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

Despite the rather lengthy and unprofessional title of this book, it is by no means bland or ill-motivated. The insight into urban education and the struggle that most students face in impoverished areas captivates readers and provides thought provoking questions as to what one can do to help.

Christopher Emdin tells his story as an informative piece through autobiographical methods. The introduction recounts his first session training upcoming teachers. He remarks several of them asked questions such as “how do we get students to care?” and “why are they not up to standards?”. While he recalls answer the questions, he reminisces how most of his answers were only there to pacify the teachers. His responses taught them how to avoid the problem rather than fix the cause of it. Such was and still is common in the native - which Emdin refers to as indigenous-, black, and Latinx – which Emdin calls the neindigenous.- communities. Many believe that harsh punishment and severe force is necessary for POC children to grow up properly. There in lies the problem that Emdin addresses: a proper adult is defined by white standards, which is then enforced on different communities. Emdin cites an argument between his fellow teacher and her student as a prime example.

The teacher constantly belittled the student for being late to class and never prepared. By the time the bell ring, the student was not in her seat nor did she have her materials out. However, the student stated that she was on time, due to her cultural upbringing that punctuality

meant being in the classroom, not necessarily in her seat with her materials out. As Emdin points out, it is unknown who is right in this situation, nor does it matter. There was a miscommunication between the teacher and student that neither attempted to overcome. It is through these small discrepancies that accumulate that has caused urban students to be viewed as enemies. Rather than try to understand their perspective, teachers think that the background the students come from has made them 'evil' in a sense. Too often, teachers strictly behave as if their class is the only event occurring in a student's life, which causes resent from the students, in turn evoking resent from the teachers. So the question becomes: how are teachers suppose to relate to students and still be seen as a teacher?

Emdin outlines seven different methods that teachers could use to better understand their students. From fashion, to cultural immersion, to student teaching, all of them help to better strengthen the understanding and bond between student and teacher. Each of them adjusts educators the culture that indigenous and neoindigenous students come from. For example, one method is cogenerative dialogues, which stem from cypher rap groups. In these cogenerative dialogues (shortened to cogens), four to five students are randomly selected as representatives for the rest of the class. The teacher meets with the students after class to discuss what the teacher should or not do, how to improve their style, or if there is a new mechanic that should be introduced. There are rules for switching members, though some of them do not change. Members and the teacher only speak one at a time. In this way, the teacher gets insight on how to better their style while the students feel comfortable voicing their opinions.

Using several personal anecdotes as examples to parlay the insistent hurdles that urban students face. One of which is that the teachers were told "do not smile until November." As if the students they were teacher were criminals who did not deserve a form of happiness. In

another example, he states how one of his colleagues intended to tell her story about traveling to Europe to teach about her history unit, hoping that sharing her personal experience would help her better relate to them. She decided to not go through with it though, since that might cause a connection to form between them. She feared connecting with her students similar to how an ethical person would not wish to have any association with a murder. Emdin notes that through these tiny dissonances are what ultimately bring more stress on not just the students and teacher, but the education system overall.

Taking into account all of the struggles that urban schools face, it is very obvious what the problem is. The solution, however, seems to be difficult to grasp. Mainly due to the fact that teachers grow fearful of losing their jobs and status, and feel that an iron-grip on their class.