

# Powerful Multicultural Essays *for* Innovative Educators and Leaders

OPTIMIZING "HEARTY" CONVERSATIONS



Festus E. Obiakor

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*Optimizing “Hearty” Conversations*

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**Festus E. Obiakor**

*Sunny Educational Consulting*



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## *Foreword*

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**P**owerful *Multicultural Essays for Innovate Educators and Leaders: Optimizing “Hearty” Conversations* provides a series of insightful and thought-provoking essays that challenge the reader to examine critical multicultural dimensions of education in today’s schools and classrooms. The essays stimulate critical thinking as it relates to multicultural education issues in the United States as well as across the globe. More importantly, the contents stimulate the reader to examine and conceptualize one’s own experiences regarding multicultural experiences throughout one’s life. These essays challenge the reader to take a journey via the essays to examine how his or her multicultural accepted beliefs and practices meet the needs of multicultural students today. At times, this personal journey may illicit more questions, doubts, and confusion regarding more rational educational standards and practices. However, this book’s author, Obiakor, eloquently composes remedies related to questionable multicultural practices that are at odds with what is best for the education of multicultural students.

*Powerful Multicultural Essays for Innovative Educators and Leaders* allows the reader to develop a philosophy of multicultural education that values students. The essays accomplish this by exposing the reader to the renowned author’s experiences as a researcher, scholar, and professional leader in multicultural education and his belief that education is molded

by lifelong experiences and experimentations. The reader is challenged by the comprehensive content within each essay to ask probing questions related to problematic and questionable multicultural educational practices that may have tarnished the value of multicultural education endeavors that pervade our schools and classrooms today. Obiakor asks that the reader begin to conceptualize what appropriate and corrective multicultural educational practices could be undertaken. Essentially, the essays are presented by him as “antidotes to the phony or fraudulent multiculturalism that has permeated our human interactions in schools, college/universities, communities, states, nations, and world.” However, Obiakor emphasizes that the essays are not to be considered remedies to a struggling world where there is growing nationalism, disenfranchisement, disillusion, political and social divisions, economic disadvantages, close-mindedness, and ethnocentrism. While he stresses that the essays are not “panaceas,” their powerful impact on the reader raises questions related to unfairness, inequality, displacement of those who are different by the powerful elite, and the lack of cooperation by professionals, leaders, and politicians due to historical prejudices and racial bias.

This powerful book provides the reader with informative and a timely multicultural education literature and delineates stark and probing questions that stimulate communication about the justification and need for sound multicultural education practices that emphasize meeting the diverse needs of multicultural students. The manner in which Obiakor builds justification is based upon the documentation of prevailing and historical multicultural practices and an emphatic and humanitarian connection. This latter aspect becomes relevant as it appeals to the reader not to sit idly by and accept problematic practices or retreat from obvious unfairness. While this may be difficult for the reader due to experienced societal mores and our primary indoctrination to the prevailing “White” culture, Obiakor gently nudges us to conceptualize change as a developmental process of growth where we are asked to reexamine our past and present multicultural experiences and knowledge base with the goal to accommodate and assimilate these aspects to form a higher moral, intellectual, and humanitarian foundation that will allow all to openly advance multicultural discourses that encapsulate communities where a “people valued and social justice orientation” prevails.

Based on the aforementioned premise, Obiakor encourages all of us to engage in meaningful conversations in which school leaders begin to consider what is morally right as opposed to what is legally right without fear of retribution. In addition, he suggests that we engage ourselves in (a) collaboration with the intent to improve the plight of those treated unfairly

or ignored due to being different; (b) experimentation with the knowledge that it may be positive or negative but allows critical information to construct truly multicultural schools and communities that take advantage of the energies to involve all stakeholders to “avoid unwarranted labels, derogatory categories, and illusionary generations that disempower students”; (c) university teacher preparation programs that stress the importance of our racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse society; (d) the recognition of the dangers of absurd “alternative facts” that the dominant society perpetuates to intimidate, disenfranchise, and disillusion minorities; (e) higher education communities to “listen to voices that have been traditionally silenced, disenfranchised, disadvantaged, and disillusioned”; (f) the acceptance of an overall educational mission “to value personal realities and experiences, multidimensional pedagogical and intervention strategies, collaborative consultations between professionals and families, and the unique specialness” in diverse learners to reduce behavior problems in classrooms that stem more from demographic changes; (g) the recognition that society needs to recognize its blindness on human differences in spite of the fact that “our world is changing demographically, socially, racially, culturally, and linguistically”; (h) the need to accept that our world is changing which necessitates using “our power and privilege to do well—not for some, but for all”; (i) valuing “White” multicultural voices in America’s colleges and universities who encourage all to “race together” to increase racial and multicultural discourse in the United States; (j) working with confident school leaders who know who they are to inspire others “to value cultural, linguistic, learning, behavioral collaboration and cooperation, not just at school levels, but also at community levels”; and (k) the acceptance that “in our efforts to police and manage the behaviors of those who are different (e.g., CLD individuals), we must have the moral compass to understand the imperfections in our respective communities.”

Obiakor concludes with an essay that lays the foundation for his multicultural educational purpose, goal, and faith. This powerful essay is certainly unconventional in regards to the multicultural educational practices and foundation literature. At times, the reader experiences a spiritual sense that allows for the understanding and rationale for the essays within this book. Obiakor eloquently allows the reader to transverse the contents with acceptance, understanding, and a sense of peacefulness as he convincingly describes how his practical implications, research and scholarly activities, and activities as a servant leader provide a social justice path that emphasizes valuing people where society can survive with “good pedagogical powers that are enveloped in decency, integrity, fairness, and human uplift.” In conclusion, I say “Bravo” to Obiakor, my dear friend and cherished colleague for his courage and

leadership throughout his long, internationally renowned, and distinguished career in providing multicultural scholarship that educates all of us to the uniqueness of what multicultural education should truly be.

—**Anthony F. Rotatori, PhD**  
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## *Preface*

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**P**owerful Multicultural Essays for Innovative Educators and Leaders: Optimizing “Hearty” Conversations is a book that is inspired by my experiences as a student, teacher, college/university professor, program coordinator, and department head or chair. Additionally, my experiences as a researcher, scholar, and professional leader have helped to motivate me in writing the essays. I believe like John Dewey (1958) that education is molded by experiences and experimentations. We cannot divorce ourselves from them, and we do ourselves a disservice when we downplay them or stop learning from them. Whether experiences are positive or negative, they become the survival tools that are cemented to our lives.

I have always enjoyed documenting my experiences since they teach me a lot. I also know that they generate discourses of divergent dimensions. They force us to see beyond our eyes, hear beyond our ears, talk beyond our mouths, and think beyond our imaginations. In addition, they empower our intelligences, guide our souls, steer our actions, and engender our possibilities. Without our ability to enjoy our experiences or challenge ourselves, we find ourselves in the valleys of despair and in the wells of destruction. When these happen, we are forced to silence our voices and find ourselves in the cycles of disruption, disaster, and even death. When minds die, the society dies, and our future dies. On the contrary, when we truly cherish our experiences, we see more, do more, and act with enthusiasm.

We begin to enjoy the kind of education that inspires a continuous process of growth and replenishes our soul.

Yes, I enjoyed writing *Powerful Multicultural Essays for Innovative Educators and Leaders*. The individual essays (now chapters) are my “brain children” that have appeared in various forms as parts of my commentaries, journal articles, and book chapters. In earnest, some of them were difficult to write because the circumstances that led to their writing were sometimes sad. In a perfect world, books of this nature will be irrelevant. But, we live in a world that shifts and turns! We see a world that is advancing educationally, economically, socially, and otherwise. However, we also see a world that is struggling with disenfranchisement, disillusionment, divisions, and disadvantages, thereby forcing our traditionally silenced voices to rise up. For example, on the one hand, we celebrate technological advancements, and on the other hand, we decry how these advancements are forcing us to talk and communicate less with fellow humans. While we are moving forward, we are also retreating into our narrow confines, nativist cages, tribal enclaves, and exclusive domains. For example, the Brexit election in England and the patriotic election of President Trump in the United States speak volumes about today’s xenophobia, ethnocentrism, racism, and closeness. In reality, retreating will not advance our communities, our nation, and our world; retreating will destroy bridges that took years to construct.

It is my hope that this book will help the readers to develop “good hearts” and motivate them to collaborate, consult, and cooperate more with each other at various interactional and intellectual levels. In this book, the essays are geared toward multiculturalism and multicultural education. They are supposed to be antidotes to phony or fraudulent multiculturalism that has permeated our human interactions in our schools, colleges/universities, communities, states, nations, and world. However, these essays are not supposed to be iconoclastic in nature or even panaceas to all our societal problems. My hope is that they become cathartically beneficial to our sacred existence as human beings, especially since each chapter has *three* starting points for enhancing “heartly” conversations. And, my hunch is that this book will stimulate our human valuing and open doors that go beyond personal idiosyncrasy, race, color, language, culture, religion, and national origin.

*Powerful Multicultural Essays for Innovative Educators and Leaders* is written for this day, age, and time. We need to tear down our walls of hatred to optimize “heartly” conversations. In addition, we need to challenge ourselves and our institutions to do the right things. We must revisit our inner spiritual connectivity—there are biblical allusions that could buttress our

understanding about multiculturalism. For instance, human valuing is the engine behind the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the Parable of the Sower. Should our goal not be to sow good seeds that bloom to be beautiful flowers and even grow to be strong trees? Should our actions be divorced from supporting those who are different from us? Reading this book will help us to answer these questions. As often as possible, we must be action-oriented and practical as we arrive at our central hub and enhance our potential or existential collaboration, consultation, and cooperation at all levels of our human interactions.

This is a book for students of life, which means all of us! We are all learners, whether we are students, teachers, community leaders, university professors and leaders, researchers, scholars, or politicians, to mention a few. We all need to read this book to optimize conversations, create open and healthy environments, and advance our nations and world. The days for hiding from discourses are over! We can no longer sweep our problems and actions under the rug! And we cannot divorce ourselves from our own realities or from the realities of others different from us. Hopefully, this book will yield remarkable fruitful dividends with regard to human discourse and valuing.

Since this book is tied to my personal experiences, I must thank my wife, children, brothers, sisters, family members, friends, and well-wishers for their uncontaminated support, wisdom, and love. I thank Mr. George Johnson and the people at Information Age Publishing for believing in this book's authenticity. I also thank Dr. Anthony Rotatori, Professor Emeritus of Saint Xavier University and Dr. Tachelle Banks of Cleveland State University for writing the Foreword and Afterword of this book, respectively. Their voices have helped to enrich my voice. To all of us, let's continue to talk and work together for the common good. As we already know, we live in a global village.

—**Festus E. Obiakor**