

Foreword

by Ayanna Cooper

Culture—what is it, exactly? What is equity? How do we define them? How similar or different are our definitions? More important than how we define them is what we do with them: how we preserve and respect them. How are culture and equity related to culturally responsive teaching? These are some of the questions posed in this book, along with answers that help move readers from understanding to unpacking the work that needs to be done.

Recent events have led us to reexamine our lives, our morals, and our identities as part of society. Between a global pandemic and the revitalization of the Black Lives Matter movement, access, equity, and compassion have weighed heavily on the hearts and minds of people who want to contribute positively to where we, as a people, are now and where we hope to be in the future. In striving to make positive contributions, it is important for educators of all students, but especially those who are from linguistically diverse backgrounds, to engage in continued learning. The exploration of culture and how it defines us is a never-ending journey that enriches who we are and how we engage with the world. Sydney Snyder and Diane Staehr Fenner provide this book to aid educators in critical reflection while equipping them with tools that will help them shape themselves and their learning communities to be more diverse, inclusive, and equitable.

GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH BEING UNCOMFORTABLE

Years ago, I had the opportunity to teach an undergraduate Diversity in Education course. I remember being excited for the semester to start and to meet my students. I also remember

a department chair warning me that this particular course was difficult to teach and that students could be resistant. With that warning in mind, I wanted to be prepared for a potentially unreceptive environment; I wanted to find a fun and relevant way to facilitate an ice breaker.

The ice breaker started off with me having everyone, myself included, take off their shoes and put them on the opposite foot. My students' footwear included high heels, flip flops, cowboy boots, and tennis shoes. I asked them to do a couple of stomps, as if marching in place; balance on one foot, then the other; spin around to the left and then to the right; and then stop, face forward. I then asked my students, "How do you feel?" They said they felt awkward, silly, confused, pained, annoyed, and, most important, curious why we were doing this activity. I said, "Welcome to diversity in education!" I explained that throughout the semester, we'd embark on a number of topics and, at some point, they would probably experience these same uncomfortable feelings. I assured them that this was part of the discovery process and that they needed to hang in there and be open to learning. I wrote the list of their feelings on the board and kept it for the entire semester, referring to it every time we needed a reminder.

THE ICEBERG ANALOGY

That same advice is appropriate for this book. Snyder and Staehr Fenner invite educators to learn about culture—not only the culture of multilingual learners but also one's own culture. They help readers define and sharpen their understanding of equity and what it means to provide access. They also pose the notion that school communities have their own cultures in which we, as participants, interact while still owning our own cultures.

What happens when multiple cultures are merged, even temporarily? Picture culture as an iceberg; we can only see the small portion above the water and not what is beneath. Now picture three icebergs—one that represents a multilingual learner, another representing a teacher, and the other a school.

We only see the tops of those icebergs, so we don't see how deep or wide they truly are, and we don't know whether they are connected to one another. When pieces of icebergs break off or crash into each other, what happens to the remnants? We do know that icebergs can coexist, stay frozen, melt, or merge, depending on the environment. What kind of environment is needed for the best outcomes? This book affirms that we can, like icebergs, successfully coexist while maintaining our own forms.

DISPELLING THE MYTH: THE ILLUSION OF INCLUSION

Learning communities have been working toward being more welcoming of diversity for decades. With the push for more multicultural books, resources, curriculum, and pedagogical practices, the field of education has evolved, and we've seen it: welcome signs in multiple languages, potlucks in which you bring a dish from your culture, and vision and mission statements that profess antiracism. But it must go further. Our embrace of diversity should be exemplified in our daily practices and actions. We can't allow ourselves to believe that once we do something, anything that promotes diversity, that it is enough. We can avoid the *illusion of inclusion* by getting to the core of our beliefs and acting upon it. Snyder and Staehr Fenner do this by helping us understand why culturally responsive teaching matters and how to build our capacity to become more culturally competent practitioners.

When we see and hear things that make us or our colleagues uncomfortable, such as microaggressions, how and when do we address them? For example, what should we do when we see educators change the names of multilingual learners to more American-sounding names or when derogatory assumptions are made about where multilingual learners are coming from and why they are here in the United States? Truly embracing diversity means welcoming all of our multilingual learners and their families. An example of this was when an elementary school at which I taught changed its annual Cinco de Mayo celebration to a more inclusive celebration of all the

cultures represented by its teachers, students, and families. Positive and intentional changes are made when we evaluate and dismantle barriers that exist in our schools, such as deficit mindsets and low expectations, in order to assure access for all students. This book helps to create school communities that celebrate, elevate, and validate the lives and experiences of multilingual learners—this will take time and energy, but it will yield results beyond our expectations.

It is my hope that this book helps you get uncomfortable. How uncomfortable? That depends. Not so uncomfortable that you'll be immobilized (just stomp, balance, and spin), but enough for you to keep moving forward while also reflecting on what made you uncomfortable in the first place. Only you will know to what extent to engage and how far you'll go. What matters most is that this book helps educators to take steps, either individually or collectively, to create learning communities that are diverse, inclusive, and empowering for all.