Introduction

AUTHORS’ PERSPECTIVES

The battle for holistic social equality is a broad conflict which necessarily encompasses every industry, institution, nation, and people – and academia is no exception. Accordingly, while the authors of this text consist of experts working in the fields of sociology, gender studies, and education, the text of their chapters reflects a more personal meditation on the role that these issues have played in their own lives and careers, as well as the lives and careers of close friends and colleagues.

Together, these chapters comprise a shared record of the trials facing leading authorities who work and teach on the frontlines of a struggle whose challenges they themselves face every day. But this book is also a celebration of the hard-won successes and crucial insights those struggles have yielded, and offers an inspiring commentary enriched all the more so by the insight of professional expertise.

Below, readers may find the testimony of two such authors: Drs. Christina Smith and Nonofo Losike-Sedimo.

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The book Supporting Multiculturalism and Gender Diversity in University Settings came about because Molly Zhou, a professional woman of color on the academic pathway in Higher Education, placed a call for papers from authors intimately acquainted with the woes, challenges, and successes resulting in the lived experiences of women of color in the Ivory Towers of America. Dr. Zhou has produced a work that is honest, insightful, and like no other work to date on the complex topic of two popular topics today: Multicultural Education and Diversity.

The book offers an account of the advantages of Multicultural Education and Diversity in Academe, yet, confronts the crisis that exists in the 21st century as institutions of higher education grapple with the outcomes of the 20th century efforts of how to accommodate the increasing demand for education for populations that
had been excluded from the halls of The Academy. This work is complete with the authors’ perspectives and stories supported by feminist theory, diversity, multicultural education and teacher education.

An overarching theme to a work of this scope is the voices of the women in the book which provide the audience with a connection between the theories of multicultural education and diversity and the practice within the halls of Academe, where professional women of color expected that the national motto of the United States “e pluribus unum-out of many, one” to be the lived experience. Instead, like other fractions of the society and even the world, theory and practice are still too far apart. The expectation that institutions of Higher Education in the United States are places where different groups live, study and think side-by-side on a daily basis, thereby offering an authentic space for supporting multiculturalism and gender diversity, paled when the changing ethnic texture of the Academy intensified and the progress, though notable, has been slow.

Anyone aspiring to gain an intimate understanding of the complexities of multicultural education and diversity within the university setting will find this book realistic and useful personally and professionally. Readers will come away with a better understanding of the not always favorable outcomes of policies, behaviors and perceptions that permeate the very institutions that hold the greatest promise for transforming citizens, communities, the nation, and ultimately the world.

As a former university administrator (Dean, College of Arts and Professional Studies, Dean, School of Education and Sports Management, Tenured Faculty), and most recently, University Professor of Higher Education and Educational Management, I have attempted to fathom answers to questions such as:

- Why are institutions of Higher Education in The United States grappling in the 21st century with a massive mismatch between representation of faculty, administrators, Boards of Trustees, and Staff that equals the roughly 35% student bodies across the 7006 accredited higher education institutions, 105 Historically Black Colleges and Universities; 268 Hispanic Serving Institutions and 34 Tribal Colleges and Universities?
- Why are women of color, in particular, Black, foreign women, not counted by ethnic origins in the United States Census?
- Why are so many segments of the United States population severely underrepresented, particularly in math, science, technology and engineering at institutions of higher education?
- Why is it that only 34% of US higher education institutions offer culturally diverse curricular?
How can colleges and universities serve as models of transformation that result in equitable, non-oppressive and diverse communities?

How can a global perspective of multicultural education and diversity enhance the scope of higher education?

In my administrative and professional career, the opportunity to travel, present lectures and serve in numerous civic capacities has led me on a journey of personal understanding of the complexities of diversity in The Academy, especially as it pertained hiring, firing, recruitment and retention of students and faculty. My search for answers to my own confusion, heartbreaks, and perceptions were always unfilled. This book leaves me satisfied that finally after three decades in higher education, the lessons learned, the misconceptions and the false starts were part of the journey. The issues in this book are not new: nations and institutions of higher learning have struggled with them in one form or another for centuries. The ten chapters in the book were not randomly selected but chosen based upon the common themes of perception, misconceptions and ultimately, success.

As with any new book, care has been taken to provide updated sources, statistics and resources to expand the content on critical issues such gender, race, and issues specific to the role of women of color in K-20 settings. This book is a collection of essays providing multiple perspectives on multiculturalism and education with each chapter ending with a compendium of action steps to support moving from the theoretical stance of what to do to how to do. This book is a must read, for college presidents, administrators, faculty and staff, K-12 colleagues, graduate students, and anyone interested in personal transformation that facilitates a better understanding between diverse groups.

Despite the incredibly strong interest in multiculturalism and diversity, there are few books that present the voices of professional women of color as they navigate the issues and problems stemming from misconceptions, perceptions, and potential benefits of the diversity that exists in the United States and other parts of the world.

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Multicultural education as a field of study is eclectic. It uses concepts, paradigms, and theories from various disciplines. Scholars in the field have defined it differently depending on their perspective of Multiculturalism. James Banks defined it as follows: “multicultural education as a field of study is designed to increase educational equity for all students that incorporates, for this purpose, content, concepts,
principles, theories, and paradigms from history, the social and behavioral sciences, and particularly from ethnic studies and women studies” (Banks & Banks, 1995, p. xii). He further simplified this broad concept into five comprehensive areas, which are content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture and social structure. These areas are interrelated but each brings in unique important concepts to the field.

National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) defined the study as a philosophical concept built on the ideals of freedom, justice, equality, equity, and human dignity as acknowledged in various documents, such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence, constitutions of South Africa and the United States, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations. This book subscribes to the ideals expressed in the above definitions. Although definitions are many and varied, the general aim of the multicultural education study is espoused as in James Banks’ words “to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups. One of its important goals is to help all students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate, and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and moral community that works for the common good” (Banks & Banks, 1995, p. xi).

This book interrogates key variables of multiculturalism as they apply to the university as an institution of higher learning. It analyses the application of multicultural education content, concepts, and paradigms to all aspects of the university life. It also contests all kinds of discriminations, in institutions of higher learning and society. Discrimination is portrayed as a barrier that hinders the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitude and effective function necessary for multicultural environments. It also addresses contexts and multiple ways of thinking within multiple cultures. In addition, the book encourages the reader to critically analyse oppression and power relations in their institutions, communities, society, and the global community. The book uses the experiences of authors and their stories about their successes, challenges, and struggles with multiple cultural environments and varied educational and administrative practices. These experiences are presented as easy to read, engaging text that permeates all aspects of university education, practices, policies and organizational cultures. The stories are lessons from which readers will be able to learn. These stories will also empower women to contribute to voices and changes necessary in higher education practices. The targeted audience for the book are Higher education administrators, policy makers, and women professionals in institutions of higher learning.

The focus of the book is on the major key players or variables of multiculturalism, such as gender and education, culture, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, power relations, culture capital, and economic power and race. The book
can be used as textbook for multicultural education classes. It deliberates on creating equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups. For example the chapter on gender mainstreaming and power structure, encourages justice, equity, equality for educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups. The book suggests how educators can prepare students for tolerance and responsibilities in an interdependent multicultural world.

The roles that institutions can play in developing the attitudes and values necessary for a democratic society are comprehensively presented. The value of multicultural perspectives in universities is discussed in detail against the barriers that impedes processes of access, justice, equity and equality. NAME stated that multicultural education prepares all students to work actively toward structural equality in organizations and institutions by providing the knowledge, dispositions, and skills for the redistribution of power and income among diverse groups. The association also recommends that school curriculum must directly address issues of racism, sexism, classism, linguicism, ablism, ageism, heterosexism, religious intolerance, and xenophobia. This book contributes towards meeting these needs for schools curricula.

I believe this book will motivate those in the fields of gender studies social and behavioral science and multicultural education.

SUPPORTING MULTICULTURALISM AND GENDER DIVERSITY IN UNIVERSITY SETTINGS

By collecting the words and works of writers such as Drs. Smith and Losike-Sedimo, this book aims to open a dialogue regarding the effects of social inequality on the very institutions which must serve as the vanguard of understanding, education, and progress.

REFERENCES