



Anderson, T. (2016). The Systemic Cycle of Brokenness. *Workplace*, 26, i-ii.

TAMARA ANDERSON

**FOREWARD:
THE SYSTEMIC CYCLE OF BROKENNESS**

A child cannot be taught by anyone who despises him, and a child cannot afford to be fooled. —James Baldwin

As I sit here and write, public education in Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, and in other urban communities across the country is under systemic attack. Budget cuts, constraints, poor decisions, and basic underfunding have stripped most schools of Biology, Physics, Humanities, support staff, counselors, school libraries, and even basic necessities like toilet paper and soap.

As a former public school teacher in Chicago, New York and Philadelphia from 1996 to 2009, I have witnessed firsthand the effects of top-down decision making and education reform that definitely do not always have the children at the center of the conversation. I have worked in amazing schools in communities mired in poverty and violence. These schools provided a beacon of hope, safety, and joy in the midst of everything because they were given the money to do just that. I have seen children enjoy the beauty that the arts can bring because there were actual funds available for all schools, not just for a chosen few. Today, even the best schools struggle with overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated books, and fewer extracurricular activities because no one has been protected from the severe cuts and district wide mismanagement.

Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor. —James Baldwin

Philadelphia is one of the poorest cities in the nation. At least 50% of the residents have a felony record. Only 54% graduate from high school in 4 years. 20% hold a college degree. And 220,000 residents live in deep poverty (a family of 4 living off of less than \$9,200/year). In regard to race, all of these numbers are disproportionately high in African American and Latino populations. Most Philadelphia neighborhoods are mired in poverty, racism, and chronic decreases in educational funding, which structure a cycle of brokenness and, at times, hopelessness.

Parents are exhausted from making a choice between who should eat since it is nearly impossible to feed an entire family on the low wages available to many. Parents are exhausted from selecting schools that are overcrowded, always at the risk of closing, and sometimes not safe. Parents are exhausted from wanting better for their children, generation after generation, just to end up on an eternal hamster wheel.

Educators are exhausted from being placed on the proverbial cross each time their hands and talent are tied to poorly devised standards and ideas. Educators are exhausted from unions not working hard enough for or with them. Educators are exhausted from having to choose between paying their mortgage, buying school supplies, food for their students, or food for their own families.

But now, the peasants are waking up. Slowly and deliberately, and in each and every city, we are starting to see percolations of social justice movements attempting to take public education back. We are starting to see communities of educators, advocates, parents, unions, and students once again reclaiming a dream and privilege that continues to be just out of reach. I believe that systemically failing our Brown and Black children is purposeful, and it is time for it to stop. It is the morally just thing to do because every child regardless of class, race, or ethnicity deserves a chance to be invited to the table. The pages that follow are a testament to the work that is being done around the country that continues to grow.

The paradox of education is precisely this—that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. —James Baldwin

AFFILIATIONS

Tamara Anderson received her bachelor's degree in Secondary Education from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and her master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from National Louis University. She is originally from Chicago, Illinois and has vast experience as an educator with the University of Phoenix, Chicago School District, New York Board of Education and the School District of Philadelphia. She has taught middle years through adults for over 14 years and has great success in motivating students to reach and achieve higher goals. Tamara continues to be a teacher consultant with Philadelphia Writing Project. She continues to work in partnership with organizations to create original project based curriculum and strategies that will continually address the needs of at-risk populations that self-select or are pushed out of school. In 2011, she was awarded the Leeway Art and Change grant to continue her work with dropout teens and adjudicated youth. She currently writes articles for *Examiner* about the struggles and successes of public and adult education in Philadelphia.