

Foreword

I was surprised and humbled when Dr. Ursula Thomas asked me to write the foreword for this book. As of this writing, I am the director for Georgia's first and only Call Me MiSTER (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) program, where a more diverse cadre of educators is intentionally recruited to not only enter the teaching pipeline, but remain there to plant seeds for our next generation of students. I have been engaged in this work (and more broadly, work around supporting marginalized students) for a decade in central Georgia. Naturally, I was excited when I heard about the plans for this collection of important perspectives on matters of extreme importance for K-12 education. Dr. Thomas is an esteemed colleague of mine and I've known her for several years. Her work with strategic partnerships for education cannot be understated; it's not a stretch to say that her expertise has informed my own as I've become more a more confident scholar and practitioner via relationships with leaders such as herself. Thus, I can think of no more worthy individual to edit and lead this important and timely collection of educators' perspectives.

In James Baldwin's "A Talk to Teachers," he implored educators to "go for broke" and unapologetically become paradigm shifters for the next generation in an era where institutionalized oppression loomed large in every sector of society:

You must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won't happen. (Baldwin, 1963)

Such a talk bore such an unfortunate prescience into what we face today. In 2020, Black and Brown children are still faced with unimaginable cruelty from those who are entrusted with their precious futures. In 2020, the disproportionately small percentage of teachers who look like those students are often overworked, not supported, and thus, fast-tracked out of the profession. In 2020, we still face the issue of inequity across racial, gender and sexual identities, as well as disparate school

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conditions relative to a student's zip code or socioeconomic status. Teachers have gone on strikes in places such as Los Angeles and Chicago due to unsustainable work environments that, undoubtedly, are not unique to just those metropolitan areas. With the advent of social media, videos frequently emerge of Black children being physically abused in schools by officials. Additionally, so many schools and organizations purport to help address issues in education, but their efforts ring hollow due to being silos in isolation, bereft of a true collaborative framework towards sustainable change. How can you transform a community without being truly grounded within and connected to it? How can you begin to address any of the aforementioned issues without a foundational connection to the cultures that produce the families you serve in education? Real solutions require multi-tiered analysis from various stakeholders in our communities.

A new, more intentional paradigm is needed. As the great scholar/poet/activist Audre Lorde once said, "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*" If we are to take Lorde's advice towards a new framework for the betterment of our children, the search for "new tools" to destroy and rebuild the dilapidated house of education has never been more urgent than now. As Baldwin suggested nearly sixty years ago, *there is no point in pretending* that this mission will be easy. Therefore, those of us who are fortunate enough to engage ourselves in the most important work of educating our children have a responsibility to be builders as well. We must not only build our children up to be compassionate citizens of the world around them, but we must also build and fortify ourselves to ensure that the important work of self-reflection is consistently being done. Part of this internal work requires us to challenge each other - whether public or private, profit or nonprofit, individual or institutional - to foster intentional relationships as a foundation to this important work. Only then can we then turn outward as builders of a better "house" via new tools, forged in the fires stoked by our collective passions to make a difference.

In the spirit of embracing new tools to fix old problems, this text features important narratives from authors across sectors of education who have been in the trenches. These contributors are not merely "experts" hired to pontificate on issues they've only theorized about, but rather, individuals who have succeeded, struggled, and strategized with the multitude of issues in education that constitute barriers for the increasingly diverse next generation of adults. This book contains wisdom and analysis regarding how to maximize urban and rural school partnerships, in addition to ensuring that such partnerships are inclusive not only of the specific students they serve but also the communities they reside within. Authors also contribute valuable knowledge regarding the importance of mentorship and "rites of passage" regarding Black males and females in particular. Such information is vital to ensure that our marginalized students feel *seen* and *loved* in a world that either a) does not see them or b) sees them only as targets for destruction. Equally important are the narratives

include here that spotlight ways to increase outreach, both from a service-oriented perspective but also from a marketing standpoint in order to maximize educational impact. Several authors also offer important expertise regarding best intervention practices and key strategies for college preparation.

Perhaps most urgently, this book is about conversations to action. Readers' perspectives will be challenged and hopefully, moved to become agents of change themselves by absorbing the narratives of the authors within these pages. I believe in the power of (counter)narratives as truth-telling. Lived experiences, whether professional, personal, or a combination of both, are vital in challenging and expanding what we *think* we know about a subject. In a world where seemingly everyone has something to say about the state of education, how could we not listen to and be informed by the voices of actual educators at all levels? That is why I believe in the purpose of this book. Fellow practitioners, take heed and absorb this new information. Let it inspire you to critically reflect upon your respective spheres of influence as you plan to expand them and maximize their impact. Most of all, knowledge is useless without proper dissemination. Share resonant chapters of this book with others and let it encourage you to use your own critically-examined experiences to bring forth new truths. With the assistance of the authors included here, hopefully those new truths will form a new, more inclusive narrative about methods to build resilient schools connected to their surrounding communities.

Warmest regards,

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C. Emmanuel Little is a native of Macon, Georgia and graduate of Georgia College with a Bachelor's degree in Mass Communications (07) and Masters degree in Public Administration (2010). He recently graduated from the University of Georgia in 2018 with a PhD in Higher Education. He currently lives and works in central Georgia with his daughter and wonderful wife who is also an educator. As a scholar-practitioner, Emmanuel is extremely passionate about issues affecting historically marginalized communities, particularly Black people; this passion informs his professional work as well as his scholarship concerning higher education. His current role as an administrator focuses on empowerment for Black males at both the P-12 and postsecondary levels.

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REFERENCES

Baldwin, J. (1963). *James Baldwin: A Talk to Teachers*. Retrieved from: <https://flaglerlive.com/2461/james-baldwin-talk-teachers/>