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In *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education*, Christopher Emdin inspires readers to challenge the pervasive Eurocentric norms of today's public schooling (i.e. individualism, competition, monolithic culture) in favor of what he terms *reality pedagogy*. We, the authors of this review, interpret *reality pedagogy* to be an authentic teaching method that utilizes culturally sustaining practices to mitigate the trap of deficit thinking and cultural incongruity. Due to frequent cultural and racial misalignment between teachers in urban schools and their students, these teachers—who are disproportionately White—may force their students (intentionally or not) to compromise who they are in order to conform to Eurocentric school norms. Emdin introduces readers to pedagogical moves that use students' culture to craft an enriching and engaging classroom in which the students have ownership over
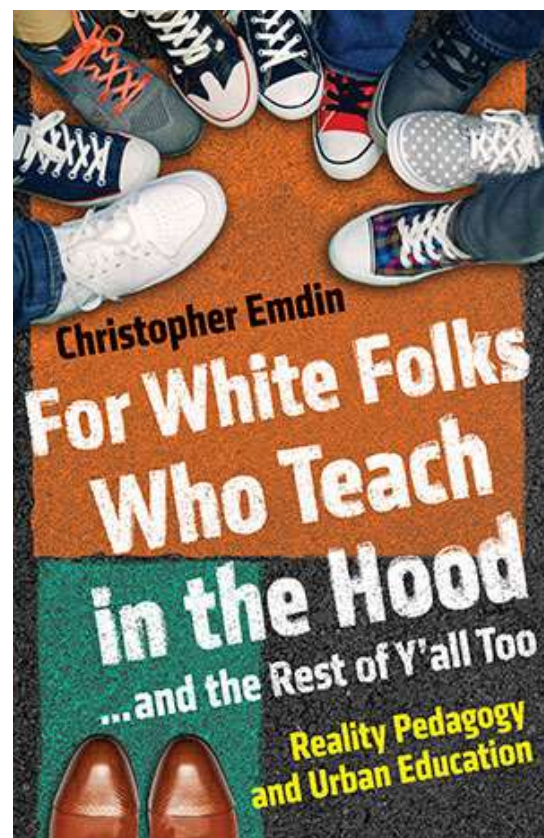
their own education. The call to embrace the complexities of our students' lives and use their unique experiences to enrich their learning in our classrooms is clear throughout this text. By the end of the book, readers will rethink what it means to be an effective educator.

Key Contributions

The first compelling contribution Emdin provides is the coining of the term *neoindigenous*. Arguably, most North Americans are familiar with the term *indigenous* as it relates to First Nations or Native Americans. Indigenous people are defined as "people whose existence in a certain geographic location predates the region's conquering or occupation by colonial powers" (Emdin, 2006, p. 8). Indigenous people are separate from those in positions of political or social power within the region. Strong evidence of this separation between those in power and indigenous people is the current Dakota Pipeline protests (Democracynow.org; Hayes, 2016; NPR.org). Native Americans are fighting powerful institutions to keep their land and their water as well as their lives. Although not the most encompassing definition, this broad description illuminates indigenous people's close connection to land, the act of being physically and mentally colonialized, and their distinction from those in positions of power. Emdin believes that if geography were removed from the definition, the same description can be used to describe historically marginalized urban youth, such as African Americans. Consequently, he coined the term *neoindigenous* because it positions historically marginalized urban youth in the greater context of displacement, colonization, and oppression. Thus the term neoindigenous connects the experiences of urban youth with that of indigenous people.
In gaining understanding of Emdin's term neoindigenous, we, the authors, recall former students expressing a sense of

disconnect with school because they did not see how it related to their "real lives" nor did they feel that most school personnel cared about them personally. Our former students who felt the least personal connection to their school environment and curriculum were often the students who found themselves perpetually punished for challenging school norms or who disengaged with school entirely. When one examines this classroom situation within the larger socio-political environment in which these students live (i.e. historically on the margins of society, low-income neighborhoods, high unemployment, poor healthcare, food deserts, etc.), the term neoindigenous helps to capture urban youth experiences.

Another key contribution of *For White Folks* is Emdin's rich descriptions of several tools—termed "The Cs"—for enacting *reality pedagogy* with neoindigenous youth. These tools include **cogenerative dialogues** (carefully facilitated student advisory boards called cogens), **coteaching** (engaging cogen members in teaching lessons to their classmates), **cosmopolitanism** (building a classroom environment in which students feel responsible for each other's learning), **context** (immersing oneself in the students' community and bringing artifacts to the classroom), **content** (expanding subject matter knowledge to accommodate fully engaged students), **competition** (supporting students' participation in rap battles based on the course content), **clean** (valuing and respectfully emulating the fashion and aesthetic sense of students), **code switching** (valuing student natural vernacular and teaching them to adapt it to appropriate discourse patterns in different settings), and **curation/computing** (valuing student knowledge of social media and teaching them to use it as a learning tool).

Emdin masterfully highlights the problematic nature of status quo teaching in urban schools (i.e. focusing on perfect lesson planning and teacher-centered

instruction, specifically the issue of rendering the neoindigenous invisible and suppressing their culture). Due to racial and cultural misalignment, White teachers often fall into this pedagogical trap when attempting to educate historically marginalized students in urban schools. Emdin cautions readers that cultural differences between teachers and students will multiply if they are not purposefully addressed. These teachers may see themselves as kind-hearted with the best intentions to educate their students, while unintentionally ignoring (or worse, suppressing) their students' culture. This could dangerously send a message to the neoindigenous that their culture is not valued and that success is marked by "making it out of the hood" (p. 177). On this front, Emdin would agree with author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates (2014) who highlights the need to shift the narrative of urban student success away from "leaving the hood." Instead, Emdin suggests we should embrace the histories and strengths of students' communities. In doing so, students will learn that smartness is not defined by the act of forfeiting oneself to conform to the dominant culture.

Fortunately, *For White Folks* offers implementable suggestions to embrace neoindigenous culture. Emdin shows us that lessons about teaching can come from unexpected sources such as churches, barber shops, hip hop shows, rap cyphers, etc. The suggestion that effective teaching of the neoindigenous requires active involvement in students' communities increases attention to the value of students' culture in shaping pedagogy. We must look outside of our college education for lessons on how to teach urban youth. By asking *What is successful in urban communities?* we can find valuable tools to increase achievement in the classroom. When the neoindigenous are engaged and invested—both in the content and the classroom community—academic performance will follow. Emdin summed up

this process best when he stated, "in the neoindigenous classroom, collective effervescence is reached when the joy of teaching matches the joy of learning and a truly cosmopolitan space is created" (p. 147).

Addressing Issues beyond the Isolated Classroom

Emdin provides instructional tools that can be implemented by an individual teacher in an individual classroom; consequently, we question whether this is enough to effect real change in the lives of the neoindigenous. Teachers are overwhelmed by the sheer responsibility of educating all children, in large part, because they work in silos. So we are left wondering: How will these engaging and empowering experiences in a single classroom impact the overall educational experiences of our urban students? How can we collectively address the global issues of educating urban students to effect change at the administrative, policy, and societal levels? Is it possible or even desirable for one teacher to do this work without support?

Ideally, teachers should work as a collective to eliminate the privileging of Eurocentric norms of schooling imposed on urban students at the administrative, policy, and societal levels. We, the authors of this review, are concerned that *For White Folks* may inadvertently reinforce the norm of the egocentric teacher. In this case, it is framed as saving urban students one class at a time. In the introductory chapter titled "Commencement," Emdin criticizes the "teacher hero" working in urban schools. Yet, by working in isolation to implement reality pedagogy, is the teacher not acting as a sort of "hero/shero"? One teacher cannot fix the entire system, and it must be made explicit how we do this work as a collective. In addition, Emdin explains that the neoindigenous are not motivated by individualistic competition in the way that it is fostered in traditional schools. In traditional schools, the goal is for one

student to be better than the others. On the contrary, he explains that the neoindigenous are motivated to succeed when there is a sense of community. For instance, one of Emdin's "C's" is *cosmopolitanism* which involves creating a classroom culture in which each student plays a crucial role in contributing to the collective success of the class. This paints a different picture of a school experience than one in which each student is primarily concerned with her/his own GPA and competitiveness for admission to her/his top college choice. Given this focus on the collective and community within urban culture, why are reality pedagogues working in isolation? Shouldn't teachers share this value of community by engaging in collaborative practices themselves?

Further, even if one classroom successfully enacts reality pedagogy, what happens when students move to their next class? We, the authors, wonder how this would impact students' identities within these schools. We are also concerned about possible disciplinary actions taken against students who speak out against traditional schooling. Without proper supports in place, vulnerable students could be suspended or expelled for exercising their voice. This goes against everything reality pedagogy is built upon. Is it fair for students to navigate such different worlds within the walls of their school without supports in place to protect them?

On one hand, it would be ideal to shift this conversation towards how we can work together to effect change at the administrative, policy, and societal level. In doing so, the positive impact for urban students will be far greater than what one teacher can do in a single classroom. It would also ensure that vulnerable students are able to navigate their learning within a space that nurtures their critical thinking development and distinctive cultural ideas and practices. On the other hand, given that the current state of our education system

involves many teachers working in isolation with students experiencing school failure, there is great need to provide urban students real opportunities for self-actualization and academic success. Perhaps, for now, this can only be achieved at the classroom level.

Learning to Navigate Multiple Worlds: Code Switching

Some of the issues regarding "student navigation" (discussed above) are addressed, in part, by Chapter 10 which is titled "Code Switching." As reviewers, we felt that this was the strongest chapter (and we recommend that hurried readers consult the Introduction, Chapter 1, and this chapter if they have time constraints). Code switching is a linguistic skill which allows a student to retain her/his own cultural language while simultaneously learning to use the language rules and norms of another culture. If a student has the ability to code switch, she/he will be able to verbally navigate different cultural situations without jeopardizing her/his own identity. Teaching urban youth to code switch is a call for what Paris (2012) termed *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy*, in which students are supported in valuing and maintaining their own identity (which includes their home language) while simultaneously learning the skill of navigating different cultural contexts (i.e. Standard American English valued on high-stake exams). Here, Emdin superbly integrates the need for cultural sustainability and for tools to succeed across multiple spaces. He cautions against a classroom culture which claims to embrace the identities of the neoindigenous but does not provide them with the tools to navigate multiple social situations. This sentiment is similar to Delpit's (1993) work in *The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children*, in which she argues the need to recognize the rules of power in schooling and that these rules must be explicitly taught to students in urban schools. To give students the tools to successfully navigate

the present power structures is starkly different than the hegemony of typical schooling that forces students to conform or risk being pushed out.

In Chapter 10, Emdin highlights the importance of striking a balance. On one side of the scale is traditional urban schooling which rewards students who forfeit their own identities in favor of the valued school behaviors of the dominant White American majority. Doing so forces the neoindigenous to "assimilate into a set of school norms, which requires them to repress their authentic selves" (Emdin, 2016, p. 109). On the other side of the scale is the typical urban classroom which attempts to embrace urban culture but fails in equipping students with the tools to navigate power structures outside of the classroom. Code switching is one way to provide the necessary balance between these two teaching models.

As discussed, vital work in urban education lies in challenging the current failing and persistent norms that hinder the academic achievement of the neoindigenous. However, as we continue to work towards this important goal, we must ensure that our students have the skills to succeed in the 21st century. Hence, Chapter 10 is particularly strong because it situates the reality pedagogy classroom in the greater school environment and larger society. It provides a clear picture of how to empower students within our classrooms while also giving them the tools to successfully navigate spaces that privilege Eurocentric values.

Closing

For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood excels at highlighting the problematic nature of teaching historically marginalized urban students under the current school norms that privilege Eurocentric values. The book features implementable suggestions for engaging the neoindigenous under *reality pedagogy*. As former K-12 teachers of urban youth, we can envision the transformative

impact of implementing "The C's" outlined in this book. For instance, involving students in coteaching could improve the relevancy of the curriculum, increase students' confidence, and foster a sense of student ownership of their learning. Thus, we feel the book is valuable for its intended audience of current teachers in urban schools. As current teacher educators, we also feel the book could also be appropriate for teacher preparation programs. We think it would be particularly beneficial for future teachers to have an understanding of code switching and the importance of allowing students to preserve their individual identities while simultaneously giving them the tools to succeed in American society. We also recommend the book for urban education specialists and researchers, particularly those who self-identity as White. It is important for White stakeholders to better understand the implications of their Whiteness in society as well as how their Whiteness may be misaligned with the cultural and educational needs of their urban students.

Though we wish we could begin to address issues of urban education beyond the scope of the classroom, we recognize the present structural obstacles in doing so. Perhaps Emdin's suggested teaching moves are termed *reality pedagogy* because they are not only grounded in the reality of our urban students' lives but also because they refer to the *reality* of teachers. What can one teacher *realistically* do to enrich the education of our historically marginalized students in urban schools? The reality is that teachers need to develop co-teaching relationships with their students because of cultural mismatch. This book illustrates tangible and authentic ways to begin to do this work. Some of the tools involve teacher actions inside the classroom such as forming student advisory boards, engaging students in coteaching, and giving individual students contributing roles in the classroom. Other tools involve teacher actions outside of the classroom such as

immersing oneself in the students' community, gathering artifacts to decorate the classroom, and respectfully emulating urban fashion aesthetic. In summary, Emdin charges urban educators to rethink what they've learned about "good" teaching. He challenges educators to allow space within our classrooms for urban youth to engage in the education process as leaders and creators of their own curriculum.

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