

Foreword

Equity, inclusion, social justice, advocacy, acknowledgement and awareness are just a few of the words that come to mind when we discuss, Fallah, Reynolds, and Murawski's work on the Middle Eastern North African Southwest Asian (MENASWA) population. While our nation continues to evolve in our culturally responsive approaches to teaching, counseling and health care practices, we must continue to delve deeper into theoretical paradigms, cutting-edge research, pedagogical best practices and infrastructural deconstructions that "flip us upside down to get us right-side up once again". In other words, although we have come far, we still have far to go in order to address structural discriminatory practices and institutional racism that impact the "liberty and justice" for all citizens in our country.

The Census Bureau projects that by the year 2060, current "minority" populations in America will be the majority (Vespa, Armstrong, & Medina, 2018). While this is a statistical shift, it must be coupled with a cultural shift as well. As scholars, practitioners, advocates, parents and teachers, we must work collectively and courageously to address critical topics, and actively explore underserved and under-acknowledged populations to: 1.) celebrate their unique strengths and contributions to society ; 2.) determine how to utilize these strengths to maximize learning as educational practitioners; and 3.) address challenges that would deter success for these groups whether it is- linguistically, culturally, economically or socially. Diverse "minority" populations specifically within the United States, must often confront stereotypes, experience greater economic challenges and often experience unique health care risks.

When considering families, children and communities we have come far. As I reflect upon my own experience as a woman of color, educator, and scholar who has dedicated my life's work to social justice, equity and diversity, I consistently marvel at how I was able to excel. Born in the 1970's and a proud child of the 80's, I experienced some tension in my educational

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experiences. Situated between Baltimore and D.C., I spent my first 12 years of life in Columbia, Maryland, one of the first planned communities in the United States. It was designed to be a suburban, middle class, multicultural/multilingual mecca. A solution to “urban decay” and “urban decline”. My mother, a College Professor and my father, a Psychiatrist, were both raised in the segregated rural South. They divorced when I was two-years old. My father, Dr. Maxie Collier, was our sole caretaker for a short period. While my father worked tirelessly to get through medical school, my grandparents, often helped to care for me and my five siblings. My grandmother, a domestic and my grandfather, a mechanic both had eighth grade educations. While our home was overflowing with love, my grandparents were not able to be actively be involved in my schooling. With limited school themselves, they did not necessarily understand how to support me in school. In terms of my schooling, I remember feeling very displaced and isolated as one of three Black students in my class for the majority of my elementary experience. While we were middle class, our large family of southern background stood out, in the predominantly white suburban Columbia. In school, I remember only reading or hearing about people of color in the curriculum during Black history month. We were rarely exposed to multicultural books or diverse perspectives. It was not until my mother returned into my life when I was in the 5th grade, did I realize, I had been misidentified and mislabeled as having special needs. If only my teachers, counselors, and administrators had been able to realize and draw upon our family’s funds of knowledge, they would have been able to learn that this little girl of color came from a legacy of writers and educators, that when taught in the right manner, this little girl of color was a natural problem-solver and deeply analytic. Had they gone beyond rote teaching but used hands-on learning, they would have been aware that this little girl of color had powerful higher-order thinking skills that simply needed to be supplemented in the right way.

It took many years for me to gain my academic confidence back after living in Columbia. Even in high school, the academic track I started in elementary school followed me and I was identified as “B” track. In fact, it wasn’t until high school that I learned to advocate for myself. In high school, I began to take advanced placement classes.

While I would like to say that 20 plus years later, students will never have to feel the isolation I felt in school, we know this is not the case. Specifically, for students who English language learners, first generation immigrants, and linguistically and culturally diverse. Similar to my experience, the stages of

culture shock, academic isolation and school/home dissonance can (if we allow it to) hinder generations of students.

Fallah, Reynolds, and Murawski's work on the MENSWA population can potentially serve as a roadmap for us to gain a greater understanding of how to draw upon the community assets and resources that make this group unique. Generations of educators and counselors now understand that these resources can be utilized to literally transform family trees, specifically through education (Pk-20 and beyond). When I think of this population, I am reminded of Hornberger and Skilton-Sylvester's (2003) Continuum of Biliteracy Model. This model provides a powerful lens for determining how language policies, power, and access impact literacy development, language learning for MENSWA students' and their families. The continuum identifies one end as "traditionally more powerful" and the other end as "traditionally less powerful." It has four components: context, development, content, and media of biliteracy. For example, a subcategory under development is oral versus written languages. In traditional school environments, written language is more valued than oral language. Similarly, macro "dominant" culture is more valued than micro "minority" culture. Literary discourses are more valued than vernacular ones. Effective literacy instruction for English learners integrates or balances both ends of the continuum. Central to the continua is the discussion of power. In many cases, the linguistic and cultural contributions of immigrant families are not acknowledged and are considered less powerful. Schools and districts in the United States most often recognize the traditionally more powerful end of the continuum. According to the continua, effective family literacy programs should provide opportunities for participants to be active agents instead of passive recipients of knowledge.

As you embark on the journey of exploration into the lives of the MENSWA populations described in this book, think of your own journeys as educators, parents, and advocates. Ask yourself what is my role in ensuring the success of this population in America and beyond? Ask yourself, what potential curricula do I need to redesign? What potential policy can I advocate for? How can I continue to leverage the powerful attributes of this group? Justice for some is not justice, for we cannot be free while our brothers and sisters, still struggle. Collective, intentional and progressive pursuit of justice for ALL will transform not only the educational system in the United States but across the world. Read, learn and contribute, our world depends on it!

Shartriya Collier
Nevada State College, Nevada

REFERENCES

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