

For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too, Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education

Jean Edouard

Rutgers Graduate School of Education, New Brunswick, NJ, USA
Email: jedouard99@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Edouard, J. (2025). For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too, Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education. *Advances in Literary Study*, 13, 20-26.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2025.131003>

Received: November 27, 2024

Accepted: December 22, 2024

Published: December 25, 2024

Copyright © 2025 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Reality pedagogy draws on a culturally relevant framework to understand students' realities in the communities. Thus, the paper discusses For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too by Christopher Emdin, focusing on reality pedagogy as a culturally relevant teaching framework. It highlights Emdin's exploration of cultural inclusivity, emphasizing the engagement of students of color through strategies like barbershops and church analogies. Emdin emphasizes barbershops, beauty shops, cultures in the hood, and students outside of classrooms as a learning strategy to enhance reality pedagogy. Reality pedagogy finds its seven C's foundation in co-generative dialogues, co-teaching, cosmopolitanism, context, content, competition, and curation. Emdin's learning strategies promote the reality pedagogy to foster relationships between teachers and students.

Keywords

7 C's, Urban Education, Cultural Relevant Pedagogy, Reality Pedagogy

1. Introduction

In the educational world where blacks struggle for their academic achievement, "For White Who teaches the hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too, Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education" is not just a story about identifying a problem but also a call to action by the author to address a real issue. Emdin's book is a testament to the inclusivity of educational practices, creating a context for freedom in an educational environment. Emdin has developed pedagogical approaches that engage all students, regardless of ethnicity, race, and culture. On page 9, the author introduced the term nonindigenous, acknowledging that the powerful connections

among those who have been silenced challenge the notion that silent students are good and that those who speak are to be judged by their teachers. However, black culture has been overlooked in many higher education institutions. Often, educators label Blacks as the same culture, which is not. Even students with similar cultures may have different realities. Higher educational institutions value Western culture values. Thus, Emdin's book possesses invaluable resources to foster cultural inclusivity in an educational environment. In this instance, reality pedagogy may foster student of color academic achievement. This review aims to analyze the Emdin learning approach through class discourse and seven reality pedagogy approaches to provide a critical analysis that can help educational leaders and policymakers consider reality pedagogy in educational reforms.

Author Christopher Emdin is an associate professor of Mathematics, Science, and Technology at the Teachers College at Columbia University; Director of College education at the Center for Health, Equity, and Urban Science Education; and Associate Director of Urban Education for minorities at Teachers College, Columbia University. He was named 2015 Multicultural Educator of the Year by the National Association of Multicultural Educators and has been honored as a STEM Access Champion of Change by the White House. His book provides resources to those willing to learn about Urban Education. He traced his experiences of being undervalued and invisible in the classroom as a young man of color. The main aim of his book is to analyze the ineffective traditional approach. At the same time, they can bring a collaborative approach as students' voice and engagement can be best for effective teaching. According to Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), in culturally relevant pedagogy, all teachers take the impact of cultural inclusiveness on teaching and learning. Dr. Emdin follows cultural inclusiveness, stating that all teachers must have cultural knowledge to teach in urban communities. Thus, reality pedagogy is an action to move toward the misunderstanding of students of color behaviors.

2. Reality Pedagogy

Emdin's book is a reality of pedagogy in teaching and learning for those who are in urban education. The work was intended to support challenged white teachers in motivating and engaging students in the classroom. Emdin investigates urban education issues to bring real stories with the stakeholders' implications and find a better pedagogical approach. Emdin has found one of the best ways after observing the black church's energy of the call and response process, which is an exchange between the preacher and congregation. He quickly understood from Chapter 3 that the Pentecostal pedagogy (Chuuuch) approach could be applied in the classroom for student engagement. Therefore, a white teacher was invited in the research process to attend the black church to be more familiar with the urban cultures as his students' cultures. The white teacher experience is the view of other authors on the same pedagogy approach; Susan Rosenholtz's landmark study concluded that learning-enriched schools were characterized by "collective commitment

to student learning in collaborative settings... where it is assumed that improvement of teaching is a collective rather than individual enterprise and that analysis, evaluation, and experimentation in concert with colleagues are conditions under which teachers improve” (as cited in [Carter & Welner, 2013: p. 190](#)). White teachers in the hood may not fully understand the values of the students in terms of culture, and it could be challenging for students to engage as they have not seen their values in the classroom. Additionally, Emdin came up with another strategy for the relationship between barbers, beauty shops, and customers in the hood; in this instance, he focused on implementing the exact relationship between teachers and students. The church and the barber shop establish the relationship between students and teachers in the urban learning environment.

3. Classroom Discourse

Emdin found the reality of students after the classroom during lunch break and was surprised about the bonds created among different ethnicities. Emdin emphasized that the hip-hop process could be applied in the classroom. Hip-hop science genius B. A. T. T. L. E. S., bringing an alternative to transform teaching, learning, and engagement in science. After observations of the students in the classroom, they let them create a group called (cogens) as this group has taken responsibility for the classroom activities ([Emdin, 2016: p. 65](#)). In the same process, the teacher may be considered a participant and not a leader in co-generative classroom dialogues to empower students ([Emdin, 2016: p. 8](#)). This outside culture brought into classroom management what is called by the sociologist James Coleman’s exchange of cultural capital and dance networks. Emdin offers a freestyle approach from the hip-hop culture where participants share all of themselves through a given method, like rap and dance, in an impromptu fashion.

Emdin’s research stated that with the Cogen structure in Chapter 4, a student culture outside the classroom, he found ways to begin dialogues with students. For example, teaching gives youth agency to participate in the teaching, and cosmopolitanism helps them to feel like the classroom is a place where students can express vulnerability. Reality pedagogy only gets into the better stage once the teacher becomes a presence beyond the school and in the community, creating a bond between students where they can help each other in duo cosmopolitanism. [Freire \(2014\)](#) emphasized teaching as a discourse between students and instructors. In this instance, the teaching and learning strategy places students at the center of the instruction. The reality pedagogy approach allows students invisible to be valued and enter the cosmopolitan ethos. Students entered the new social spaces with comfort as being able to switch codes regarding the context.

4. Seven Reality Pedagogy Approaches

This book may serve as a teaching model for teachers to understand the students’ language and culture and apply those in the classroom to replace the traditional pedagogical approach. Not using students’ backgrounds in the curriculum is

considered a traditional pedagogy approach. Instead of giving lectures and students to take notes, students can take part in the learning process. In this instance, teachers learn the students' realities and infuse this knowledge into the curriculum to build relationships with students. Emdin calls for the reality approach in his book. The book was written based on the author's observation of teaching practices to help teachers facilitate students' engagement. Embrace the culture to understand each item and its values for the students. Emdin describes the seven C's: co-generative dialogue, coaching, cosmopolitanism, context, competition, and curation (Emdin, 2016: p. 60). The author explained the seven C's from chapters 4 to 11. Emdin explained the process as simple as that of white teachers and followed the seven C's to provide practical examples as learning strategies. The seven C's learning strategies foster the students' language and culture into learning practice.

Traditionally, some teachers consider polite and silent students to be good, and those who speak up are treated as troublemakers. However, it's crucial to remember that every student's voice is valuable and integral to the learning process. An inclusive school is an environment of discussion; the C's foster inclusivity in which co-generative dialogues are not just a tool but a necessity. Students share feedback according to their learning experiences, and this feedback is a vital part of the co-developing strategies that focus on the students' socio-emotional and academic needs. Co-teaching fosters students' engagement and balances teachers' power with students' silence. Students can take over teaching to share their knowledge with teachers and peers. Cosmopolitanism means that students are not guests in the school but active participants. There is no point in forcing them to assimilate into the dominant culture. Context: inviting the community to the school without going to the community in a cultural context. This practice builds strong teacher relationships. Content is a journey to engage curriculum with students' lives and concerns—a competition where teachers create material that fosters competitive activities that encourage critical thinking. Teachers can analyze videos to discover weaknesses and improve learning strategies. Curation and computation are a framework where students and teachers feel comfortable recording and studying their interactions.

Thus, the seven C's in the reality pedagogy approach play a crucial role in shaping classroom dynamics and enhancing student performance. These principles emphasize the importance of class dialogue and the need for all students' voices to be heard (Emdin, 2016).

5. Discussion and Methodology Analysis

This paper analyzes existing literature to review the reality pedagogy approach of the book. "For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too, Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education" is a guide to professional development for teachers to enter the reality of the pedagogic process. This book motivates me to read any other books by Christopher Emdin as he tackled a real problem that damaged the achievement of many students of color who have been silent to act

like white. In an exciting book similar to the author's view, during a conversation among teachers, one statement from one of them said, "I try to run my classroom as a community," Jen tells me, "Of course I want them to become better readers, writers, and mathematicians, but in the long run I want them to become good people, respectful and responsible for themselves." (Kirp, 2015: p. 66). Policymakers and educators can work on this natural experiment to change education policies in the best interest of disadvantaged students. Thus, Freire (2014) rejected the banking education system, prioritizing only the teacher's knowledge to promote one culture. Freire (2014) enhances the collaboration between students and teachers to create knowledge. In this instance, student and teacher values are crucial in the pedagogy process around dialogue to improve student color achievement.

After reading this book, the author makes you feel that applying the new pedagogical approach has been effective. The beneficiaries are the students. In this instance, students positively influenced their achievement by being more involved in the classroom. This book is one of my favorite readings, as Emdin made it easier for White Folks who teach in the hood to understand culturally relevant teaching. In his book, the stories are real, and he works through them to address the problem of the nonindigenous who may be invisible by turning them into cosmopolitans in the classroom. Emdin addressed the racial classification, as the group associated with power may use this power to disempower others. Reading this book as a minority may let you feel the dilemma of students of color getting a better education taught by those who truly understand their culture and values. Researcher found that Black enrollment achievement in higher education faces resistance to Western cultural values (Edouard, 2023). However, the U.S. education approach periodizes the White culture over the Black student's culture. In this instance, Emdin expressed frustration with the classroom approach that impedes the success of students of color. The reality pedagogy and cultural pedagogy approaches foster students of color culture.

Based on my observation, each chapter in this book describes a specific strategy. These concepts come in a sequence where each other's strategy comes to complete the previous ones. All the chapters are focused on the subject and brought to the conclusion of thoughts of transforming teaching. This book is well organized and delivers what it promised. As the title explains, *For White Who Teaches the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too, Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education*; this book solves the problem of folks who disconnect from urban students by leaving out the students' cultures. All the pedagogical concepts are well-defined for the readers to understand. As the book is based on the author's research, all the questions that may bring confusion are well addressed by the author, along with his investigation of the urban schools that were the targets.

Emdin describes the white personality of teachers and urban students. This story does not show various teachers' ethnicities or identities. In further research, I would like Emdin to demonstrate teachers' reactions from different ethnicities in this experiment. I would also like to know how Emdin's learning strategies

overcome students of color who are already classified as unfavorable, as such stigma usually turns them in the wrong direction in an urban environment. Emdin showed how poor kids are victims of the traditional pedagogical approach and made a wake-up call to teachers to fix the problem. He has yet to mention much about the contribution of policymakers in the process; however, policymakers have a critical role to play in a better future for urban schools. Importantly, the experience of the white teacher at the black churches and barber relationships with customers can build the educational framework to foster classroom inclusion. For example, in practice, the 7 C's require teacher to be vulnerable by letting students to critique their instructions. In this sense, students will feel like they are a part of the learning process by giving feedback. Students can become experts in teaching the class by co-teaching. In this context, teachers know the students' realities better and how to teach them. White teachers who teach in the hood may use the 7 C's as their teaching model.

Despite Gloria Ladson-Billing's (1995) work on culturally relevant pedagogy, more work should be done to enhance the cultural pedagogy approach. Emdin's learning strategies are another step forward for culturally relevant pedagogy. Policymakers and education leaders must collaborate to integrate reality pedagogy, a teaching approach that emphasizes the importance of students' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds, into the school curriculum. The teacher is just one of the educational stakeholders working toward enforcing reality pedagogy. In this instance, reality pedagogy may only face challenges with the collaboration of all educational stakeholders. Teacher efforts are needed to enhance the reality of pedagogy. For example, education leaders must follow the curriculum according to the school's mission without leaving space for students' realities. Therefore, enhancing new learning strategies in traditional classrooms takes much work. The 7 C's reality pedagogy curriculum may require additional time to include outside school activities with other contexts for practice related to the student realities. As to the 7 C's requirements, the school structure may need to give the student a voice to translate their reality to handle learning activities, which is incompatible with the traditional classroom. Thus, all the academic rigors may cause challenges to the implication of reality pedagogy without school reform. I want policymakers and educational leaders to consider pedagogy realities as a learning strategy for students of color. Importantly, Emdin's experience can be a model for reviewing learning strategies through a cultural approach to the implication of students' realities into the curriculum.

Emdin's book held my interest as an educator of color. The same interest may be dedicated to educators, administrators, and Scholars who read this text and would find this a fantastic book to tackle the disconnect in the classroom between teachers and students from different backgrounds and ethnicities

6. Conclusion

Reality pedagogy is an excellent pedagogical approach described by Emdin to

address students' color cultures. However, professors cannot apply alternative approaches because of curriculum constraints, as they have to follow the state guidelines focusing on test scores. Overall, this paper may guide teachers working with urban students and in education in general without the constraint of teaching students' test scores. Nevertheless, Emdin's reality pedagogy educational approach can be used in higher education settings. Similarly, the culturally relevant pedagogy of Gloria-Ladson-Billing fosters the culture of the students to integrate as ways for them to be taught. However, reality pedagogy and culturally relevant pedagogy face challenges. Cultural challenges that student of color encounter impact their academic achievement. Thus, Western values in higher education impact negatively Black student enrollment and academic achievement (Edouard, 2023). In this instance, Black students in higher education need a place for their culture and identities, as they may have come from the hood with their own cultures and realities. Emdin's book calls for action. Often, there is a lack of representation of Black experiences in the curriculum. Notably, other cultures are resources for educational environments dedicated to fostering inclusivity. Importantly, reality and culturally relevant pedagogy are constructive approaches that policymakers, teachers, and school leaders may utilize to integrate student culture and their realities into the curriculum to foster classroom inclusivity. For instance, incorporating literature or history from the students' cultural background or using culturally relevant examples in math and science classes can make the curriculum more inclusivity.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Carter, P. L., Welner, K. G., Welner, K. G., & Carter, P. L. (2013). *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199982981.001.0001>
- Edouard, J. (2023). How Did the Brown V. Board of Education Encounter the White Resistance to Black Enrollment Achievement in Higher Education? *Advances in Literary Study*, 11, 76-92. <https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2023.112006>
- Emdin, C. (2016). *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education*. Beacon Press.
- Freire, P. (2014). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. Bloomsbury Academic & Professional.
- Kirp, D. L. (2015). *Improbable Scholars: The Rebirth of a Great American School System and a Strategy for America's Schools*. Oxford University Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, 465-491. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>