

“They say that we are prone to violence, but it’s home sweet home”: The Praxis of Hip Hop, Self-Actualization, and Democratic Education for Addressing the Roots of Violence

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Abstract

The unmet need for recognition is at the root of human aggression and violence. Each person has a basic need for food, clothing, and shelter. We also have a personal need for respect and regard, and to reach our potential. For marginalized communities of low-income urban youth of all colors, normal actions taken to meet such needs can become difficult. Efforts are stymied or blocked by society and individuals in the form of injustice and prejudice, as well as discrimination through social, economic, and political isolation. Having these needs unmet, leads to feelings of frustration, powerlessness, hopelessness, and eventually to apathy--the stage before violence. Thus, violence per se is not our problem, normalcy and indifference are. Situations which enable true human regard and respect will reduce the tendency to meet these needs in ways having anti-social consequences. Such genuine situations are characterized by actions toward meeting psychological-social needs through personal and cultural clarification, and self-actualization. The use of pedagogies of recognition and democratic education in our urban public schools, appreciating global Hip Hop culture via validating youths’ search for authenticity, and an urban community enabling the uniqueness, self-determination, and human potential of each and every citizen are recommended.

1. Introduction

“At the heart of violence lies the wish to show ourselves men with a will. But the complexity of society makes the man lose heart. Nothing he does any longer seems a skill to be proud of in a world where others get the headlines. This is a plausible picture, in despair of which men cheerfully join any private army offering the ambivalent identity of a uniform: the right to salute and be saluted.” ~ Jacob Bronowski, *The Face of Violence*

“How a society channels male aggression is one of the greatest questions as to whether that society will survive. That’s why I am not against violence in the media; I am against the glorification of immoral violence.” ~ Dennis Prager, author.

“It is better to be violent, if there is violence in our hearts, than to put on the cloak of non-violence to cover impotence.” ~ Mahatma Gandhi

2. Framing the Problem as a Need for a New Kind of Urban Education

It is tragic to have to say that there is no need to try to prove urban public education in America is in trouble. We only have to look at local television to see the negative outcomes associated with urban school failure. We also know that when urban students are graduated on time ready for careers, college and citizenship, chances of being involved in crime or violence are reduced.

The latest Schott Foundation report “The Urgency of Now” [1] alone reflects the echo of the constant debates on the issue. Oddly, the report presents a term, “The pushout crisis.” Evidently, nearly 17% of African American students and 7% of Latin@ students were suspended at least once in 2009-10, compared to 5% for White students. The section of the report concludes that disproportionate use of out-of-school suspension for Black and Latin@ children at all levels is the first step toward pushing them out. Thus, the definition of a “pushout” is a student who leaves their school before graduation, through the encouragement of the school itself.

The pushout crisis created situations where many schools are trying to get rid of (dump or “counsel” out) students who may tarnish the schools’ statistics by failing to graduate on time [2].

Pushing students out is especially the case for urban charter schools which are under intense pressure to perform. These schools “spin” the pushout phenomenon as one where the student and their family “self-select out” [3] and so the school is left free of responsibility: We did not push the child out, they “self-opted” out. Thus, the challenge is not only trying to convince urban students to stay in school, but trying to keep urban school officials from pushing students out. Dealing with the “pushout” issue is going to take a whole new and proactive approach.

3. Pedagogies of Recognition as the Basis of a New Urban Education Where Educators Name, Know, Respect, and Celebrate Students

Perhaps these “pushed out” students, who may have been particularly subjected to years of social, cultural, political, and intellectual alienation, are ready for a new kind of pedagogical experience in their schools.

This is what educator Louie F. Rodriguez [4] asserts. He bases his new schooling on Max Van Manen's concept of "Pedagogy of Recognition" which are relational, curricular, contextualizing, pedagogical, and transformative. He explains these as relationally driven pedagogies because they foster identity formation while raising the existentially necessary critical consciousness of urban students.

Rodriquez wants to "problematize" the concept of recognition, particularly for urban youth, and introduce a new urban education around pedagogy which will help schools to understand, examine, and "help rectify" the social, political, and economic conditions that plague marginalized communities of low-income youth.

Perhaps due to his minority status, Rodriguez knows urban public schooling is inherently a socio-political actuality. Urban teachers must foster the academic, cultural, and especially the political development of youth. , he "reweaves" the ways urban schools conceptualize their understanding of youth in low-income schools.

"Thanks to our pedagogical responsibility and influence, we have the power to recognize; a power that has been given to us by the child and that can be observed when the transformational effect of recognition occurs." ~ Max Van Manen

Dr. Rodriquez also knows that equal attention must also be placed on questioning the institutional power structures that legitimize or deny recognition. Negative recognition, or denying a person's or group's existence, he sees as counterproductive and it typically continues to perpetuate the distrust urban students and families have regarding public urban school systems [4].

3.1 Understanding the Function and Significance of Recognition through an Introduction to the Various Pedagogies of Recognition

Reviews of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs [5] and Rollo May's five levels of power which exist as a potential in each person [6] show a common link regarding the function and significance given to the human need for recognition, and acts of self-affirmation and assertion used to develop self-respect, and gain and keep the regard of others.

3.1.1 Maslow's Hierarchy of human needs

"We use violence to show our love."

~ A remark by a Cape Town, South Africa youth stated to researcher Monique Barling as to how

violence is used to solve minor conflicts or acts of retribution in their community.

According to Abraham Maslow [5], we human beings have fundamental needs which motivate our behaviors. These needs are:

- Biological--hunger, thirst, sleep
- Safety--security, protection
- Social--sense of belonging, love
- Esteem--self-esteem, recognition, status
- Self-Actualization--the need to fulfill our innate potential

3.1.2 Self-Actualization Self-actualization is the need of humans to make the most of their unique abilities and to strive to fulfill their essence. Maslow [5] describes self-actualization as follows: Self-actualization is the intrinsic growth of what is already in the organism, or more accurately, of what the organism is.

"What we can be, we must be. We must be true to our own nature. This need we may call self-actualization." ~ Kurt Goldstein

For Maslow, self-actualized people are moral, creative, spontaneous, problem solvers, lack prejudice, and embrace facts [5].

"The final aim is not to know, but to be. There never was a more risky motto than: Know thyself. You've got to know yourself as far as possible; yet, not for the sake of knowing. You've got to know yourself so that you can at least be yourself. 'Be yourself' is the last motto." ~ D. H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*

3.1.3 May's Levels of Power Dr. Rollo May sees five levels of potential power in each of us [6]:

1. The infant's *power to be*. Power is given in the act of birth and the sheer fact the infant lives. The newborn infant crying, violently waving arms as signs of discomfort, demanding hunger or other needs be met, must be able to find their power and use it. To exist is to be powerful.

2. *Self-affirmation*, the ability to survive with self-esteem. Besides the need to be, we have to affirm our own being. Survival is not enough, but survival with some esteem--a sense of significance and fulfilment that is innately self-satisfying and appreciated by others. Since humans are self-conscious, the question of significance emerges, and the long and crucially important quest for self-esteem or its substitute is continuous. The cry for recognition becomes the central cry in this need for self-affirmation.

“I don't say he's a great man, he never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall in his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person.” ~ Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

3. *Self-assertion*, which develops when self-affirmation is blocked. When assertion meets resistance we make greater effort to make clear who we are, what we want and believe. It is now against opposition. This is drawing a line in the sand--a stronger form of behavior more overt than self-affirmation. We make it unavoidable that the others see us as we cry: “Here I am; I demand that you notice me!”

4. *Aggression* is a reaction to thwarted self-assertion. In contrast, this is crossing “the line in the sand” because our assertion(s) for recognition and other needs are ignored. A natural drive (impulse, tendency, or action) is a potential in humans. The aggressive response is a part of our nature which may be called to meet our needs, both primary (food, shelter, safety) and secondary (recognition, affiliation). Aggression occurs because the opposition to affirmation and assertion is so entrenched, and the apathy and inertia this has created in the ignored person or group are so strong that greater force is necessary.

Although the term “aggression” has a well deserved negative connotation, we still do not want to see anti-violence programs misjudge the healthy place of aggression in individual or societal development [7].

“In the Utopian aim of removing all power and aggression from human behavior, we run the risk of removing self-assertion, self-affirmation, and even the power to be. If it were successful, it would breed a race of docile, passive eunuchs and would lay the groundwork for an explosion in violence that would dwarf all those that have occurred so far. We can't deny the essence of ourselves: the self-affirmation and self-assertion making us persons and without which we have no reason for living. What we have failed to see is that aggression has been, on the positive side, in the service of those values of life that would if discarded, leave us bereft indeed.” ~ Rollo May, *Power and Innocence*

5. Violence, a response to situations where the individual or group feels all other ways of reacting are blocked off. Efforts to obtain recognition are ignored and/or aggressively resisted by others. It occurs when reason and persuasion are

ineffective. Thus, violence is largely physical: the cerebrum being bypassed, the stimulus transmitted from the environment is translated directly into the violent impulse to strike.

“Violence is, essentially, a confession of ultimate inarticulateness.” ~ Time Magazine

“Violence is as American as cherry pie.”
~ H. Rap Brown

“In violence we forget who we.”
~ Mary McCarthy

3.2 The Pedagogies of Recognition

Below are the five pedagogies of recognition Rodriguez [4] suggests educators use to become “transformative mentors” who surround, inspire, and support youth so that they can enact their own agency as people.

Relational recognition involves the ways in which urban youth are viewed, named (labeled), greeted, and acknowledged within the school context. It asks teachers to question: In what ways do I know, relate to, and respect my students?

Rodriguez points out the influence zero-tolerance policies, and other “climates of accountability” such as high stakes standardized testing [8] actually “thwart” the authentic student–adult relationships schools need to gain the trust and hope of urban students. Yet, authentic relationships with students, Rodriguez writes, can influence engagement and achievement only if teachers “...are willing to enact the simple yet critical gestures of acknowledgement.” Extending these basic human “courtesies” are so very important to “urban youth in urban public schools where their disposition is not perceived as the norm as success by assimilation” and not cultural empowerment and self-actualization.

Curricular recognition considers the ways in which the knowledge and experiences of urban youth are affirmed, validated, and legitimized within the school context. It challenges teachers to ask themselves: “In what ways does the curriculum reflect the lived realities of the youth I serve?”

Here Rodriguez [4] has a basic insight to share: We should assume that urban youth are ready to engage in rich intellectual activities, particularly when the content is directly relevant to their lives.

And why has this type of “engagement” not happened? The typical White middle-class culture of schools subtracts from the curriculum the realities which all urban youth face in their

neighborhoods. Also, what is presented to students as curriculum is actually in many ways a complex and politicized tool that has been used historically to exclude and marginalize urban youth in public urban schools.

Basically then, what Rodriguez points to is that urban youth are quite smart and hip, particularly they have the “street smarts” needed for their very survival. So, historically they bring a complex set of skills for analyzing, theorizing, and predicting realities not only in their neighborhoods, but in America. The issue for Rodriguez is: policies and practices of the institute of public education often fail to legitimize students’ knowledge and experiences--their existential realities.

Contextualizing recognition urges educators to connect urban students’ dispositions and lack of engagement from school to the social-historical context for the purposes of transgressing the dominant paradigms that students experience today (i.e., school–community disconnection).

When educators “contextualize” recognition, they must consider the ways in which urban youth are recognized within their social context as a means of understanding their existential experiences in school and beyond. Here a teacher must ask: In what ways does the social context help me understand the lives and schooling experiences of the students I serve?

Rodriguez [4] explains it this way: urban youth come to school with experience which require a degree of skill and knowledge that is rarely validated in the school context because it may not be considered “official” curriculum.

In many instances, he claims these urban skills and experiences are needed for purposes of handling or overcoming the status quo (the historical school-community disconnect or social justice issues). Contextualizing will help teachers see these coping behaviors not as negative, but as a way urban communities can be used as “a catalyst for change” [9].

Pedagogical recognition happens when teachers’ lessons stem from and are shaped by students’ experiences in schools, the values they place on particular knowledge and experiences, and how these experiences and life lessons interact within the larger social context in which they live. A teacher using this approach to pedagogy asks: In what ways does power influence the learning and relational environment of the classroom?

Rodriguez [4] notes that educators must assume urban youth of all colors want to talk about their

experiences. Legitimizing the knowledge and experiences of urban youth may disrupt and transform the social relations of power typically found in schools and society. Here educators can work toward a consciousness-raising: conscientization [10]. Students will realize their position in the world and fight for social justice.

This begs the question: since urban schools are uniquely situated to understand the effects of poverty and other social toxins on the lives and school performance of urban students, why not have these schools’ curriculum formed around the study of and eventual eradication of these toxins? Now the purpose of urban schools is not to get students out of poverty, but to get rid of poverty [11].

Finally, *transformative recognition* is a constant process where questions are forged about the purpose of recognition and education. In this situation teachers must question: In what ways do all aspects of the educational endeavor live up to principles of justice, transformation, and freedom?

As an example, Rodriguez [4] points out that transformative recognition will encourage educators to constantly question the purposes and goals of their policies, processes, practices, and curriculum: education for whom, for what purpose, for what social order? Transformation challenges teachers to examine how public urban education coincides with larger community goals for social change and liberation. When this happens, Rodriguez asserts that justice-seeking projects will become central to the educational process as “...a way to better serve our youth and forge hope in impoverished communities.”

The very practicality and direct relevance of these methods of recognition is why Rodriguez [4] believes urban students (and their families) who have experienced years of social, cultural, political, and intellectual alienation, may be ready for a new kind of pedagogical experience in urban schools.

4. Other Pedagogies of Recognition

Two more pedagogies of recognition, self actualizing and global youth culture, must be added to the previous five pedagogies.

4.1 Self-Actualizing: Recognition as a Way to Enable the Full Potential of Each Student

A pedagogy of recognition regarding self-actualization is a process where schools are set up to enable the full potential of each student. This

approach recognizes the influence of the “one-size-fits-all” concept of normalcy and counters the hegemony of the myth of “average” with a pedagogy based on finding and developing the uniqueness of each student.

4.1.1 One-Size-Fits-All or “Normalcy” as the Source of Problems in Society [12]

“If such a thing as a psycho-analysis of today’s prototypical culture were possible, such an investigation would show the sickness proper to the time to consist precisely in normality.
~ Theodore Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

At the 2006 (14th) International Democratic Education Conference [13] in Sydney, Australia, Yaacov Hecht of the Institute for Democratic Education (IDE) argued that the source of problems in society is the one-size-fits-all “square” we all must fit into. This is reinforced by schools where we are told, if you want to learn, you have to come inside the square. We judge everyone by the square. We are asked, “Why are you outside of the square?” This, he said, is the danger of school.

The role of standardized tests Hecht [12] says is to keep us in the square. He predicted an era of global testing would arise to promote world standards. He sees this as no more than the creation of a culture of competition, power, and money: a “Coca Cola” culture which turns individual cultures into one global culture.

In traditional approaches to standardized testing, learning disabilities are dismissed and every grade level has a fixed standard of achievement. In democratic self-managed learning approaches, testing is not standardized, thus unique learning abilities are recognized and each person has unique areas of strengths and development [12].

4.1.2 Using Democratic Education to Enable Self-Actualization Using Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Hecht [13] noted that presently only around 20% of the population self-actualizes, yet everyone can be excellent, especially if we let a child in school choose the area they wish to develop. These are the questions we ask our children to encourage self-actualization:

- What is your uniqueness?
- What do you bring?

“A democratic culture guards the equal right of every person for self-actualization.” ~ Yaacov Hecht

To have a democratic culture we must [13]:

- Recognize the fact of “the different”-- difference is beautiful.
- Accept the fact that we do not own the truth.
- Recognize that “the different” is also a part of the status quo.
- Recognize the importance of self-criticism as a constructive tool for growth.
- Disburse democratic education outside school borders--to businesses, government agencies, social/community, and civic organizations.

According to Hecht, the current problem regarding sustainability is that we do not know how to deal with difference, but why?

- We only see ourselves.
- We only see the world from our perspective.
- We want everyone to be like us.
- We want to expand ourselves, and our point of view everywhere.

Thus, the goal of education for sustainability must be to reduce negative aggression and violence by:

- A democratic school culture fostering closer relationships between adults and children.
- Looking for the uniqueness of every child.
- Providing a place for it to develop.
- Bringing this to the attention of the community and celebrating.

This is an opportunity to move from a society based on democratic procedures to one fostering a democratic culture. This ethos of principles gives each person a right to know and express their uniqueness, and so a way each can become capable of the following:

- Recognizing the uniqueness of every other member of society.
- Understanding that difference and/or uniqueness do not pose a threat, but are rather an opportunity for the individual and the community as a whole.
- Understanding the importance of supporting others in their quest to find uniqueness.
- Recognizing that the integration of differences guarantees a world that chooses construction over destruction [13].

The challenge for urban public school districts is to bring about legislation that enables the creation of a fluid educational system where

difference is a “taken for granted” attribute of every child who enters a public school classroom.

4.1.3 An Education City Enables Diversity, Excellence, and Self-Actualization [13] An “Education City” is a city where citizens choose to position education at the head of their priorities. In such a city, education is not what happens during certain hours and in certain places, it is the essence of the city itself. The vision of a “culture of learning” is driven by the belief that individual development and self-fulfillment through education improves the general quality of life for everyone.

4.1.4 Pluralistic Learning [13] Yaacov also suggests “pluralistic learning,” a type of education which acknowledges uniqueness: each person is different with both weak and strong attributes, talents, and abilities.

“Democratic education is self-managed learning.”
~ Yaacov Hecht

4.1.5 Excellence Centers in an Education City [13] An Education City would manifest through collaboration among community, government, and education organizations which would promote “Excellence Centers” outside of school representing a variety of intelligences, interests, occupations/careers, etc. Here, urban students could see what they are passionate about learning and doing. They could begin intense personal study and/or find adults who have the skills, interests, or careers they desire. The city could provide adults storefronts, places in strip malls or studios for individuals to pursue their passions. Here, adults could develop and/or share their own interests with the community and the world. This would be the first of many steps a community takes to support and develop the personal passion(s), uniqueness, and self-actualization of its citizens.

4.2 Hip Hop: Cultural Recognition through Using Self-Actualization and Hip Hop’s “Keepin’ It Real”

It is no coincidence that the concept of self-actualization Yaacov Hecht supports for a sustainable society is also the essence and “promise” of today’s global youth culture. To understand the potential of self-actualization as the mission and goal of public education, we are challenged to examine and discuss the repression of Black identity within these same urban school settings and larger society.

To do this, we must first examine the culture of identity of the Black adolescent male as reflected within and influenced by Hip Hop culture.

“I failed your class ‘cause I ain’t with your reasoning. You’re tryin’ to make me you.”
~ Boogie Down Productions, 1989

Hip Hop is a world-view of those born after 1965. In the early 1970s, African American and Puerto Rican communities in New York City’s South Bronx gave birth to a culture of music, spoken word, graphic art, dance, and fashion. They termed this culture “Hip Hop.” (To make it clear, although rap music gets most of the attention, as noted above, there is more to Hip Hop than rap.)

In “Keepin’ It Real, Keepin’ It Right,” [14] educator D. Miles Brady discusses being a Black student in urban high schools in America. He quotes James Cone in his groundbreaking work of 1969, “Black Theology 6-Black Power.” Brady shares Mr. Cone’s “kernel of truth”: “This is a message to the oppressor, not in hope that he will listen, (After Dr. King’s death, who can hope?), but with the expectation that my own existence will be clarified.” Cone’s insight made Brady asks: How will my own existence be clarified? How will the existences of young, Black students be clarified and respected?

Brady’s and other African American’s pursuit of “clarity” is directly linked to the history of enslavement of Africans in America. Having their home culture (languages, religions and kinship systems) stripped from them, they were left no alternative but to learn their master’s language, values, and institutions [14].

“If violence is wrong in America, violence is wrong abroad. If it is wrong to be violent defending black women and black children and black babies and black men, then it is wrong for America to draft us, and make us violent abroad in defense of her.” ~ Malcolm X

Yet, most African Americans, for the sake of their sanity, were at the same time left no choice but to reinvent themselves. With no tenable link to Africa and the desire to distance themselves from their enslavers, Blacks created and recreated forms of cultural expression and thus valid personal identities [14].

According to Brady, out of this same desire for recreation was born the clarifying potential of Hip Hop culture which he describes as “...an artistic rebellion against the humiliating deadness of western culture. It is a culture reflecting its own values of respect, loyalty, and authenticity.”

Despite its various styles, Hip Hop is about “keeping it real” and remaining authentic to the culture. For example, as a narrative of survival and independence, the successes of authentic rap music comes from not giving away one’s music to mainstream culture and speaking and acting out on those who do [14].

We can see within the DNA of Hip Hop is the constant process of the clarification regarding authenticity. In the world of Hip Hop, youth who misuse the genuine values of the culture are identified as “posers” or “busters,” or “sell-outs who need to get the hell out.” Again, Brady points out that genuine rap is not all about “the cheese” (money) or being the top “player” or pimp. However, when White media deemed certain styles of rap as being “gangsta” rap, soon ignorant and “wack” MCs (rappers) began “wanna be” attempts to live up to this reputation. The original gave way to the copy. *Commercialization turned Hip Hop into “hip pop”* [14].

4.2.1 Problems that Plague the Hip Hop Nation and Black Students in Urban Schools In Brady’s [14] estimation, our urban public schools are a culture that misunderstands real identities of young Black men, preferring to devalue them, and find them to be somehow unmotivated and/or threatening, even criminal. He says, unfortunately many times these young men will live up to the reputation. Or, some fall into categories of “racelessness,” attempting to cut out blank, generic identities. Others, who do not try to fit into the Black urban mainstream, or who try to fit into the larger society are dubbed by their peers to be “defectors” and called “oreos” or “incognegroes.” So, how can young Black men “keep it real”? More importantly, how can our urban public schools help marginalized urban youth of all colors find clarity and be authentic?

“Hip Hop [is] a ‘Critical Cultural Movement’ due to its historic and continued orientations towards healing broken families and supporting cultural and spiritual connectedness; resisting and critiquing peoples, spaces, and systems that promote fragmentation and divisiveness; and fighting (literally) for a peaceful, restorative, and humanizing existence--a movement towards self-actualization.” ~ Thurman Bridges [15]

4.2.2 How Can Our Urban Public Schools Help Black Urban Youth (and All Urban Youth) be Authentic?

“Urban students are asked to trade the culture of their home and community for the ‘higher culture’ of the school in exchange for access to college. This reduces the life choices of students into a

false binary, that of choosing between staying behind as a failure, and ‘getting out’ as a success. Faced with the prospect of leaving their communities behind to be successful, many urban youth opt out of school. They choose to retain an urban and cultural identity they perceive to be in conflict with the expectations of schools, even if the cost of that choice is school failure. To be effective, urban schools must begin to develop partnerships with communities that provide young people the opportunity to be successful while maintaining their identities as urban youth.” ~ Dr. Jeffery Duncan-Andrade

Yaacov Hecht’s [13] Institute for Democratic Education (www.democratic.co.il/en/) provides urban schools a way to enable students to be more authentic. The IDE envisions schools as crucibles for self-actualization and the realization of human freedom. Such a vision validates Hip Hop culture which is the crucible for urban youth to clarify their identity and be who they are potentially.

If what Yaacov asserts is true and viable, that “A democratic culture is one that guards the equal right of every individual for self-actualization,” then we can also say, “A Hip Hop culture is one that guards the equal right of every individual for self-actualization.”

Educators must realize urban students are in a existential dilemma: feeling unrecognized due to the one-size-fits-all controlling normalcy of the dominant culture, they know if they assimilate this culture, they will not be authentic.

This is profound and key to making current failing urban schools work for the many disaffected students.

5. Discussing the Potential of Self-Actualization to Reduce Negative Aggression and Violence

By enabling self-actualization and not assimilation, self-affirmation will not be blocked, nor will self-assertion be “thwarted.” As basic levels of power are respected and provided expression, and our psycho-social needs are met, the reason and potential for negative aggression and violence will be neutralized.

“We each have an insatiable appetite to be respected, appreciated, valued, and heard.” ~ www.lifemoxie.com

As was noted, according to Maslow [5] we all have a need for recognition--a sense of significance and fulfillment that is innately self-satisfying, and is appreciated by others. Unfortunately, indeed, people may starve for food, but we do not live by

bread alone, and people also “starve for recognition.” Yet, what if recognition cannot be obtained legitimately, will persons be motivated to obtain it somehow, in whatever form and degree--one way or another?

In *Power and Innocence*, Rollo May [6] argues that when our need for recognition/significance is blocked, we become assertive. This is natural. If our assertiveness is blocked and we still do not get the recognition and sense of significance we are seeking, we may become aggressive. If others continue to ignore us no matter what we do, or if our need to fulfill our possibilities is blocked, the soil is made ready for the seeds of alienation, uselessness, and hopelessness--and we may be inclined to violence.

“Writing saved me from the sin and inconvenience of violence.” ~ Alice Walker

5.1 The Issue Is Indifference, Not Violence

Power corrupts, but so does powerlessness [6]. The problem is: in order to decrease the potential of negative aggression and violence we must recognize the underlying causes of the social disease of impotence. When a person’s need for recognition is stifled; when their sense of justice is ignored; when they feel they have little influence over events; when they become frustrated when kept from realizing dreams, ambitions, longings, ideas, full-filling their potential and actualizing who they are, they can become apathetic. Violence is not the child of power, but of powerlessness [6].

“The Church is in the world, it is part of the suffering in the world, and though Christ condemned the disciple who struck off the ear of the high priest's servant, our hearts go out in sympathy to all who are moved to violence by the suffering of others. The Church condemns violence, but it condemns indifference more harshly. Violence can be the expression of love, indifference never. One is an imperfection of charity, the other the perfection of egoism.” ~ Graham Greene, *The Comedians*

Apathy is the stage before violence. We can only imagine the complete lack of significance, or sense of fulfillment and influence, and the feelings of nothingness that are inside the mind and heart of each of society’s most violent.

Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel looks at it this way:

- The opposite of beauty is not ugliness, it’s indifference.

- The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference.
- The opposite of life is not death, it’s indifference.

Now, let us add: The opposite of peace is not violence, it’s indifference; it’s nothingness, in authenticity, impotence, and anomie. It’s a human being’s unfulfilled potential [16].

“Violence is the expression of impotence.” ~ Bronowski, *The Face of Violence*

If these ideas have truth, Yaacov Hecht [13] has proposed one important way society can empower citizens, challenge indifference, enable the actualizing of our potential, and give people a basic sense of recognition and significance, therefore countering the causes of violence by way of self-actualization that comes through democratic education. See what democratic education is by watching this video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLECircdLGs.

People have voices, and they want to be heard. They want engagement. They have a sense of history, of what others have done, and what needs to be done. They want to feel important, to have a sense of power that is more personal and socially powerful—the power to be able to assert oneself, to exercise influence on the world, and to make a difference.

Are those performing the deeds of violence in society the ones who are trying, though anti-socially, to establish their self-esteem, defend their self-image, and demonstrate they too are significant? These needs of esteem and importance, by themselves, are potentially constructive. Our human aggressive impulse arises not out of the excesses of power, but out of powerlessness--the feeling of insignificance that leads to the sense that nothing matters and that there is no other way to express or articulate it than through violence [6].

“Hungry people can’t be good at learning or producing anything, except perhaps violence.” ~ Pearl Bailey

When schools think democratically by following the advice of the IDE--enable students to articulate and follow their interests, goals, dreams, career interests, so as to reach their potential and self-actualize--there will be little or no need to be negatively aggressive in order to have the sense of significance we all seek.

6. Summary

“The love of violence is to me the ancient symbolic gesture of man against the constraints of society. Vicious men can exploit the impulse, but it’s a disaster to treat the impulse as vicious. No society is strong that does not acknowledge the protesting man; and no man is human who does not draw strength from the natural animal. Violence is the sphinx by the fireside, and she has a human face.”

~ Jacob Bronowski, *The Face of Violence*

This paper searches for answers to fundamental questions concerning the sources of violence [6]: What does violence do for the individual? What purposes are achieved through aggression & violence?

“Many feel the only way they can be heard or get a reaction is by setting fires and tearing things up.”
~Antonio French on Ferguson, MO riots over the 8/9/14 police killing of unarmed teen Mike Brown

Maslow [5] and May [6] provided a possible link between the human need to be noticed and valued and the resulting negative aggression/violent behavior when these needs are unfulfilled.

“Riot is the language of the unheard.”

~Martin Luther King

This brings new views about healthy aggression [7], or the relationship between violence and indifference. Considering how meeting these fundamental human needs through practicing democratic education in urban public schools and an appreciation of current global youth culture as a means to reducing youth violence is proposed.

“Violence isn’t always evil. What’s evil is the infatuation with violence.” ~ Singer Jim Morrison of the rock band “The Doors”

Yaacov Hecht [13] of the IDE helped develop over 30 public democratic schools in Israel. See: www.democratic.co.il/en. The theme of the schools is discovering and developing the uniqueness of each student and is based on the concept of self-actualization.

Democratic education involves pluralistic learning. It is the opposite of the simple one-size-fits-all “square” traditional public schools must utilize since educators cannot deal with the complexities of large and growing amounts of knowledge. This creates, inside the square, a bell curve where 30% are excellent and 70% are weak to mediocre. We tell students to go to school and they will be successful and make money, but Yaacov notes, due to the one-size-fits-all bell curve paradigm, few make it. Standardized testing makes the square more exclusive. Ignoring the variety of talents and interests students bring to

school makes the “square” the most restrictive and consequently the least democratic [13].

It is no coincidence our innate impulse to clarity, to self-actualize, to be who we potentially are, gave birth to the clarifying potential of Hip Hop culture as it “rebelled artistically against the humiliating deadness of western culture” [14]. Reflecting its own values of “respect, loyalty, and authenticity,” Hip Hop’s pursuit of clarity through credibility is condensed in its slogan, “Keepin’ it real.” This is directly linked to actualizing one’s personal uniqueness and integrity while remaining authentic to one’s culture. Authentic Hip Hop will manifest in the self-actualization needed for a more sustainable world.

It is through an ethos of democracy and validation of youth culture by pedagogies of recognition that our urban public schools can become crucibles for self-actualization and a means to clarity. Now students can be academically successful--all while maintaining their urban identities [17]. Such a school climate reduces the use of negative aggressive attitudes and behaviors as ways to meet our basic need for self-affirmation, recognition, and validation.

“Poverty is the worst form of violence.”

~Mahatma Gandhi

Finally, this paper suggests a relationship among democratic education, authenticity, and human aggression and violence. Noting that self-actualization reduces the aggressive impulse, the paper questions the triangular pyramid hierarchy created by the one-size-fits-all square in which traditional education is trying to fit all students, allowing for just a few to self-actualize. This triangle organization reflects the unsustainable competitive model for society, enabling violence. In the pluralistic learning [13] circle of democratic schools where uniqueness is the standard, everyone, not a few, can self-actualize.

7. Conclusions

As stated in the title of this paper, “They say that we are prone to violence, but it's home sweet home,” leading Hip Hop artist Jay Z declares that the neighborhood that he calls home is full of violence and drugs, and where police takes their cut. This is “home sweet home” because this is his reality. This is the life in the “hood” where differences between men are met with violence for violence.

“I’m from the streets where the hood could swallow a man, bullets ’ll follow a man. There’s so much coke that you could run the slalom And cops comb the shit top to bottom They say that we are prone to violence, but it’s home sweet

home Where personalities crash and chrome meets chrome.” ~ Jay Z, “U Don’t Know”

www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/jayz/udontknow.html
www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXR_DncpiPc

Jay Z challenges urban teachers to regard the daily realities their urban students face by making teaching for recognition a part of urban schools’ pedagogy and curriculum.

This is very important because Jay Z also challenges urban schools to reconcile: a) the current purpose of education which has been reduced to a “test-prep pedagogy” [4] of rubrics and high stakes standardized tests; with, b) the need for authentic relationships, mutual respect, and true urban school reform--all of which are required to win the hearts and minds of urban students and their families.

Although individuals, not connected to Hip Hop, confuse Hip Hop with violence, it is Hip Hop that builds the framework of recognition in this paper. This structure serves as a lens by which to better understand the struggles and challenges facing our country’s most vulnerable populations, such as the marginalized youth, by proposing a way to better serve them and forge hope in impoverished communities.

“The Roots of Violence: Wealth without work, Pleasure without conscience, Knowledge without character, Commerce without morality, Science without humanity, Worship without sacrifice, Politics without principles.” ~ Gandhi

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