

Emdin, C. (2016). For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood... and the Rest of Y'all Too: Reality Pedagogy and Urban Education, (pp. 8-10). Beacon Press. Kindle Edition.

Identifying urban youth of color as neoindigenous allows us to understand the oppression these youth experience, the spaces they inhabit, and the ways these phenomena affect what happens in social settings like traditional classrooms. It seeks to position these youth in a larger context of marginalization, displacement, and diaspora.

Like the indigenous, the neoindigenous are a group that will not fade into oblivion despite attempts to rename or relocate them. The term neoindigenous 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.

The neoindigenous will continue to exist, and need to be acknowledged, in classrooms for as long as traditional teaching promotes an imaginary white middle-class ideal. As long as white middle-class teachers are recruited to schools occupied by urban youth of color, without any consideration of how they affirm and reestablish power dynamics that silence students, issues that plague urban education (like achievement gaps, suspension rates, and high teacher turnover) will persist.

The neoindigenous often look, act, and engage in the classroom in ways that are inconsistent with traditional school norms. Like the indigenous, they are viewed as intellectually and academically deficient to their counterparts from other racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Too often, when these students speak or interact in the classroom in ways that teachers are uncomfortable with, they are categorized as troubled students, or diagnosed with disorders like ADD (attention deficit disorder) and ODD (oppositional defiant disorder). The Association for Psychological Science recently shared a study finding that black students were more likely to be labeled as troublemakers by their teachers and treated harshly in classrooms. Students who are treated harshly in classrooms are less likely to academically engage in classrooms, which results in their being perceived as academically inferior.

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 significant step toward changing the way educators engage with urban youth of color.

Addressing the cultural differences between teachers and students requires what educational researcher Gloria Ladson-Billings describes as culturally relevant pedagogy. This approach to teaching advocates for a consideration of the culture of the students in determining the ways in which they are taught. Unfortunately, this approach cannot be implemented unless teachers broaden their scope beyond traditional classroom teaching.