

# A Black & Latino Policy Institute Report

The 3rd Annual Indiana Whole Child Summit  
Equity and Social Emotional Learning  
Fostering a Safe Environment for All

February 24, 2021

Indiana Department of Education  
Indiana School Mental Health Initiative

Advancing the Whole Child concept in  
light of the global Black Lives Matter movement:  
Adding political to the social, emotional, physical,  
and cognitive needs of the whole African American child

"Urban students quickly receive the message that they can only be smart when they are not who they are. This in many cases is classroom colonialism."

-- Prof. Chris Emdin, "Reality Pedagogy"

"In some instances, Black students reject schooling since being successful is associated with 'acting white.' Yet, to these students, it's not about having to 'act white' or not, but the assumption that to succeed in school one must be assimilated into the mainstream by a 'subtractive process' where their identity is stripped away by the education process itself. So, it's not that Black students have to act white to be successful, they can't act Black and be successful."

-- Dr. Prudence Carter, *Keepin' it real*

"Education is indoctrination if you're white, subjugation if you're black."

-- James Baldwin

## **The intersectionality of K-12 education with the existential reality faced by Black America**

Within the years of the past decade, I came to appreciate the intersectionality of K-12 public education with the everyday existential reality faced by Black America.

### **The Whole Child concept**

This is why I became interested in the idea of the "whole child" which began forming nationally in the early years of the 21st century. Advancing past, yet including the academic needs of students, the whole child idea centers on key "domains" that matter deeply regarding our human potential: intellectual, social-emotional, identity, and sustainable physical health and mental health development.

As a consequence, I realized that if educators are to build the capacity to address the wider development of the whole African American child, the "political domain" must be added to the current general set of factors.

### **My proposal and presentation during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Indiana Whole Child Summit**

This February 24, I presented at the 3rd Indiana Annual Whole Child Summit. The on-line event had over 1000 attendees. My talk was 1 of 15 chosen to be presented during breakout sessions from the batch of 87 summit proposals received by the Indiana School Mental Health Initiative and IDOE.

My hour-long manifesto concerned: "Advancing the Whole Child concept in light of the global Black Lives Matter movement: Adding political to the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs of the whole African American child."

### **Schools are political sites**

Adding a political factor to educating the whole Black child is not an odd request. Our public schools are not politically neutral. Our public schools are political sites. And, going to school is a political act for Black children and youth, and their families and communities. Indeed, for Black boys, learning how to read is an existential act. The issue is literacy is seen merely as an academic act by the majority of educators. These political facets of public education are obvious to Black Americans; they are not so obvious to European Americans.

Political does not mean party politics. In this context, political means an awareness of what it takes to survive as a child of color in a public school system and nation which ranks and sorts students based on whiteness.

Just like schools must respect the social-emotional, cognitive, or physical qualities students need to have a fulfilled life, a safe learning environment for Black children respects and develops the political qualities they need to survive.

As noted, the mainstream does not view schools as political sites. Like racism, this is hidden or disguised. The "political" is there though in fact. The purpose of America's public schools is to socialize students into a system based on the politics of whiteness. In many respects then, our schools are colonial, confusing education with assimilation. What is challenging for Black students according to Chris Emdin is that African American teachers can colonize students just like white teachers. See: [For white folks who teach in the hood: A lesson in campus colonialism.](#)

**Advancing culturally relevant teaching to politically relevant teaching** (Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1990)  
Cultural responsive pedagogy is important, yet an insufficient precondition for teaching Black students. The current concept limits orientations to understanding and appreciating culture-- ignoring the political and existential realities students face daily. When teachers use their knowledge of society's inequities, they recognize the political dimensions of culturally relevant teaching which then enhances their "political clarity."

That is, these educators recognized the existence of oppression in their students' lives and seek to use their personal, professional, and social power to encourage students to understand and undermine their subordination. This broadens the applications of cultural responsiveness, expanding a teacher's influence to empower students to organize so as to eliminate the issues of race, class and injustice which can interfere with their academic success at school.

By realizing schools are political sites, educators respect global youth culture—a critical stance towards society that requires a critical pedagogy. Making sure Black American students are not required to leave their politics/political life at the schoolhouse door, respects the fact that marginalized students have to be political in order survive. School becomes "the enemy" when their political qualities are ignored, underdeveloped or at worst, suppressed.

- [Whole Child Summit flier](#)
- [The Black & Latino Policy Institute's Summit proposal](#)
- [Video of presentation](#)
- [PowerPoint from presentation](#)
- [Resources supporting presentation](#)
- [Synthesis of attendee's evaluations of presentation](#)

A Movement Against and Beyond Boundaries: "Politically Relevant Teaching" Among African American Teachers, Tamara Beauboeuf-LaFontant, 1999, *Teachers College Record*.

<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/A-movement-against-and-beyond-boundaries-Politically-relevant-teaching-among-African-American-teachers.pdf>

Cultural competency is not enough: Advancing culturally relevant teaching as politically relevant teaching, John Harris Loflin, 2012, Black & Latino Policy Institute.

<http://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Cultural-competency-is-not-enough-Advancing-to-politically-relevant-teaching.pdf>

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