The Underground Philosophy of Education

Coming Soon…

Chapter 1: The Educational Breakdown
(E-bonics)

Now, the real deal of education can be discussed is simpler terms than pedagogical creeds and differentiated instruction of the sort. I would like to let the reader know how I decomposed the professional talk to what I will call the casual language that you might hear in places such as the neighborhood of my upbringing. Just in case there is any mystery, I am a child of public housing and a single parent family of eight children; so while I was growing up, I was clueless to any words any similar to epistemology (closest I would say would probably be the word pistol!). In the field, I often had to break down the million dollar words for myself in order to connect what I see with what I know. And so, the following thoughts were constructed in the meantime.

The development of a child is one of the topics I covered in my creed as I stated that I believed that it involved interaction with the environment. There has been much research in about nature verses nurture as far as if a child naturally acts the way he or she does or if their

environment influences them. Tell me, how many people operate totally from natural instinct, with no evidence of change or development through experience? Or, how many people go solely by what they pick up from their environment and never show any evidence of instinctive or natural behavior? The battle to base education on either nature or nurture is senseless because it is clearly a mixture. I also talked about how a child develops through social interactions. One can see that a child's educational experience seems to be based solely on interaction. Can you think of a child who comes to school specifically to read, do math, spell, and memorize countries everyday; a child who never thinks about when he or she is going to see a friend, girlfriend, or have to face an enemy. Remember, I base my opinions on what I have seen so it may differ. But, in my experiences, the only thing a child comes to school for is to talk with friends. Some keep their grades up in order to maintain freedoms and rewards, but if grades had no bearings on a child (i.e. passing, failing, sports eligibility) how do you think report cards would look? To the child, school is not about education and we need to keep that in mind. The students already know why they are coming and even stressing the importance will only have an affect on few.

Continuing on similar lines as to why students come to school, one might also think about why student behave the way they do when they are there? If they have their own reasons to come, it is almost certain that those reasons will control how they act.

In my creed, I stated that behavior is intrinsic. I think that what a child does come from them and only them. If you just study the behavior of a child, good or bad, you can see that they know exactly what they are doing and the consequences. Even in law, the few times a person was not held accountable for their actions were if their insanity plea was actually proven. Otherwise, people in life and children in school are aware of what they are doing. The important question is to figure out why they choose to do the wrong thing instead of the right thing. That is a million dollar question that I'm not sure has one blanket answer. When I think about what made me choose to do the right thing when I was surrounded by so much wrong doing, I don't think I would answer it the same as any other person who went through similar instances. Besides, there were times I chose to do the wrong thing and it solely the grace of God that I am here today in this position instead of in the position that which we all beat our brains trying to figure out—the time where we are asking how can a person let himself fall so far down the destructive path of life. However, I did discover an idea that I felt covered a lot of the feelings I had in life, right and wrong. The information captured me so greatly that it was imperative that I added into the creed.

During my undergraduate years I came across a psychosocial theory by a philosopher named Eric Erikson that intrigued me. He talked about the crises that children faced in development, as I mentioned in the formal creed in the previous

chapter. When you think about students, especially in middle school, who does not get the word CRISIS ringing in their minds? To break it all down into a personal perspective, I know for fact I had issues in school of trusting, believing in my ability, knowing what type of person I wanted to be, being accepted, and most of all, not ending up like my father in life. Those were just a few of the crises I felt that I was faced with. It has all the workings of such categories that Erikson discussed in his theory: trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, intimacy, generativity, and integrity. And as I think of them all, I realize there is one single aspect that can change them all—ethnicity. That caused an explosion of emotion when that went through my mind. It's an amazing thing to keep in mind being a teacher. It affects so much as far as the approach to the individual student that may have many crises going on in very different ways. Finding the psychosocial theory was very important to me because it gave meaning to some things about which I felt confused when I was young.

After discussing the development of a child, my creed went into the role of schools. Again, the creed is a personal declaration so it is relative to my experiences from the time that I was in school to now while I am a teacher. One quality that I described that a school should be is transformational. The term involves how there is a direct connection of the student to the teacher, curriculum, or any other important aspect of education. The child cannot be told that the need an

education to get ahead. The child has to develop a belief in education. The child must think that they are responsible for the outcomes of their lives in accordance with the education they receive. And one may ask how old must a child be in order to develop such a complex idea? I say as old as a child must be to know that he or she is good at something. Once I was convinced that learning was not hard, it made things look totally different to me. It also goes back to Erikson's category of autonomy verses doubt. The negative has been what I have seen as the biggest determinant between whether a child liked school or not. The fear of being embarrassed if he or she cannot find the answer goes as far as causing a child to deliberately get him or herself in trouble to avoid the situation. Thankfully enough I chose to feign sickness instead of acting out with a negative behavior. However, once things didn't seem so difficult to learn, I actually wanted to go to school. Imagine that; a child WANTING to go to school to learn. If only there was a drug that we could prescribe to stir up the desire to learn we wouldn't need Ritalin. But since there is no pharmaceutical remedy, I tried to think back to what really worked for me.

The term dialectical describes what I thought was a good way to capture my interests. It involves the use of strategies. I know the use of the word strategies may be met with much kudos from educators, but hold on to those for now. I hesitate because I am sure my view of strategies is a little different from the accepted view of strategies. I'm

not even going to call them strategies. I will refer to them as games. Children like to play games and strategies are supposed to be fun and interesting ways to teach. Now, think about games you have played in your life and strategies you have used or seen in the classroom. Are the two related? Let's be real. Some of the strategies that have been created are neither fun nor interesting. Yes, they are a hit at the professional development groups, but whom are they supposed to be targeting? Let me give an example of the difference.

Strategy—think, pair, share—pretty interesting but not the most fun activity. It is where you think about the question and writes a response, pair up with another student and combine answers, and shares the results with the rest of the class.
I have seen where the kids more often "wait, take, share." They will wait for other groups to get an answer, take the answer, and (if called on first) share a stolen answer. The reason is that such strategy is seen by the students as a way to try to trick them into learning, so they try to trick the teacher into thinking that they are actually participating.

Game—heads up, seven up—wonderful game that all students love to play and forces social interaction. The only problem is that it has no academic merit. However, I adapted the game just a little. Five problems are given and five students are chosen (seven was too much for my middle school students). As the game goes, the five chosen students then touch the thumb of a person whose head is on his or her desk. The people chosen have

to figure out who picked them. If they are correct, they go up. If they are incorrect, the person who chose them stays up. With my game, I kept the same rules, except that there were two chances to be correct. If you are incorrect about who chose you, you can solve one of the problems to stay up there. If you are correct, the person who chose you can solve a problem to stay there. It is a great review "strategy" but the kids know it as a game that they are used to and have no problem playing it or trying to trick the teacher into thinking that they are playing. It also forces them to pay attention if they want the chance to stay in the game. Don't get me wrong; I think strategies are a great way to engage students in learning. However, we shouldn't use things that sound good to other teachers or administrators. We should use things are proven to get the students hooked. The word "strategy" would not even register in a child's mind as fast as the word "game." The child is whom we should keep in mind first and foremost.

Following the lines of keeping the child in mind, I would like to address another term that I used in creed to describe the role of the school. I stated that it should be dialogical, meaning that the teacher is seen as human and learn as the student learns. The mentioned term is very delicate however. One has to keep in mind the purpose and extent. It is not aiming to make best friends or be unprofessional. Showing human qualities are only to shed the pre-conceived notions that all students in the world have about teachers. I am a teacher now,

but I had the same ideas when I was in school. Do the teachers ever go home? Do teachers wear anything besides "teacher clothes"? Such questions show how disconnected students are to the reality that teachers are human too. It doesn't help how community and society places them on a tight rope like the media does to superstars. Too bad the pay scale between the two was tipped (oops; very inappropriate opinion). Seriously though, there is a huge disconnection between students and teachers simply because the students don't see teachers as normal human beings. It is said how it is hard to understand someone if you cannot relate to them. Often, students come in with the mindset that they are not going to be capable of relating to the teacher, which puts everyone at a disadvantage from the beginning. But, after the student learns that the teacher is normal as well, it changes the whole dynamic of the classroom environment. On seldom occasions, I would drift from the lesson if someone mentioned an unrelated topic. Then I would simply let them know we need to get back on task, but I just wanted to talk about the other subject and I couldn't wait. Children can never wait until the appropriate time to talk to a friend about certain things. By me showing that I am the same way, it presents a human side; a relatable side. It doesn't have to be a big deal. In fact, it is better if it not made a big deal to be human because that can lead to problems with classroom management. But each time you make a small deal, they wait attentively for the next time; some actually staying attentive enough to learn a

thing or two. I have seen that some educators try too hard to be one way or the other. Such behavior builds the "not human" or even "holier than though" attitude that students have generalized being possessed by all teachers.

To finish off the discussion of the role of the school, I visit the qualities of a school being reconstructive and emancipating. One the student has established a connection to the school and thus decided to learn on his or her accord, they will see things in a new light. It will hopefully rebuild their thoughts about every aspect of their lives. It will release them from a defeatist mindset to a determination of excellence. Consider my story. I started out and a child of eight in the projects. My surroundings showed me that people in my neighborhood are supposed to fight, steal, or sell drugs to make it. At school, even though I shed the mentality of the poor and worked to excel, my classmates reminded me that I was far different. The black students wondered how I could be so smart coming from the projects. I definitely didn't belong to that group. The white students wondered why I was in the gifted classes when I was so poor. However, I saw things in the light of one day being in the place where both groups will look up to me as intently as they look down on me. I had gone as far thinking of ways to use my knowledge to manipulate. It is a sad confession, but I felt that my knowledge was true power that I could use to my advantage. Can one make a judgment on such mindset? In one light, it has a ring to it of a comic

book villain. However, it made me an honor's graduate in high school and college and I never have provoked the wrath of a single caped crusader. All I know is that I chose to get an education and that put power in my hand to be successful.

My successes in life led to me wanting to help others reach their goals. I chose to be an educator because I felt that I could help a child get past the crossroad of excelling or failing; constructive thought or destructive behavior; life or death. A description that I found that matched my ideals is the passionate participant and facilitator. I am not here to control the students like a dictator, but direct their thinking and actions; being sensitive to the crises that they may encounter and being directly involved in their lives and well-being.

There is a lot that educational research can do to help with some of the problems that we face in the classrooms, but it is important to realize that every single student is different. One of the only common threads that bind them is the fact that they all have a story that tells who they are. We don't write it for them, so we should not try to. We need to encourage them to write their own stories and make them fairy tales so that they can live happily ever after. For this, I added the implications of the creed and what it means for the classroom. I stated that differentiated instruction vital to ensure that everyone is being accommodated. Differentiation oftentimes means lessons for different learning abilities, whether it is learning styles or even the rate of mastery. It mainly deals with cognitive

capabilities. However, my take on differentiated instruction covers a lot more ground. To me its adding relevance to a child's life by including things to which they are familiar. Linking graphs and charts to the sports that the children enjoy; finding grammar or literary devices in popular songs. I went as far as to linking how the science of sound waves allowed me to hear students whispering even though my back was turned on them. I also went as far as saying that just talking to kids sometimes in more of a causal manner would even help. It goes back to the persona that children have about their teachers and how it needs to be broken. It shows that the teacher is trying to meet them on a more level field no matter their ability. Again, it's the little things that make the monumental difference. The elaborate plans, maps to follow along, visual aids, and other complex designs are great to fill the room up and impress the visiting administration. But, ask the children what they are going to do with all of the wonderful instructional aids once they go back to their neighborhoods.

So as I reach my conclusion, I show you that this underground philosophy of education that I have does not come from a desire to point out anyone like a disgruntled postal worker or something, but to share with readers a true creed that I have with more practical implications. The ideas were initially researched and supported, but it would be a tragedy not for me to explain in-depth. Though the research gives relevance to this book, I reiterate that the purpose is for discourse, not praxis. Plus, the next

section moves away the basic principles of the creed and focuses more on experiences in education and my opinionated implications. Nothing is to be taken as researched facts, but pay close attention, because there is truth in observation. Keep in mind, though, that the experiences are based on a middle school level, which may or may not present drastic differences.