

## Foreword

**T**he experience of being called names and treated poorly because of where your parents come from or the perception others have of your heritage is an old one. Many move to the “land of opportunity,” to “the other side of the tracks,” to “the better part of town,” and to “a good school” to overcome criticism, discrimination, and mistreatment and to build a better life for themselves and their children. They hope to reclaim the dignity they are entitled to as human beings and as citizens of a country where dreams and ideals of individualism, equal opportunity, nationalism, and success prevail and are the basis for fundamental human rights and continuing social responsibilities. Too often, it just doesn’t work out that way. Too often, diversity that should be celebrated is the source of disparaging remarks, continuing intolerance, and disenfranchising treatment—even on the right side of the tracks, even on the right side of town, even in the “good” schools.

Dealing with diversity is certainly not a new concept in America. Multiple voices have been part of the country’s educational system for a very long time. For example, in the 1850s, over half of New York City’s residents were immigrants. Administrators and teachers in every period of educational history have had to think about both the challenge and the certainty of dealing with people from different cultures in schools. At the beginning of the 20th century, when compulsory attendance laws forced children from all ranges of society, not just the privileged, to go to school, special education programs cropped up in large cities to address the growing

need for services for “exceptional children,” children at the margins, many of whom came from rich, albeit nonmajority, cultures. Today, American public schools arguably serve a more diverse population than ever before in history. Race and ethnicity, social class, gender, national origin, native language, and disability contribute to the rich and diverse cultures that many children bring to school today. The challenge that remains is exploring, entertaining, and enriching what schools can do to promote educational experiences that are fully capable of serving diverse students and their families well.

*It Even Happens in “Good” Schools: Responding to Cultural Diversity in Today’s Classrooms* provides perspectives of great value in this quest. Crossing “cases” with critical practices related to identification, assessment, categorization, placement, and instruction, Dr. Obiakor carries the reader on a journey that challenges, informs, and enlightens. Arguing that truly good schools are places where the potential of *all* students is maximized, he consistently illustrates the importance of addressing diversity in doing this. By the stories he tells and the questions he asks, he points out that progress is slow-moving and that quality, equity, and fair, appropriate treatment are, more often than not, very hard to find, even in “good” schools. Arguing that all schools must respond to pleas for excellence and quality, he shows us that these will not happen without concern for diversity as well. The book is punctuated with observations, solutions, and key points that should be invaluable in efforts to reform, restructure, and improve schools by translating research, resources, and rhetoric into fundamentally sound, “culturally responsive” professional practice.

In a very readable style, Dr. Obiakor presents challenging and practical information reflecting multiple perspectives, points of view, and philosophies. The lessons to be learned from the stories he tells are abundant, varied, and important; consider a few examples:

- Diverse student experiences belong in the classroom and enrich what is going on there.

- What a student is called, where he or she is placed, and how he or she is taught speak volumes about how much we value him or her.
- Perceptions affect assessment and instruction.
- Lack of language should never be misconstrued as lack of intelligence.
- A common goal of teachers must be to minimize negative consequences of testing.
- Behaviors (good and bad) of teachers have far-reaching consequences.
- Learning environments should be manipulated to meet the needs of all students.
- Good teaching is the engine behind good schools.

It is difficult to argue with Dr. Obiakor’s ultimate conclusion: A good school is defined by how it addresses diversity. If his vision is embraced, misidentification, discrimination, and mistreatment will be reduced, and the benefits of having a truly good school, a dream school, will be realized by *all* learners, *all* teachers, *all* parents, and *all* communities.

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