become proficient in physics, for example, but with the use of our new technology base, their interest and wonder in it will increase significantly. With that new

interest and wonder, you never know how their bright young minds might use that in other disciplines such as the Arts or analyzing human behavior; including their own.

15. Miscellaneous – This module will be open for use at the sole discretion and new ideas of the teachers. Included in the organizational structure of this new model of urban public education will be a technology staff of programmers and developers. I know from firsthand experience the *huge* progress that can take place when passionate operating ideas team up with highly skilled, competent and caring technology developers. Believe me when I tell you that **transformative things happen** when these two pieces of the puzzle are put together. Under this new model, teachers will be excited like never before and the students will see this, and by osmosis, will become excited themselves. I am very confident of this.

# Conclusion

As stated, this unique and radical new student desktop is built on the latest in telecommunications, satellite and internet technologies and attempts to encapsulate the findings from this research and my own vision on an entirely new approach to urban public education. The *idea* of this new student desktop is aligned with the thinking of Vincent Valle Jr., where he says that our current models and thinking on education are outmoded. It is also aligned with David T. Kearns and Dennis P. Doyle, who say that our schools need to look less like factories and more like high-tech companies.

Of highest importance, this new student desktop is specifically designed to facilitate the necessary **transformation of people** so brilliantly pointed out by Banks. It also takes into consideration the thinking of Rebecca Chopp and supports and encourages her more flexible and fallible teaching approaches. How so? With access to, for all intents and purposes, an infinite amount of instantaneous data and information, teachers will be forced to become more flexible and fallible because they can now be so easily refuted by students, most of whom already possess amazing surfing skills, with a quick search over the internet to validate what the teacher is saying. While I will save the discussion on the controlled use of this new student desktop for a later time, suffice it to say for now that the rigidity of stoic content is, for the first time, clearly under siege.

It also takes into consideration what authors Valerie E. Lee and Julie B. Smith discuss in their analysis. They say instead of the usual top down structure, there should be a lateral

communication and power in decision making with expectations and behavior driven by greater personalization and individual discretion. This new student desktop gives teachers that decision making power and individual discretion.

As a former corporate manager of large departments with hundreds of employees, I strongly believe that administrators should administrate and doers should have the power to do; with each being a full time job and function. My experience in analyzing education has shown me that for the most part, **teachers love to teach**; even though they are underappreciated and undercompensated. Imagine giving them the proper compensation, proper appreciation, proper authority, and proper autonomy to do what they love doing!! I am confident that we cannot even imagine the great results from that new dynamic. We seem to forget that teachers are college educated professionals with proven intellectual abilities.

In this new model, knowledge is seen as multidimensional and interdisciplinary where teaching is responsive to student's opinions, talents, and tastes. Learning is thus built more around concrete problems than abstract subjects; and student assessment is more flexible and less standardized. I have taken the thinking of these scholars and turned it into a unique workable solution built on state of the art technology giving both students and teachers the ability of responsiveness and decision making in an effort to increase student outcomes. As the reader can see, this new high-tech student desktop focuses on the *individuality* of each and every student. Several of these sources claim that this is a critical factor in any effective alternative education model.

The culmination of this research paper was the creation of an idea, set of basic new principles and a business plan to present to the Chicago Public School system to open an alternative public school, or turnaround an existing poor performing school, in an urban area. In

other words, it is one thing to learn of a problem, and another thing entirely to do something about it. If there is any one single thought from the research that I consider critical, it is that the problem of public education in urban areas is so complex, that no one can claim that they have ‘a solution.’ There will never be a ‘one size fits all’ answer that can apply to all urban schools. Hopefully, this report will come across as my presenting principles that a new model of urban public education can rest upon and not a stoic doctrine of solutions set in stone. If you are looking for someone to come up with ‘the answer’ to urban public education, you will need to find someone far smarter. I believe that one’s passion and courage for this endeavor must be accompanied by a true humbleness; understanding the difficulty of the task ahead.

In my opinion, any plan to improve urban public education needs to reflect this, and be constructed in such a way that emphasizes versatility and open ended design over static process. In other words, *specific* curriculum, teaching pedagogies, information systems, funding methods etc, should be introduced, but only as beginning points for discussion, and not as final solutions to the proposed school. There is no way that any plan can accurately predict the future success of *any* alternative model, even though a well designed plan is essential to getting things off ground zero. Once the paper was complete, I found myself having the necessary information and philosophies to build an effective business plan/design to open an alternative public school or turn around a poor performing existing one.

The most useful aspects of this paper were the views of the various scholarly sources and the ‘other survey methods,’ which in this case were the informal interviews I conducted. The one thing that my research did not include happens to be what my own conclusion theorizes as the most *critical element* in any potential solution to the problems of public education in urban areas. As stated, I did not find much on the interpersonal relationship dynamics between all the

stakeholders in the arena of public education in urban areas. I am totally convinced that my own value can only be manifested if I consider it **paramount**, that I am dealing with human beings, not statistics or computers. This is what, in my opinion, makes the problem so intractable. My own solution to this most complex of social issues is actually quite simple. I am still amazed at how little it appears to exist out there today: One needs to GET PEOPLE TO LIKE YOU **PERSONALLY**.

Such an endeavor is both a skill and not a skill at the same time; intellectual and not intellectual at the same time. First, if you are not a nice person to start, and almost all people, thank GOD, can see this with incredible accuracy, you have ZERO hope. Second, if you are not an intelligent person, and most people can also see this too, you have ZERO hope. Third, if you do not *really* love young people and your personal agenda is **not** a strong desire to help them; and this too, people can see, you have ZERO hope. So while there are no guarantees in life, and the problem of reforming public school education in urban area is surely one, I am certain that without the above personal qualities, I would be far better off pursuing a different career.

Thank you for your attention.

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