

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.

Reviewed by Edmund S. Adjapong, Teachers College, Columbia University

Christopher Emdin's *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too* provides a breath of fresh air for any urban educator who is looking to improve their practice or gain authentic insight on urban youth. The title and book cover alone grab the attention of anyone who has even the slightest interest in education and relates to all stakeholders in education. Dr. Emdin draws from his personal experiences as an urban student, urban educator, and urban education researcher to offer a new approach to teaching and learning in urban educational spaces.

In a time where researchers have described and discussed the pitfalls of urban education ad nauseam, they often neglect to provide notable policy or pedagogical practices that improve teaching and learning in urban schools. This allows the perpetuation of the same traditional narrative of failing urban schools that perform substantially worse than suburban schools without a remedy. In his book, however, Emdin provides a rich description of urban schools through his multiple lenses as an urban educator and, more importantly, he explores pedagogical practices that he has developed through his research in urban schools.

In his illustration of the context of urban education, he shares that urban educators often find themselves in a position to serve as a "savior" to urban students to improve their circumstance or save them from their communities, which teachers may deem as dangerous, gritty, or not palatable. Emdin argues that when educators feel as if they are in a position to act as a "savior" for urban youth, they miss opportunities to create deep connections with students, which ultimately leads to misunderstanding the realities of their students. Emdin questions and challenges the age-old common tropes that teachers are encouraged to erase themselves to seem invisible to students, not smile until November, and condition students to act "properly." He argues that when educators enact these practices it keeps them emotionally disconnected from students, and they miss opportunities to foster deep connections with students. I agree with Emdin, as urban students do not need educators to be their "saviors," rather urban students need educators who are open to becoming students in the sense that they are open to learning about the culture and realities of urban youth.

Emdin suggests that urban educators consider his approach to teaching and learning, Reality Pedagogy, which "focuses on teaching and learning as it is successfully practiced within communities physically outside of, and oftentimes beyond, the school" (p. 43). Emdin's Reality Pedagogy, which he thoroughly describes through personal anecdotes and practical examples, draws on enactments that occur in the Pentecostal church and Hip-Hop culture. His pedagogical model is composed of practical tools, which are identified as 7Cs (co-generative dialogue, co-teaching, cosmopolitanism, context, content, competition, curation) that educators can use in their classrooms immediately upon reading.

Emdin writes this book for "white teachers who are already in these schools, the preparation of those being recruited to take these teaching positions, and [to] challenge a 'white folks pedagogy' that is enacted by teachers of all ethnic and racial backgrounds" (p. 15). While Emdin does not blame educators for their lack of understanding of the realities of urban youth, he also does not believe that increasing the number of Black educators is the ultimate solution to improving urban schools. Rather, he believes we should focus our attention on working with the

already established teaching workforce to improve their knowledge of urban youth and their connections with their students.

Over the past few decades, educators have noted and discussed the importance of utilizing students' culture as a tool to better reach and engage students, particularly urban students (Emdin, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tate, 1995). Using his personal experience and the frameworks of culturally relevant pedagogy and critical pedagogy, Emdin's reality pedagogy bridges the gap between theory and practice as he provides tangible tools that align directly with theories that have been proven to better educate youth while considering and using youth culture.

For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too, comes at a pivotal time considering the state of urban education. Urban schools continue to fail to educate the students they serve. Emdin's approach to teaching and learning encourages educators to try a different approach and "focuses on privileging the ways that students make sense of the classroom while acknowledging that the teacher often has very different expectations about the classroom" (p. 41).

References

- Emdin, C. (2011). Moving beyond the boat without a paddle: Reality pedagogy, black youth, and urban science education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 80(3), 284-295.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, 465-491.
- Tate, W. F. (1995). Returning to the root: A culturally relevant approach to mathematics pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), 166-173.