

For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood...and the Rest of Y'all Too

Zakry Akagi-Bustin

Professor Dorothy Hines-Datiri

C&T 807

10 August 2018

**Book Review**

Emdin, C. (2017). *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education*. Boston: Beacon Press.

### **Introduction – Commencement**

Coming from a multiracial family, I feel that I have a unique background to multicultural education in and out of the classroom. Also, having taught in such a diverse place such as Hawaii gave me a unique understanding on how to deal with persons who are the minority. The title alone is something that drew me into the book and having read it, each page lead into the next and one that made the book hard to put down.

Emdin compares the indigenous and the nonindigenous in this chapter. According to the United Nations, the definition of the indigenous speaks to the collective oppression that a population experiences at the hands of a more powerful and dominant group (p.8). It is stated that indigenous people are the original persons to occupy that land or area, such as Native Hawaiians, whereas *neoindigenous* is referred to as the “new” native. This refers to people of color and carries the rich histories of indigenous groups, acknowledges powerful connections among populations that have dealt with being silenced (p.9). This has been a precedent for many generations being that the white race is seen and perceived as the dominant race and they know how to act appropriately and behave in ways that are seen as the norm. The neoindigenous often look, act, and engage in the classroom in ways that are inconsistent with traditional school norms (p. 9). Emdin shows that the understanding of how to connect with the neoindigenous students are what can help the teacher to provide for a more equitable learning environment for all students.

The education system was formed and based off of the ideas and ideologies of the middle class white student. The education system was not formatted and structured for the minority. Having been in the education setting for twenty years, as a student and an educator, I have seen

and experiences teachers who lack the ability to connect with their students on a personal level thus causing classroom management issues to arise. Growing up in Hawaii, there is a unique culture and way of life that is presented there by the Native Hawaiians as well as the local residents. When a white teacher is placed in the classroom, they often are not assimilated with the culture and cannot connect with the students due to the local lingo that is spoken. Thus, the barrier has been created and still remains. With the change in demographics nationally, the white student will soon become the minority in the classroom. I had experienced this in Hawaii, where most of the students were of asian descent or they were mixed race being partially white. For teachers to acknowledge that the ways they perceive, group, and diagnose students has a dramatic impact on student outcomes, moves them toward reconciling the cultural differences they have with students, a step toward changing the way educators engage with urban youth of color (p.10). If we as teachers can take what Emdin is stating, we can engage students in a more effective way that prepares them for success in the twenty-first century world.

### **Chapter 1 – Camaraderie**

This chapter reflects on Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Where he describes how the segregation of the South imprints a history of racism and hatred between the whites and colored in America. Emdin states, the reality is that we privilege people who look and act like us, and perceive those who don't as different and, frequently, inferior (p. 19). He also go on to discussion the positive and negative ramifications that result when teachers are not connected to the students and do not fully understand what the student's lives are outside of the school building. To be in touch with the community, one has to enter into the physical places where the students live, and work to be invited into the emotion-laden spaces the youth inhabit (p. 21). This sentence that Emdin provides is one that is powerful and one that resonates throughout the

chapter. Urban youth students who live in these areas, who hear gunshots on the daily, see drug deals, and even prostitutes are expected to hide those experiences and emotions and conform to the culture of the school. All while the teachers are concerned about test scores and curriculum mapping and do not see and understand what these students are dealing with the moment they leave the school building. Emdin confirms that we as educators need to be aware of our students and to have that emotional connectivity and empathy with them.

Growing up in a upper-middle class military household, I would say that I did not experience a lot of what urban youth go through on a daily basis. I grew up playing golf, going to the country club every weekend, going skiing in Japan every winter, and flying first class. Not having to worry about my next meal or if I would get shot walking down the street. This concept of camaraderie relates to many topics that are discussed in this course. This chapter provides a unique but solid foundation to build off of and to produce best practices for educating urban youth, and students of minority. It relates to Module 2's readings as Matias states in her article *Check Yo' Self Before You Wreck Yo' Self and Our Kids*:

If White teachers want to support the healthy development of racial identity among students of color, they must acknowledge the implications of the overwhelming presence of whiteness indicative of the majority of urban schoolteachers and, they must as White racial identity, "take the journey himself or herself." white teachers must acknowledge the emotional and mental processes that must be undertaken to move from culturally responsive "White teachers?" to culturally responsive "White teachers!" In other words, White teachers must "check" themselves before they wreck themselves in our urban students of color (Matias, 2013).

This is true to the fact that we as white teachers need to fully immerse ourselves in the ways and means of what it is to live in and experience what our students do. One of the greatest programs that my current school district is called COPE. COPE stands for *cost of poverty experience* where teachers spend an hour and a half, in 15 minute intervals, going through a month of poverty. Each group is given different circumstances and asked to make decisions based on the situations they have been given. Fifteen minutes is equal to one week. Going through this simulation is an eye opening experience that fully relates to what more and more of our students are facing. To understand what it is like to live in these conditions for approximately an hour is nowhere near what our students face, but it gives us a glimpse into their life to better empathise and connect with our students.

## **Chapter 2 – Courage**

Courage is one thing all teachers must have...whether they are novice first year teachers for veteran teachers. We as educators have to have the confidence and courage to stand in front of our students daily to inspire, challenge, dispose information, and grow them from the moment they walk into our class to the moment they leave. This chapter talks about the courage it takes for teachers to not follow the norm of a building and falling into a confirmation bias of going with the norms of the school and teaching the colored as our preconceived notions of “how tough the urban kids were going to be.” Thus, conforming to that ideology and not connecting with the students. Teachers believe that anything aside from teaching to the test will be detrimental to students and teachers alike (p. 37). This is the norm in the fact that test scores, GPA, and graduation rates are stamps on how well a teacher teachers. Teacher performance is not based on how they impact the students in their emotional and cognitive life but how well they perform on those standardized tests regardless of what is going on in their home life. To have the courage to

swim against the stream is what this chapter aims at. Teaching is not a war against students, and we have to stand up to let them create and make their own narratives.

To be an ally to the neoindigenous, the teacher must unpack the indoctrination that we all have been subject to. For white folks who teach in the hood, this may require a much more intense unpacking. For me, this meant taking the time to analyze why I was initially scared of my students and moving beyond that fear, acknowledging that getting to know my students and having them know me may alter the power structure and affect classroom management (p. 40-41).

We as teachers need to have the courage to open up to our students to create the atmosphere of acceptance and belonging. We need to show the students that we are here for them and want to support them.

This chapter relates to Module 3's reading by Ullucci and Battey, *Exposing Color Blindness/Grounding Color Consciousness: Challenges for Teacher Education*. We as teachers need to empower our students to come back to their hometowns and communities to make a difference. To inspire them to become educators so that they can be role models for future students of color. To do this we need to strive to becoming color conscious instead of being color blind. A necessary step in recognizing others' worldviews and experiences as valid requires acknowledging that such paradigms are racially informed and not monolithic (Ullucci and Battey, 2011). We need to be accepting of all students and their views being that they have different worldly experiences and their ideas can be just as valid as someone not of color.

Without teachers recognizing the biases they hold and how these biases impact the ways they see and teach students, there is no starting point to changing the dismal statistics related to the academic underperformance of urban youth (p. 43). Having the courage to be a change agent

and be that influential person in an urban youth's life can be a game changer in how they start to perform in school and how they ultimately perform on standardized tests.

### **Chapter 3 – Chuuuuch**

\_\_\_\_\_Chapter three looks into the lense of a model teacher who is too blind by the structure and format of the lessons than to see the impact that it is having on the students in the class. Emdin speaks of a model teacher who had been recruited by Teach for America and placed in a New York City Middle School. This teacher was praised and labeled a model teacher by the administration for his attention to detail and his well planned lessons. However, this model teacher was not able to connect with and engage his students. He was also too focused on the lesson structure that he did not see the students frustrations and boredom in the class, therefore he felt that he did not need to change his lesson plans. It was not until he was observed that he was able to reflect on his teachings. Emdin wondered about why the ability to plan a lesson, and not the ability to connect with students, was the prerequisite for being a model teacher (p. 48). It is unfortunate that administration and teachers are reluctant to venture out and change their instruction because of a title of being named a model teacher based off of their lesson planning rather than how the engage students in the classroom.

This chapter relates to the reading *Cultural Knowledge and Social Inequality* by Lareau in Module 5. Lareau states, yet, beyond individual behaviors, such as persistence, or specific work skills, generalized cultural knowledge about how institutions function also can be important, particularly in helping individuals negotiate key institutions such as schools and workplaces (Lareau, 2015). Understanding how colored people live and spend their time outside of the school can greatly influence the teaching in the classroom. Emdin talks about two different but influential scenarios. Lessons from a Black Church and what he learned from the

Barber Lecture. Understanding the culture from the perspective and lense of these experiences greatly influenced what can happen in the classroom. Such examples as call and response. That is something that I do in my classroom and at assemblies. Marcus, the barber stated, clients walk into my shop to get a haircut, but as a master of my craft, my responsibility is to ensure that the client leaves the barbershop having had a personal experience with me that makes them want to come back (p. 57). Education is the biggest customer service job in the world. We are serving our students...they are our customers. We have to make their experience in our classrooms so that they want to come back for more. Just like going to the barbershop, we need to make their education personable where their voice is heard and where we can create that idea of working toward fostering a family -- crucial for the neoindigenous (p. 59). Letting students know that we hear them and we understand them can mean the world to them allowing them to “buy-in” to what you as the teacher are trying to do but also build that trust so that they can come to you at any time and seek advice. As Emdin put it perfectly, the best classroom teachers develop ways to make the classroom feel like a family that has its own distinct rules, ways of speaking, and power dynamics (p. 60). Thus, truly creating a classroom that is structured around a student centered learning environment that is truly preparing students for success in the 21st century world.

#### **Chapter 4 – Cogenerative Dialogues**

Chapter four is one that hits a lot of points that can be implemented from day on in the classroom. Emdin talks about the idea of the importance of having dialogue in the classroom when it comes to rules, procedures, etc. Cogens are simple conversations between the teacher and their students with the goal of co-creating/generating plans of actions for improving the classroom (p. 65). This type of dialogue empowers the students to and gives them choice and



buy into what is and will be accepted in the classroom. This also gets the neoindigenous students involved in the classroom discussion as it related to how they are raised at home and it gives the other students a chance to hear a different perspective on how procedures and discussions take place with different families.

This chapter directly relates to the Hip-Hop Based Education (HHBE) article that was presented in Module 8. Love (2014) states:

Many teachers' reservation regarding HHBE are seemingly knotted to their perceptions of Hip Hop as low culture composed of deviant, nihilistic attributes that they believe are harmful to young learners... By changing the methods used in these early childhood classrooms, teachers can begin to understand that Hip Hop is hardwired not only into their children's culture but also to their learning potential and identities. Equally important is that children see their culture affirmed and recognized.

This hits the concept wholeheartedly. If we as teachers can have meaningful dialogue and fully get to understand our students and their culture, we can affect how they learn in any class and subject area. Having taught in Hawaii, most of my students can from local families who immigrated generations ago as well as some with Native Hawaiian backgrounds. One of the biggest things and how learning happens in this culture is storytelling. So I had to incorporate how I "story tell" about my content but also make it relevant to my students so that they are engaged in the lesson. Emdin puts it perfectly when he said, most importantly, it calls forth powerful indigenous traditions related to fostering family and connections that are at the essence of improving teaching and learning (p. 80).

### **Chapter 5 – Co teaching**

\_\_\_\_\_ Chapter five is all about co teaching and how to implement it in the classroom as an effective pedagogical tool. There are three common forms of co teaching that Emdin explains that can greatly affect a students learning in the classroom. The first is two strong teachers that are good at teaching and are similar in views and they feed off of one another in the classroom to make it a place that is great for learning. The second, is where you have a veteran teacher and a novice teacher where the veteran teacher is essentially teaching the novice how to teach. The third is a hybrid of the two where the content area teacher and the special education teacher work together to deliver content to those students who need an added layer of differentiation.

However, co teaching in an urban setting happens when we empower the students to lead the class and to teach from their perspectives. Emdin explains that from the second and third type of co teaching described earlier, co teaching in reality pedagogy follows an apprenticeship model that allows a novice to learn from an expert on how to teach. The difference here is that the neoindigenous student is positioned as the expert (in delivering information to other neoindigenous students), and the teacher is positioned as the person who needs to learn about the ways to teach to the neo indigenous (p. 89).

I can personally connect with this chapter as it relates to my current teaching setting in all three primary examples. Last year, both me and my teaching partner were confident in our craft so we did our best to feed off of one another to deliver great content information as well as to provide meaningful and engaging lessons. This coming year, I am in a co teaching setting where my partner is a novice and I am seen as the expert and am having to train him on how to be a teacher. I have also been in a setting where the special education teacher was in the classroom with me teaching and writing curriculum that fit the needs of all learners so that we are not just “modifying tests” but looking at the entire course and seeing where we can modify it so that all

students can learn the content at the same time. This chapter related to Module 7 in that it talks about how culturally diverse our students are and will become. Also, looking at the access to special education on both ends of the spectrum for services that our students need and how the minority students are able to access those services. The goal is for the teacher to incorporate what is observed from the students' teaching into their own instruction (p. 90).

### **Chapter 6 – Cosmopolitanism**

When one thinks of cosmopolitan, either two things come to mind...the alcoholic beverage or the women's magazine. Both in their own right are what the true meaning of cosmopolitan is. It is a marriage of items that essentially make up a family that all blend together to form a product. Where no one thing that is added or contributed is the same and all come with uniqueness. For education sake, cosmopolitanism is referred to as a way of being in a world that focuses on an individual's embodiment of tolerance, sensitivity, and inclusiveness of others in the process of being a "citizen of the world" (p. 105). It is a true blend of different people to make a family in the classroom. By creating the family atmosphere in the classroom where students take on jobs and roles to help everyone succeed, there is more investment that is given and they become more engaged in the learning. A young person who is emotionally connected to the classroom as a cosmopolitan space will not only be willing to learn in that class but is also committed to that classroom (p. 107).

I feel that this directly relates to Module 6 where we are looking at classroom behaviors and doing what we can to minimize them and respond to how to handle those situations. If we give out students classroom duties and have it so that we are focusing our teachings not only on the curriculum but truly fostering that idea of socioemotional connections, the learning environment is enhanced and students are taking ownership for their learning. Thus, having a

place where it is safe and students can share about their weaknesses and can be mentored or taught by other students in the classroom. Thus, now the learning becomes a whole class venture where all students are looking out for one another and are able to help when they are needed. It is a sailing ship and no member gets left behind or thrown off the boat. In all creating an environment where all students are felt as if they are wanted and worthy will be devoted to that class and to their peers in that class. Emdin summarizes this perfectly by saying, for the educator, understanding the significance of cosmopolitanism, and establishing norms that allow youth to create deep and personal connections to the classroom, elevates classrooms from places or locations of learning to spaces that have the potential to transform teaching and learning (p. 128).

### **Chapter 7 – Context and Content**

This chapter dives into looking at how context and content are influential in one another's path and how they influence the education and the learning of the students. Chapter 7 analyzes how students assimilate with each other based off of social cues, how they engage in non linguistic learning and expression as well as the sense of value for place and ownership of what is important to them. Emdin portrays to the reader the value of what it is like going to “the hood” and learning about the cultures and practices of the neoindigenous urban students.

As I spent more time in the students’ communities, my social networks within the communities expanded, and I spent less time in the morning and after school planning sessions that used to take up most of my time. I was earning about the students and enjoying myself so much that I didn't realize that I was still putting the same amount of time into my new activities as I was into formally planning for my classes (p. 137).

This is important in that it shows the families that this person is willing to learn from them and about their cultures. It is a reaffirmation that this guy is “one of them.” Just as Obama fist bumped, gave a bro shake, and dusted his shoulders conveyed that the president is just like them and he know what I am going through.

When looking at the relationship between this chapter and how I see it in context, this is a meaningful one in the sense that I have witnessed a lot of what this section is saying. Growing up in Hawaii, there is a set lingo called Pigeon English that is spoken as a slang and if teachers are not accustomed to that language or do not assimilate with the culture, then the students know that this teacher is “not one of them.” Understanding the language is a huge aspect of the local culture and the Hawaiian culture and it is often seen and portrayed as why am I going to listen to this Haole (White person) teach me if they don’t know anything about what I am going through or about Hawaiian history. Thus, teachers who are recruited from the continental U.S. are often times put into programs that help them to understand the culture of Hawaii and its nuances so that the transition can be a smoother one. As Emdin watched the players act on the court next to the memorial and how he witnessed the great deal of respect the people had for their neighborhood and for the memorial he related that to the indigenous. He stated that, indigenous see their land as sacred and develop cultural practices based on how they interact with the land (p. 137). This is evident in the Hawaiian practice of rituals and Heiau or Hawaiian Temple. The lands are sacred to the natives and you can only go on the land if you have it blessed by certain Hawaiian priests. This is also true when construction is taking place. Being that the Hawaiian respect the land for all that it provides, every time there is construction a ritual to bless the land takes place in honor of the demi goddess of the land to ask for acceptance. If we as educators can make our classrooms a sacred place for learning where students value that area and look

forward to coming to school then they will be more inclined to protecting the area, looking after it, and caring for it. They would not respect the building and learning can happen in a place where all students are investing in a commonality.

### **Chapter 8 – Competition**

Chapter 8 does a great job at showing how competition stems from the indigenous and how it has influenced the cultures of competition as we see it today. The battles therefore serves as an example of the ways that indigenous populations deal with stressors introduced into their lives by the dominant culture (p. 152). This shows that being that the native population had to deal with a lot of stress, they reverted to battles and competitions to get head and assert dominance. This is related to school and altercations. If students are in an argument and it then turns into a battle, it is to show one another and who else is watching what person is the dominant one. This can also be related to the classroom and creating a culture of healthy competition. Much like what Emdin says about sparring sessions, the humanity of the neoindigenous emerges as the entire community goes through much effort to ensure that the warrior is sufficiently prepared for battle (p. 155).

This shows that it takes a lot of moving parts and people to prepare one person for battle. Thus, if we all want to succeed in the class all persons need to be invested and help one another to achieve a common goal. Emdin also mentions that younger members of the community are introduced to the norms of the larger social group by watching and then doing (p. 157). This can be true to the fact that we want our older students to act a certain way and model those behaviors so that the younger students know the correct and proper way to act in the building. This relates personally being that I feel and have experienced that competition drives success. My classroom is set in a way that each class challenges one another on their tests to see what class can achieve

the highest average. That class then is rewarded with a prize. This competition stems from this aspect that it takes a village to prepare and succeed. Thus, students in like classes are seen studying together, re-teaching topics that they might have not grasped, and coming to review sessions. Thus, competition in the class with modeling and incentives can help elevate the academic learning of the neoindigenous students.

### **Chapter 9 – Clean**

This chapter directly relates to the socio economic statuses of the neoindigenous families and how they look and portray themselves in the public setting. Chapter 9 talks about how low income families are concerned about their image and how others see them. Emdin states, the more challenging their socioeconomic backgrounds, the more sophisticated and unique their aesthetic tastes (p. 163). It is true that the students who come from families who live off of welfare and food stamps, are the ones that come to school in the nicest clothing and best “Jordan” shoes. Emdin also states that this striving to make oneself look better off than one is, and to demonstrate a culturally aware fashion sense, is brought into the classroom and affects how teachers interact with students (p. 164).

When analyzing the socioeconomics of the building and seeing how that plays a factor into attire and appearance, one must look to see what the makeup of their respective building is. From personal account, teachers who teach in a Title I school, appearance does not matter to them being that majority of the families come from a similar household. However, in my current building, I have seen and experienced teachers who are more prone to helping students who

come to school that are better dressed than those who are not better dressed. It is unfortunate that some teachers think in that way and treat students based off of how they come to school.

### **Chapter 10 – Code Switching**

According to Emdin, code switching is a practice that has taken root in fields like linguistics, sociology, and cultural anthropology, and that focuses on where and how a speaker alternates between two or more languages and dialects in the context of a conversation or interaction (p. 175). This chapter talks about how students need to be able to adapt to social changes and be able to understand how to deal with different social contexts. In analyzing this chapter, students need to maintain their own cultural identity and also be able to see and accept the views of other social groups. This is evident that students need to be able to balance how to deal with their cultural cues and be able to see and respond to other cultures and students from different backgrounds.

### **Chapter 11 – Curation and Computation**

Take a look at how technology usage is effective in the classroom and how it can transform education in a positive way. Also, looking at how the teacher responds to students in a both positive and negative way in the tone of the voice and how students respond to that. The good thing about this is that the students are responsive to the teacher and are able to tell them what they felt. Emdin mentioned that students mentioned that my yelling distracted them, made them upset, and put them in a mood that made them disinterested in learning (p. 186). This was also coupled in a way that the students and teachers are able to have a discussion on how to improve the talking and instruction in the classroom so that students are more interested in learning.

### **Conclusion**



In all there is a lot to do with improving multicultural education in the classroom setting. I feel that being that I taught in Hawaii, I have a minimal background on how to teach in a multicultural educational setting and thus I use those experiences to help me teach in a setting where it is predominantly white with the few minorities and neoindigenous students. Being able to use those experiences and knowledge as a minority myself, I feel that I have had an upper hand at connecting with those students. Having taken this course and reading this book, I feel that I am more culturally aware as to what is happening in the realm of multicultural education and what improvements need to happen nationwide and even in my school building. I feel morally obligated to go back and teach my fellow teachers on what I have learned about multicultural education and how that can look in their classroom on how to deal with and teach to those students. Emdin provided great accounts on his experience as a classroom teacher and gives the reader an insight into what can happen at the worst of school setting and thus helps the reader to formulate their own ideologies and strategies from the framework on how to best deal with those students, being that no students are exactly identical. I look forward to researching more about this topic of multicultural education and seeing how I as a future administrator can use it in my training to help better prepare my teachers for a change in the classroom when the “White” race will be the minority by population numbers.

## **References**

Lareau, A. (2015). [Cultural knowledge and social inequality](#). *American Sociological Review* 80(1), 1-27.

Love, B. L. (2015). [What is hip-hop-based education doing in nice fields such as early childhood and elementary education?](#) *Urban Education* 50(1), 106-131.

Matias, C. E., & Grosland, T. J. (2016). [Digital storytelling as racial justice: Digital hopes for deconstructing whiteness in teacher education](#). *Journal of Teacher Education* 67 (2), 152-164.

Ullucci, K., & Battey, D. (2011). [Exposing color blindness/grounding color consciousness: Challenges for teacher education](#). *Urban Education* 46(6), 1195-1225.