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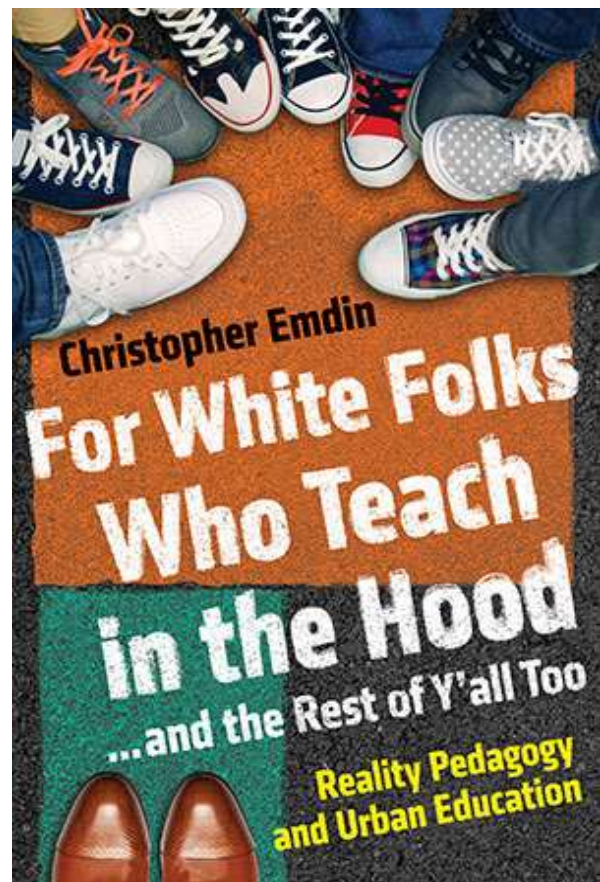
Emdin, C. (2016). *For White folks who teach in the Hood ... and the rest of y'all too: Reality pedagogy and urban education*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

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Education scholar Dr. Christopher Emdin's groundbreaking new book, *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education*, is essentially a pedagogical love letter to often misunderstood urban students. Although this book is written for teachers in mind, particularly white educators teaching in predominantly black/brown communities, the focus on student-centered pedagogy and students as experts throughout the teaching and learning process, is the highlight of the text. The students' voices and lived experiences center this text from beginning to end, emphasizing the notion that traditional schooling far too often stifles the various knowledge systems urban students bring into the classroom. The author notes early on in the introduction: "Students quickly receive the message that they can only be smart when they are not who they are. This, in many ways, is classroom colonialism; and it can only be addressed through a very different approach to teaching and learning" (p. 14). In all respects, that is what makes this work noteworthy, the



centering of urban youth as experts, in a society that has historically marginalized and oppressed them in both in-school and out-of-school spaces.

Emdin infuses his own urban experiences as teacher, student and resident in urban environments throughout the book, as a way to ground himself in the narrative. The author also offers a culturally relevant pedagogical underpinning for his thesis: If you're white and plan to teach in the hood, you need to value and celebrate the experiences of urban students, whom he refers to as the *neoindigenos*. Emdin uses the term *neoindigenos* in direct comparison to the experiences of Native Americans and coerced white assimilation via land dispossession and schooling. According to the author, "The term *neoindigenos* carries the rich histories of indigenous groups, acknowledges powerful connections among populations that have dealt with being silenced, and signals the need to examine the ways that institutions replicate colonial processes" (p. 9). Thinking of urban students as neoindigenous provides the reader with a context to view each chapter about teaching and learning *with* urban students as opposed to *on* urban students. To teach *with* urban students is to acknowledge their languages, cultures, racial backgrounds and ethnicities as ample and valid curricular material. To teach *on* urban students is to oppress their ways of knowing and seeing the world. The teaching and learning *with* vs. *on* dynamic is how I view the basic argument of this work.

Although the idea of celebrating urban students' various identities to promote academic success is not a new concept in the field of education, as noted by the work of previous scholars (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lewis, 2011) the personal narrative throughout the text that infuses a bit of theory, pedagogy and relentless love for black/brown youth makes this an important and insightful academic work of art. Several pedagogical strategies are outlined, including: co-teaching opportunities

between teachers and students, cogenerative dialogues with a group of students (referred to as cogens), and an emphasis on respecting the students' cultural cosmopolitanism and fashion choices in the classroom and throughout the curriculum. Each of these teaching and learning strategies position students at the heart of instruction, flipping teacher-student power dynamics on its head, which is also Freirian in nature (see Freire, 1970).

The most significant and well-defined pedagogical suggestion in the text is the cogenerative dialogues (cogens) which is defined as "simple conversations between the teacher and their students with a goal of co-creating/generating plans of action for improving the classroom" (p. 65). In these *cogens*, four students (of various abilities and backgrounds) are chosen to offer insight and suggestions about instruction and classroom culture. The teacher then immediately implements their suggestions, as a way to honor the collaborative student-teacher process in the classroom. After a few weeks or so, one student is removed from the cogen in order to add someone new, and the cycle continues in this manner thereafter. I see this as a powerful way of structuring students' insights directly into the curriculum in a visible and equitable way.

What was missing in this volume was the necessary balance between teacher and student identities in school settings. Although Emdin offers multiple ways for white teachers to engage urban youth pedagogically and culturally, which also includes visiting the barbershops and Pentecostal churches in the community, he doesn't offer space for various teacher identities to coexist in the classroom. In other words, the main response was, focus on the students and celebrate who they are.

Although I understand why the need to center urban students is both vital and significant, I also think it's important to not only have teachers recognize their biases, but also offer suggestions as to how to be their authentic selves in urban classrooms. Because

let's be honest, celebrating urban youth does not mean you will ever understand them or know what it is like to be in their shoes, despite many barbershop and church visits. Thus, white teachers in the hood need to know how to engage students without superficially trying to understand who they are and where they are from. They also need to know that although they represent the so-called dominant culture, they too have various identities that they can share in the classroom, as well, in order to model for students that monolithic conceptions of individuals, black, brown and white, are dangerous.

Furthermore, Emdin's latest work can be helpful for white teachers who are unfamiliar with the hood and the various cultures and traditions within the community that can surely be beneficial to the curriculum. However, I think it's important for white teachers to find activities in the hoods they work in--activities that they are genuinely interested in--as a means of being their authentic selves in the classroom. Perhaps some of these activities may include attending church services and playing basketball with students, as Emdin suggests. However, these activities might also involve trips to the local museums and shopping centers, too.

Encountering students at various businesses in their community is also another entry point into their worlds. Students will know who is genuinely concerned about their well-being; this does not always mean teachers understand all of their students' cultural and community practices, but they are aware of the relevance of these practices in their students' lives.

Teachers may use some of the instructional activities offered by Emdin, such as developing collaborative dialogues with students and heterogeneous grouping to build on students' strengths and weaknesses while working with others. At the same time, teachers needed more direct implementation strategies about how they can effectively teach in these collaborative ways while adhering to administrative requests about standardized testing. In the age of standardized testing, it's important to note that many teachers do not have curricular autonomy in the classroom. As such, how can teachers emphasize culturally relevant pedagogical practices within a system that renders black/brown students' ways of knowing as inferior? This is an important question I was left pondering on throughout the text, which I believe that if addressed, would have made Emdin's strategies much stronger overall.

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## About the Reviewer

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