

# **Valuing Exceptional Ethnic Minority Voices: New Leadership for a New Era**

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Educators and school leaders have continued to look for new ways of thinking and doing as they confront changes and shifts in paradigms and power. These changes and shifts have led to individual and systemic searches for new meanings (Frankl, 1984). In his search for meaning, Bell (1985, 1992) concluded that on issues of social justice “we are not saved” because of “the permanency of racism.” While I am not as pessimistic as Bell with regard to the permanency of racism, I agree that we live in a racialized and/or tribalized society where race has continued to matter (West, 1993). The challenge then to educators and school leaders is how best to make invisible voices visible. This special issue titled, “Valuing Exceptional Ethnic Minority Voices: New Leadership for a New Era,” is a remarkable effort by Dr. Faith Crampton, Executive Editor of *Educational Considerations*, to highlight those invisible “special” voices that are rarely heard. These voices are the voices of ethnic minorities who are at risk of being misidentified, misassessed, miscategorized, misplaced, and misinstructed because they look, talk, learn, and behave differently (Obiakor, 1999).

Current demographic changes in society indicate that there must be similar kinds of changes in schools and programs. These changes call for a new kind of educational paradigm and a new kind of shift in power by school leaders and administrators (Beachum & Obiakor, 2005). Consider this fact: Not long ago, the National Center for Education Statistics (2001) and the U.S. Department of Education (2001) noted that some disproportionality exists in public school enrollments and racial/ethnic special education placements. For instance, in 2000-2001, Anglo Americans showed a national population of 67% in public school enrollment and 4.3% in special education placement. On the other hand, African Americans showed a national population of 17% in public school enrollment and 20% in special education placement. Interestingly, public school teachers are mostly Anglo Americans and the majority of their students who receive special education services are minorities. As it appears, there continues to be a cultural disconnect between teachers and students. It is reasonable to argue that what these students and their communities bring to school deserves to be incorporated into what teachers and school leaders do. As an imperative, their multicultural voices must be valued and heard if their potential be maximized (Obiakor, in press). The law demands it, and the “heart” appreciates it!

This special issue, to a large measure, focuses on how administrators can use culturally responsive leadership strategies to respond to current demographic shifts in school programs. In this special issue, Bakken, O'Brien, and Sheldon address changing roles of special education administrators with regard to multicultural learners; Mukuria and Obiakor go beyond the narrow confines to discuss special education leadership for ethnically diverse urban learners. Ashbaker and Morgan describe the role of administrators in paraprofessional supervision to support ethnic minority students with special needs. Obi discusses the management of transition and student support services for ethnically diverse college students with learning disabilities; and Obiakor, Beachum, Williams, and McCray describe how to build successful multicultural special education programs through innovative leadership.

In conclusion, this special issue brings to the forefront critical issues confronting ethnic minorities in educational and societal settings. From my perspective and from the perspectives of scholars involved in this special issue, we need innovative educators and leaders who understand their roles in this era of change. The reasons are simple: Race continues to matter to us, and our society continues to change at a startling pace.

## **References**

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