FOREWORD -- E PLURIBUS UNUN: PILLARS FOR EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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The ideal notion of attaining a utopian pluralistic life has long been elegantly captured by the United States Motto: *E Pluribus Unum-*-"out of many, one." Originated in Latin, this phrase reflects the symbolic value of these three words which carry a great promise for approaching an optimal level of democratic life that ironically has recently proven to be fragile. Perhaps, the implied vision of this slogan might have not been fully heeded at the practical level nor taken seriously by society's institutions. Educational institutions are expected to embrace this dynamic slogan as a framework for their effective role and function within the overarching framework of democratic principles. Indeed, the words are by no means cosmetic in nature to appear on our currency and the emblems of political landmarks and establishments; rather, they are living words that shape the interaction process in the American pluralistic society. Likewise, rituals and rites of democratic engagement have the power to enhance the dynamics of pluralism and strengthen the American civilization. The educational and social institutions have always adopted these as constant reminders of what the United States is about or should be like. While demographic mosaic has a special significance in the American society, it should not be the sole incentive for integrating multicultural education in schools and elsewhere. This is especially true when we consider diversity as a parallel to pluralism in a democratic society. This implies that pluralism is the most logical mode that shapes schools' input and educational practices. In short, diversity and pluralism are the rule, not the exception.

Having this in mind, scholars and social justice activists have had high hopes that these symbols should drive our discourse, shape our dreams, advance our aspirations, and, most importantly, guide our actions. Perhaps, schools are the most vital places to establish the foundations of pluralism and democratic upbringing. They are also major civic and social labs that create citizens whose roles are to preserve the mission of *E Pluribus Unum*. Recognizing this premise, over three decades ago Cortés (1990) suggested a multi-faceted vision within this construct dictated by the American slogan. He outlined a Five-pillared Educational Vision that has been benignly neglected but sorely needed today. This vision includes the following:

1. *Empowering Acculturation* of all Americans to an all-inclusive, equitable *Unum*;
2. *Sensitizing Acculturation* to help all Americans develop better intercultural understanding and become more dedicated to living with concern and sensitivity in a multiethnic society where racial and cultural differences co-exist with national and human commonalities;
3. *Institutional Acculturation* of the multiethnic present and future;
4. *Resource Acculturation* of drawing on the strengths of both Unum and Pluribus to work towards a stronger nation and better world; and
5. *Civic Acculturation* by developing in the students a greater dedication to building a better, more equitable society for all.

In schools, students' assets and cultural capital are critical elements of the acculturation processes. Thus, the pillars have direct implications for society's educational systems, especially when working with diverse groups in schools. They serve as guiding principles to achieve a balance between collective unity and individual or group diversity. The common missions and goals of the global democratic society overshadow any racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural differences (Suleiman, 2014). In fact, the framework of *E Pluribus Unum* forms a keen intercultural bridge to overcome any socio-cultural or socio-linguistic barriers and narrows any cultural or racial gaps that might exist.

In order to promote unity through diversity, individuals and groups must fully engage in the democratic process based on their common goals. At the same time, cultivating diversity through unity requires interactions outside one's prism of background experience and cultural schemata. Therefore, opportunities for discourse should be amply provided to dialogue and reflect beyond any limitations that might be overtly or covertly imposed by the social stratification and the cycles of intolerance.

Nonetheless, these principles continue to be put to a severe test when denial of the reality persists by becoming numb to the "culture of predatory affluence" that accounts for inequities and gross disparities (Wise, 2015). Endemic racism continues to take root in institutions as all sorts of cracks and gaps widen. Failure to bring about desired change is attributed to many reasons. One of them is the resistance to change and coziness with the status quo as it has been assumed that changing schools is like moving a graveyard (Rickover, 1983; Fibkins, 2015). Other causes revolve around the deficit approaches of dealing with symptoms rather than treating the roots of the problem. In other words, *the issue is the tissue*. For example, recruiting a sizable number of diverse participants in a given institution is not sufficient unless these participants know and experience that these places are created for them with open access while responding to their aspirations and dreams. Thus, retrofitting of institutions can go that far but not far enough. Reform and transformation require de-construction and rebuilding from the ground up.

At the same time, complicity through silence is counterproductive in in the face of destructive mainstream discourse and rhetoric. We are cautioned by many social justice activists such as Tim Wise, Jane Elliot, and many others against color-blindness and color-muteness (Wise, 2010). Instead, conversations about race, culture, and other human aspects should not be avoided in schools, but rather encouraged since they greatly matter in narrowing gaps and achieving civic acculturation in all students (Howard, 2020). Given the long history of racial oppression, America has become rich with anti-racist activism and resistance in a struggle to defeat bigotry and injustice (Wise, 2020). Everyone needs to do their part!

Over the past thirty years, I have always shared with my students including preservice, novice, and seasoned teachers Jane Elliot's experiment in which she courageously felt it was professionally and morally imperative to tackle the issue of bigotry head-on during the racially turbulent times. Based on William Peters' book, *A Class Divided,* Jane Elliott's (1968) blue-eyed vs. brown-eyed experiment illustrated in the *Eye of the Storm* documentary a courageous approach to unteaching prejudice and bigotry in young learners in a predominantly White mainstream school in Riceville, Iowa. While facing resistance, the experiment gained momentum for a while and became a major part of sensitizing and institutional acculturation at all levels throughout the seventies and decades afterwards.

At my previous campus in mid-America, I had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Jane Elliott during the mid-nineties at the peak of media-hype fascination of Lorena Bobbitt's saga and the Monica Lewinsky drama with President Clinton, both of which she had to say much about as one can imagine. Like my past practices, I always required students to view Elliott's original blue-eyed vs. brown-eyed experiment, analyze it, and draw implications for working with diverse learners in an attempt to help achieve sensitizing and civic acculturation. For the most part, students never heard of Jane Elliott nor her experiment and the work that led to it--so much so that they were always shocked and intrigued by the power of such an activity in combating bigotry. One of these classes in which I showed the experiment and engaged students in anti-racist and culturally responsive activities, a couple of my students became anti-racism activists and decided to raise money to invite Jane Elliot to do a sorely needed workshop on my previous campus and its service areas schools in an attempt to promote all levels of acculturation. As we publicized the event, a huge number of participants attended the workshop from the university and public schools in the county. It was a transformative experience to say the least.

Recently and in the wake of the recent cultural and racial trauma that erupted during another kind of pandemic known as COVID-19, in the wake of the George Floyd's killing, Jane Elliott's experiment has become more visible on the radar screen of those who have no choice but to be drawn into taking action to do something about the steep cancer of bigotry and racism that has long been in the American society's DNA and its institutions. For example, many educators in K-20 schools have discovered this experiment which became a major part of the plethora of unconscious-bias trainings and anti-racist

sensitizing workshops both at individual as well as institutional levels. Only time can tell if these will bear fruit especially the continual need for this intervention such as Elliott's experiment and other antibias treatments is a crime in itself; i.e., these should not have been needed in the first place especially if we have taken the pillars of *E Pluribus Unum* seriously.

In any case, we will continue the fight to promote the anti-racist agenda, and, more importantly, to actualize the pillars of *E Pluribus Unum* outlined by Carlos Cortés. In addition, the team at the Center for Leadership, Equity, and Research (CLEAR) will continue to provide the platform for any concerned leaders serious about defeating racism, bigotry, and injustice. With the *Journal for Leadership, Equity, and Research (JLER)*, we will continue to bring to light the voices of the voiceless as we attempt to respond to the calls for action of social justice leaders like Nelson Mandela, John Lewis, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, and many others. At the same time, we hope to follow the steps of courageous pioneers such as Jane Elliott and Tim Wise to change minds and hearts that will hopefully bring about desired transformation and true acculturation in schools and beyond.

The authors contributed to this year's first regular volume share their research and efforts within the overarching principles of pluralism and acculturation pillars. In addition, the volume touches upon key themes and domains that appeal to us to sustain efforts and expect less than fair, respectful, just, equitable outcomes.

Having this in mind and based on the Racial Formation Theory Framework postulated by Omi and Winant's (2014), Conchas et al. have examined perceptions as racial projects in relation to Asian American college students putting to test institutional acculturation and how far we need to go. Their study of Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese students provides further evidence to the structural disparities in higher education that may adversely affect their sense of belonging as equal Americans. Conchas and his colleagues advance the *Racial Formation Inequality Spectrum* (RFIS) which reveals how racial groups might view inequalities in the United States in relation to structural and cultural elements. They argue, it "is therefore a construct used to organize how Asian students perceive inequality as racial projects, highlighting how nuanced understandings of inequality inform ethnically distinctive interpretations and enactments of racial projects." The study is significant given its direct implications for higher education implementations of equitable policies that are keenly linked to diverse students' expectations as equal participants regardless of their color, gender, ethnicity, nationality, or socioeconomic conditions. Consequently, they put many pillars of acculturation to a pragmatic use to ensure more equitable opportunities for all students regardless of their sociocultural backgrounds and circumstances.

Similarly, Martinez et al.'s building on the classic work of Meyer & Allen's (1991) Organizational Commitment Theories, explored the impact of administrative support on early-career teacher retention. Using a technology-based intervention, the study underscores the power of collaborative dialogue between beginning teachers and administrators in promoting a supportive environment for their success in the long run. The researchers' approach can have promising consequences for examining the ways in which teacher retention, support, and professional collaboration can be promoted. Thus, it underscores the need to act upon the need for resource acculturation through collaboration and support to collectively serve all students.

Furthermore, Fortner et al. address key aspects of social justice leadership that are sorely needed in today's leaders. While providing a synthesis of literature focusing on funds of knowledge, cultural capital, and transformative leadership, the authors examine how leaders' dispositions and mindsets can impact students and their academic achievement especially in diverse settings. In particular, the authors focused on participants in high poverty schools as they examined the dispositions of school leaders in addressing students' needs living in poverty. Readers can't agree more with their affirmation that "…when creating *true equity*, the disposition of the educational leader plays an important role in developing, fostering, and enhancing the socially-just transformation of the school culture in attending to the needs of children living in poverty." It provides a testimony for the need to re-examine Cortes' dichotomy as guiding acculturation principles and serves as a reminder of Wise's caution that "the culture of predatory affluence" can still easily creep into the mindsets of many and adversely impact their roles unless they take courageous steps to achieve equity. In addition, true leaders set the right tone

by their belief system that should revolve around all pillars driven by *E Pluribus Unum* as we seek to set high expectations, make serious commitments to social justice, and take bold actions to promote a supportive climate and equitable opportunities.

At the same time, Mercado further reinforces the importance of social justice leadership needed to transform schools. He builds on his earlier work to advance the Wise-Compassionate Framework (WCF), which can serve as a blueprint for educators and education leaders seeking to enhance learning outcomes by cultivating students' assets while responding to their diverse needs. The reconceptualization of the classic Whole Child Framework in Mercado's account and argument is timely; he thoughtfully concludes that this is a "purposeful scientific approach that educational leaders in school settings can implement to transform the recursive effects of the racial trauma, poverty, and the negative experiences associated with COVID-19." Mercado's construct echoes the need for promoting empowering acculturation by creating all-inclusive and equitable *Unum*.

Closely related to the pillars outlined above, Charara and Miller provide an account of how project-based curricular activities can be implemented in diverse settings. Their research focused on teaching science through play in kindergarten classrooms and has implications for teachers seeking to harness their students' potential and maximize learning outcomes. The knowledge-in-use approaches are didactic and have pedagogical appeal for all teachers in multicultural settings. More importantly, the research findings reflect that Charara and Miller are thorough practitioners who successfully put the national and state standards such as the NGSS to effective use as they created rigorous opportunities for their students to engage them emotionally, socially, intellectually, and academically while helping young learners "develop understanding of core ideas, scientific practices such as modeling and data analysis, and cross cutting concepts."

Moreover, Settles-Tidwell et al. provided a profound commentary on the recent dangerous efforts of the previous administration at the federal levels to legitimize white supremacy and destroy the pluralistic essence of the American democracy through legislative means and executive orders. The commentary reflects an outcome of courageous conversations that should take place in every social and educational institution on a daily basis, especially when the discourse of power moves us in the wrong direction. The authors conclude with a practical call to action: to move away from destructive rhetoric and adopt an actionable anti-racist agenda by not only acknowledging the social ills that continue to plague society, but also to take concrete steps to eradicate racism and bigotry. They showed themselves to be thorough students of Cortes, Wise, Elliott, and others given their stance of tackling here-and-now issues that impact schools and society at large. In particular, they act upon Cortes' (2017) work in which he cited Plato's adage that "those who tell the stories, rule society." We have seen the recent coup attempt that has been brewing for the past few years as a result of some media-fed brain washing of the minds of many that have been ruled by the destructive and false rhetoric.

Finally, the volume concludes with an insightful book review compiled by Monreal, Cervantes-González, and Torres who represent authentic and rich Latnix experiences. They provide a touching review of Flores' (2017) book, *Latina Teachers: Creating Careers and Guarding Culture,* while intertwining their powerful *testimonios* with their analysis of the themes at hand. The reviewers remind readers by way of drawing upon implications from Flores' work that "future teachers must also understand the racialized and racist realities that remain entrenched in systems of white supremacy."

Once again, readers of this edition will find a rich variety of contributions by authors sharing their expertise and voices about pressing issues facing all of us. The authors will provoke the readers' thinking and hopefully entice them to join the anti-racist mission and approaches. Finally, on behalf of the JLER team, we are grateful to the contributors, reviewers, editors, and everyone who assisted in the production of the edition with their alacrity and synergy.

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