URBAN EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Research, Issues, and Perspectives

Edited by

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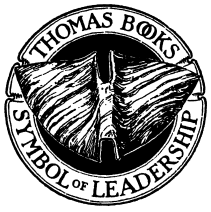

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To my late parents, Chief Charles O. Obiakor (Agbako I of Obodoukwu, Imo State, Nigeria) and Mrs. Regina Obiakor (Idiche) for teaching me the values of life. To my immediate family members in Nigeria and Jamaica for shamelessly believing in me. To my wife, Pauline, and my children, Charles, Gina, Kristen, and Alicia for their unconditional love, patience, and kindness. To all *good teachers for making a difference in the lives of others.*

F.E.O.

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F.D.B.

FOREWORD

Improving Urban Education means improving America's future. The quality of urban education may well determine the quality of life in America in the 21st Century. As I read through the various chapters in *Urban Education for the 21st Century: Research, Issues, and Perspectives* from my office in the National Center for Higher Education in Washington, D.C.–our nation's esteemed capital city–some thoughts began to cross my mind. I wondered! *A few blocks away, the Congress is debating various issues that have significant domestic and international consequences: How do we deal with the record budget deficits? What, if anything, should be done with social security? Is there a plausible exit strategy that will bring the troops home from the war in Iraq? Can the country be made more secure by curtailing immigration and tightening the borders?*

As seen above, a long list of weighty topics kept crossing my mind, and somewhere on this list is the consideration of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act–the companion legislation to the landmark bill authorizing federal support for elementary and secondary education that has come to be known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. I kept thinking of the proposal of Washington, D.C. officials to modify the Higher Education Act so that a greater degree of emphasis is placed on testing students at the high school level. In addition, I kept wondering how funding can be made available to initiate this process. The testing strategy has been a key part of NCLB; and the underlying notion seems to be that if testing is good at the elementary and middle school levels, then it will be beneficial at the high school level. This strategy appears simplistic because testing alone cannot improve test results. What I believe *will* improve test results in urban schools is higher quality and equitable educational services delivered in supportive environments by qualified and caring professionals. This is a point that the United States Congress has yet to grasp,

but it is certainly well understood, articulated, and documented by the contributors to this important book.

Professors Obiakor and Beachum deserve the thanks of educators, policy makers, and concerned citizens for addressing critical issues facing urban schools. The relationship between the quality of urban education and the long-term economic and social well-being of this nation has become clearer with each passing day because the compelling (and perhaps competing) realities of life in 21st century America are stark and incontrovertible. On the one hand, the future augurs a knowledge-based, technology-oriented economy that hints at increased productivity, innovation, and prosperity; while on the other hand, that same future shows a demographic wave of ethnically diverse children, from communities and backgrounds that have historically been underserved by the educational establishment. The choices then are clear, albeit unsettling to those who benefit from the current inequitable distribution of resources: Either we identify and implement strategic approaches in urban schools that will effectively educate these increasing populations of people so that they can be participants in and contributors to an inclusive society, or we neglect to educate them to their full potential and thus experience a real decline in our international competitiveness, standard of living, economic and political stability, and consequently, our exalted place in the ranking order of nations. This scenario is the basis of the reasoning behind my initial observation that the quality of urban education may well determine the quality of life in America in the 21st Century.

America stands on the cusp of change! Many of the nation's cities are now experiencing profound makeovers, as a largely unanticipated wave of reinvestment and gentrification brings significant transformations to urban communities. Inner-city neighborhoods that for decades have been marginal in terms of their residential quality are now becoming desirable and even chic areas where renovated houses, condominiums, and boutique shops exemplify new vitality and prosperity. For the most part though, schools in these urban areas, and students who attend them, are not benefiting from this renaissance. In contrast to schools located in suburban enclaves, these urban schools are more likely to feature a cadre of teachers who are not certified in the fields they are teaching; a paucity of advanced placement and laboratory courses; antiquated and substandard physical facilities; and a shortage of counseling and supplemental services. This disparity is not only

obvious, but also inexcusable, especially after the more than 50-year historic Brown versus the School Board of Education in Topeka, Kansas decision which outlawed racial segregation in the public schools. In fact, it has become common knowledge that in most of the nation's large cities, public schools are more racially segregated at present than they were in 1954 when the U. S. Supreme Court rendered its landmark finding. Flights of white and middle-class populations from urban centers have left urban schools with higher concentrations of students from poverty-stricken households, a smaller tax base to draw on to support the system, and a less powerful set of political allies to argue for its interests. As a result of these phenomena, the legacy of urban education could be characterized as one of malign neglect.

Urban Education in the 21st Century: Research, Issues, and Perspectives may not provide all of the solutions to the problems that afflict urban education. But, no single book could accomplish this goal! Clearly, the range of topics in this book is broad, as it should be with an area as multi-faceted as urban education, and should include such pertinent subjects as special needs students, violence management, personnel preparation, and school financing. This book is important because it provides informed analyses and solid insights which point us in the right direction, so that as a nation that is committed to fairness and equity, we can implement sound policies and practices in urban schools to counteract some of the omissions and shortcomings of the past. Finally, in writing this book, Professors Obiakor and Beachum have proven once more the importance of good networking in any organization and beyond. This brings me to one important observation that I need to make. Here in Washington, D.C., there has been fairly common use lately of a tactic where certain individuals have promoted various programs and activities without revealing their connections or relationships to parties responsible for their implementation. The criticism that this particular practice has engendered is entirely appropriate, and I hope to avoid future recriminations of this or any other kind by acknowledging my past connection to several of the contributors to this book when I served as Dean of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I hasten to emphasize that I wear this connection as a badge of honor. It was a privilege for me to have had the opportunity to work with such giants in the field of urban education as Festus Obiakor, Edgar Epps, Martin Haberman, Marty Sapp, and Ian Harris, to mention a few. Their con-

tributions to this book, as well as those of their less senior collaborators, demonstrate the important conjunction of empirical analysis and enlightened advocacy.

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PREFACE

Urban Education for the 21st Century: Research, Issues, and Perspectives is a book that is written for this day and age. It exposes the complexities and realities facing urbanness and urban schools. For instance, urban schools exist in urban communities that house successful corporations and institutions which continue to be the economic engines of the United States. While these corporations and institutions employ people of different races, cultures, languages, religions, and national origins, they have been unable to transform the perceptions of urban communities. Employers come and go in urban communities, yet the communities remain unchanged and undervalued. It is no surprise that urban communities continue to be viewed from the perspectives of poverty, unemployment, racism, and economic malaise. These views of urbanness have affected the definitions of urban schools.

Many urban schools are inadequately funded and frequently denigrated. Students in these schools continue to be misidentified, misassessed, miscategorized, misplaced, and misinstructed by ill-prepared and unprepared educators and service providers. These students are identified as having behavior disorders; they are assessed with instruments that lack validity and reliability; they are prejudicially categorized and labeled; they are disproportionately placed in special and gifted programs; and they are misinstructed with no respect for their learning styles and cultural backgrounds. These problems call for new ways of problem-solving. In more ways than one, this book presents innovative strategies to address multi-dimensional issues confronting urbanness and urban schools.

This book has thirteen chapters written by scholars and educators connected to the School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the premier urban university in the state of Wisconsin. Faculty members from all the departments of the School are repre-

sented and their contributions focused on their areas of research and specialization. In this book, Chapter 1 discusses "Urban Education: The Quest for Democracy, Equity, and Excellence;" Chapter 2 focuses on "Educating Urban Learners with and without Special Needs: Life after the *Brown* Case;" Chapter 3 analyzes "Personnel Preparation and Urban Schools;" Chapter 4 explains "Teaching and Learning in Urban Schools;" Chapter 5 focuses on "Educational Leadership in Urban Schools;" Chapter 6 provides "Insights into Educational Psychology: What Urban School Practitioners Must Know;" Chapter 7 discusses "Educating Young Learners in Urban Schools and Communities;" Chapter 8 presents "Managing Violence in Urban Schools;" Chapter 9 focuses on "Financing Urban Schools;" Chapter 10 explores "Reducing the Power of 'Whiteness' in Urban Schools;" Chapter 11 discusses "Building Community in Urban Schools: Promises and Challenges;" Chapter 12 focuses on "New Technological Horizons for Urban Learners;" and Chapter 13 finally discusses "Urban Education: Future Perspectives."

Apparently, the chapters in this book contain topics rarely discussed in urban education texts. In this book, we wanted to demonstrate the comprehensive nature and connectedness of problems and prospects in urban education, and we succeeded! As a consequence, this book will be an added resource to researchers, scholars, educators, and service providers. It should be an excellent required text for graduate and undergraduate courses in all branches of education (e.g., "Introduction to Teaching," "Teaching and Learning in Urban Schools," "Education Leadership in Urban Schools," "Critical Issues in Urban Education," and "Educational Foundation and Policy in Urban Schools," to name a few. In addition, it should be used as a supplementary text for any course in education. Also, this book should be on the reading list of state and federal department of education personnel, college presidents and deans, superintendents, public school teachers, policy makers, change agents, and politicians.

Books of this nature are sometimes difficult to write; however, this book' s contributors made it look easy. They are respectable scholars committed to urban education and its intricacies. They believe in valuing multiple voices and in looking for innovative ways to promote "goodness" in education. They crave for an education that practically leaves no child behind. For their dedication to equitable education for urban learners and their families, we are grateful. We thank Dr.

William Harvey (the former Dean of the School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) for writing the Foreword of this book. Finally, we are grateful to Luciana Ugrina of the School of Education Word Processing Department for her assistance in typing and organizing this book' s manuscript.

Festus E. Obiakor

Floyd D. Beachum

CONTENTS

URBAN EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Chapter 1

URBAN EDUCATION: THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY, EQUITY, AND EXCELLENCE

FESTUS E. OBIAKOR AND FLOYD D. BEACHUM

> The year was 1891. Progressive reformers of the day had hit upon a solution to make cities great: Improve schools to build strong American citizens by assimilating immigrants, increasing literacy to reduce poverty, and preparing workers eager to enter industry and business. To have schools achieve these purposes, new leadership and major reforms in school governance were needed. (Cuban & Usdan, 2003, p.1)

The dreams of 1891 continue to remain unfulfilled in many of today's urban schools. Twenty-first century urban education appears to be confronted by a myriad of issues, problems, and complexities such as deindustrialization, lack of political influence, gang violence, teen pregnancy, and drug abuse. Amid these overwhelming problems, many urban schools continue their undying mission of trying to educate all children who enter their doors. In this chapter, we "contextualize" urban education problems in relation to democracy, equity, and excellence. In addition, we suggest directions for change.

Schooling in the United States has always had an academic and moral purpose (Gutek, 1991; McClellan, 1999). Embedded in this notion are issues of democracy, equity, and excellence. Education has always been viewed as a way to promote the American democratic form of government as well as educate its citizenry (O'Hair, McLaughlin, & Reitzug, 2000). William Torrey Harris, the late nineteenth-century, urban school advocate wrote, "It is clear that man can live in society and constitute a social whole only so far as individuals

are educated out of their natural animal condition, and made to respect social forms more highly than mere animal impulses" (Harris as cited in Laud, 1997, p. 8). Clearly, schools have been known to promote scholarship, loyalty to country, and religious and moral guidance (Lickona, 1991; Zarra, 2000). Emerging from these ambitions are frameworks for democracy, equity, and excellence.

DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

The concept of democracy conjures up numerous images in the hearts and minds of Americans. Clearly, schools play a vital role in sustaining the American democracy (Dewey, 1960; Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, Hall, & Gollnick, 1999). Democracy can be defined as "how we govern ourselves, the concept by which we measure the wisdom and worth of social policies and shifts, the ethical anchor we seek when our political ship seems to drift" (Beane & Apple, 1995, pp. 4-5). Additionally, it has been defined as "government by the people; the people themselves are responsible for ensuring a free and just society" (Lickona, 1991). Conversely, some conceptions of the term go beyond traditional perspectives. O'Hair, McLaughlin, and Reitzug (2000) asserted that "while frequently associated with the governance of countries and practices such as voting in elections, we believe that these are merely tokens of democracy. Democracy is a process rather than a product and extends far beyond merely decision making and governance structures" (p. 7). In reality, democracy might very well be the process, product, and an inseparable charge to education in all contexts.

In more ways than one, American schools play a vital role in the continuation and maintenance of democracy. As West (1994) pointed out:

> Democracies are quite rare and usually short-lived in the human adventure. The precious notion of ordinary people living lives of decency and dignity–owing to their participation in the basic decision making in those fundamental institutions that affect their life chances–is difficult to sustain over space and time. And every historic effort to forge a democratic project has been undermined by two fundamental realities: poverty and paranoia. The persistence of poverty generates levels of despair that deepen social conflict; the escalation of paranoia produces levels of distrust that reinforce cultural division. (p.155)

In addition, he highlighted the importance of schools in both carrying on a democratic legacy and addressing deeper issues of social/ideological conflict and the paralyzing power of paranoia that could ultimately undermine America's democratic destiny. Interestingly, the dual issues of poverty and paranoia intersect at the crossroads of the urban context. Commenting on democratic civic responsibility, Glickman (2004) explained that:

> We cannot continue to neglect the role of public purpose as central to an educated citizenry, nor can we turn away from the original definition of freedom–that free citizens would rule the public domain rather than an elite aristocracy. Today, at this critical moment in the life of our nation, we can indeed usher in a new commitment to the people of America: That we will do everything in our power to help our children develop into informed, wise, and independent citizens of a free society who are concerned with the welfare of all. (p.3)

These comments reinforce the role of schools and educators in making democracy a reality. Ultimately, the democratic process and product frames the American experience, and education has become the building blocks of the framework. To buttress this point, Glickman recounted Thomas Jefferson's statement that "Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves, therefore, are its only safe depositories. And to render them safe their minds must be improved" (p. 6). Thus, democracy is the blood of the nation and education its heart.

EQUITY AND DEMOCRACY

As Americans have struggled to maintain a sense of democracy, they have struggled even more to develop a sense of educational equity. The usage of the term *equity* in this sense differs from that of *equality*. Equity addresses the issue of things not being equal and seeks to level playing fields while solving this problem. "Remedies based on equality assume that citizens have the same opportunities and experiences" (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29). The lack of access to opportunities and qualitatively different life experiences are many times linked to issues of race/ethnicity, gender, and social class. Although there are many obstacles, roadblocks, and challenges because of one's position

along the axis of oppression (Capper, 1993), the defining variable and focal point continues to be racial in nature (Perry, 2003). The endeavor towards the elusive goal of educational equity is evident in the experiences of culturally diverse individuals. For instance, the struggle of African Americans in the United States in trying to attain educational parity is a testament to the challenge of equity. Africans arrived on American shores in 1619 as first, indentured servants (Bennett, 1984). Later, millions more were kidnapped and brought to this country to participate in the peculiar institution known as slavery (Quarles, 1976). Apparently, slavery "uprooted their culture and was designed to rob memory, create dependency upon the Euro-American world, and create a self-hatred complex that would last for generations" (Rogers, 2000, p. 124). To uphold this insidious system, an array of customs, traditions, and laws were developed; one of such laws strictly forbade teaching a slave to read or write. Furthermore, if a slave was caught reading or writing, there were harsh penalties (Blassingame, 1979; Wade, 1964). Even though the law and society were not on their side, slaves still valued education and fought to gain it amid incredible odds. According to Perry (2003), "for the slaves, literacy was more than a symbol of freedom; it was freedom. It affirmed their humanity, their personhood. To be able to read and write was an intrinsic good, as well as a mighty weapon in the slave's struggle for freedom" (p. 13). This educational odyssey would take the slaves (later to become African Americans) to the 20th century still guided by the struggle for equity.

As the battle for human rights continued, the equity theme remained constant. The Civil War would eventually bring an end to slavery, followed by a brief period of progress called Reconstruction. During this time period, African Americans made significant gains in many areas, including politics and education (Bennett, 1984). Unfortunately, white southern backlash and northern apathy would set the stage for an era of segregation in which separate but equal was the rule of the day (Rothstein, 1996). Yeo and Kanpol (1999) confirmed that:

> During the latter part of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, education for minorities in this country varied, not so much in quality, but in its response to geographic, demographic, and legal contexts. Two major developments shaped the nature of schooling for Black Americans during this time