



Spotlight on Cultural Proficiency

Seven Human Resource

Reform Levers

- Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement
- Induction
- Professional Development
- Supervision and Evaluation
- Teacher Leadership
- Organizational Structure
- Adult Professional Culture

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Cultural Proficiency- A Model for Response

In *Culturally Proficient Instruction* (2012) Nuri-Robins, Lindsay, Lindsay and Terrell explain that there is no single way of describing Cultural Proficiency. For some Cultural Proficiency is viewed as a lens through which we see ourselves and others or the way we see our organization and communities. For others it is a mind-set, a worldview or more broadly- a way of being. Regardless of how individuals envision it, Cultural Proficiency is a response to diversity which facilitates effective interaction between individuals and organizations with differences.

While diversity programs focus on the nature of diversity or opportunities for learning about other cultures, Cultural Proficiency is a way of responding to the environment which has been shaped by its diversity. Stressing that Cultural Proficiency is not mechanical or a pre-packaged protocol, the authors identify four tools for developing Cultural Proficiency:

The Guiding Principles outline the core values for the model and serve as guides for individual behavior and the foundation for organizational policies and practices.

The Continuum indicates ways of interpreting and responding to differences.

The Barriers identify obstacles to Cultural Proficiency that have existed and continue.

The Essential Elements designate the standards for culturally proficient individual behavior and organizational practices.

The relationship between the tools is significant in recognizing the influences on individual and organizational beliefs, behavior and practice.

The barriers to Cultural Proficiency and the guiding principles affect placement on the continuum. While the conditions and beliefs reflected in the barriers inhibit change and restrict one's ability to respond effectively to others, commitment and adherence to the values in the guiding principles promote change and cultural competency.

The tools provide a constructive means for addressing cultural diversity in a school, district or organization. By using the tools to examine individual behaviors and values, or organizational practices and policies; educators can reflect on their own actions and those of their schools and districts to better understand their influence on students and identify opportunities for change.

The Cultural Proficiency framework is intended to honor individual culture while focusing attention on the organization. Recognizing that the organizational culture extends beyond the individuals in a school or district, this model seeks to involve all stakeholders in establishing practices and policies that are culturally proficient.

The vision of Cultural Proficiency presented by Nuri-Robins et al., requires dedicated teachers and leaders who understand that establishing a culturally proficient environment goes beyond providing workshops or checklists and focuses on transformation. Transformation that only occurs after deep reflection that guides decisions and action. This dynamic approach brings inside-out change that validates the feelings of educators and students.

Culturally proficient educators and organizations do not necessarily know all there is to know about every cultural group. They do, however, acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to find out what they need to know, to learn that information and use it effectively.
Nuri-Robins et al., (2012)

The Essential Elements

Standards for Planning and Evaluating

- **Assess Culture:** Identify the cultural groups present in the system.
- **Value Diversity:** Develop an appreciation for the differences among and between people.
- **Manage the Dynamics of Difference:** Learn to respond appropriately and effectively to the issues that arise in a diverse environment.
- **Adapt to Diversity:** Change and adopt new policies and practices that support diversity and inclusion.
- **Institutionalize Cultural Knowledge:** Drive the changes into the systems of the organization.

Cultural Proficiency Continuum

Change Mandated for Tolerance

Change Chosen for Transformation

Destruction	Incapacity	Blindness	Precompetence	Competence	Proficiency
<i>Eliminate Differences</i>	<i>Demean Differences</i>	<i>Dismiss Differences</i>	<i>Respond inadequately to the dynamics of differences</i>	<i>Engage with differences using the essential elements as standards</i>	<i>Esteem and learn from differences as a life long practice</i>
The elimination of other people's cultures.	Belief in the superiority of one's culture and behavior that disempowers another's culture.	Acting as if the cultural differences you see do not matter or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures.	Awareness of the limitations of one's skills or an organization's practices when interacting with other cultural groups.	Using the five essential elements of cultural proficiency as the standard for individual behavior and organizational practices.	Knowing how to learn about and from individual and organizational culture; interacting effectively in a variety of cultural environments. Advocating for others.

Reactive Behaviors Shaped by the

Proactive Behaviors Shaped by the

Barriers

Principles

- Unawareness of the need to adapt.
- Resistance to change.
- Systems of oppression and privilege.
- A sense of entitlement.

- Culture is a predominant force.
- People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.
- There is diversity with and between cultures
- Every group has unique culturally-defined needs.
- People have personal identities and group identities.
- Marginalized populations have to be at least bicultural.
- Families, as defined by culture, are the primary systems of support.
- The diverse thought patterns of cultural groups influence how problems are defined and solved.
- The absence of cultural competence anywhere is a threat to competent services everywhere.

Building Relationships with Students through Cultural Proficiency

Kalise Wornum, the former Executive Director of Empowering Multicultural Initiatives (EMI) and current METCO Director in Wellesley, began her recent presentation at the HR Pilot Project Colloquium on *Building Relationships with Students through Cultural Proficiency* by asking the participants to share their Capital T Truths. Explaining to the 40 participants from the 3 pilot districts, Attleboro, Brockton and Revere, Ms. Wornum's Capital T Truth is a core belief she holds about what every student needs to know to be prepared for our culturally diverse society. By sharing her belief Ms. Wornum encouraged the educators to consider their own strongly held cultural beliefs and values, and how those values influence the way they teach, lead and understand others. Self-reflection as she pointed out is a significant indicator of cultural proficiency.

Summarizing the 1989 ground breaking work of Terry Cross, Executive Director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association, Ms. Wornum stressed that Cultural Proficiency is

- Proactive and provides tools that can be used in any setting, rather than techniques that are applicable in only one environment.
- Focused on the behavioral not the emotional.
- Applicable to both organizational practices and individual behavior.

Although cultural proficiency has always been a key component of high expertise teaching, it has not always been clearly identified in teacher evaluation standards and observation tools or rubrics. With the 2011 adoption of new Standards and Indicators of Effective Teaching Practice, teachers in Massachusetts are now rated on their capacity to promote the learning of all students through cultural proficiency. As Ms. Wornum showed during the Colloquium, Standard II and Indicators II A-D of the MA Standards require that teachers establish high expectations, create a safe and effective classroom environment, and demonstrate cultural proficiency. She emphasized that culturally proficient teachers inherently set high expectations for all students and support classroom environments in which all students are respected.

Ms. Wornum outlined the Cultural Proficiency continuum, explaining that a teacher's cultural proficiency, competence, blindness, incapacity or destructiveness will elicit specific reactions and behaviors from students. Reactions which affect student engagement, motivation, trust and academic risk-taking, ultimately impacting student achievement. (Lindsey, Stephanie M. Graham, R. Chris Westphal Jr. and Cynthia L. Jew 2008).

To help participants better understand what cultural proficiency looks like in the classroom, Ms. Wornum described several classroom teaching scenarios. Participants were then asked to rate the teachers in the stories on Standard II Indicators using the MA Classroom Teaching Rubric. A thought-provoking discussion followed with participants recognizing the importance of having a clear district-wide understanding and image of what culturally proficient teaching looks like in the classroom and the school. Teams spent time discussing next steps and avenues for bringing this important conversation back to their districts.

At the conclusion of the session participants stated that they would like their districts to schedule professional development on the topic of cultural proficiency for all staff. They also expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to discuss and reflect on this important topic and its impact on student achievement.

In Every Culture

- We respond to respect and disrespect.
- We seek acceptance and to be valued and supported.
- We want to live in an environment of trust and safety.
- We want to know our life experiences matter and are understood.
- We want our strengths acknowledged
- We want encouragement and hope.
- We do not want to be labeled and marginalized.

From *What People Want*
Anchorage Alaska School District

Using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency

Culturally proficient change is systemic change, which requires that school leaders work strategically with stakeholders throughout the system.

Ultimately, when schools provide what students need and educators teach students and their families how to better access all that schools offer, achievement increases for all students.

Nuri-Robins et al. (2007)

Creating culturally proficient districts, schools, and instruction requires systemic change that begins with the understanding that diversity is not a problem but rather an opportunity. Culturally proficient organizations and individuals focus on diversity and inclusion and prepare for the future. To overcome barriers of resistance to change and lack of awareness of the need to adapt, school administrators must provide transformational leadership that moves educators along the Cultural Proficiency Continuum towards access, equity and ultimately excellence.

Using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to examine their organizations and individual actions, administrators and teachers should begin by identifying:

- Their Core Values and those of the district.
- Policies, procedures, and practices that are working and others that are not.
- Systems of unearned privilege and their impact.

- Systemic structures and behaviors that require adaptation.
- Common conversations that occur about students and their families.
- Conversations that should be happening with students and families, among students and about students.
- Initiatives that are needed.
- Potential resistance to those initiatives.
- Interventions that can be used to prevent, redirect or reduce the resistance.

Culturally proficient practices, policies and instruction lead to a strong, core culture with known expectations. This stronger culture enables students and parents to understand what is required and aligns with their beliefs. It meets the needs of students and encourages students and families to take advantage of the opportunities that the schools provide, building community support and sustainability

Essential Element	Role of Teachers	Role of Administrator
Assess Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess own culture and its effect on students, assess the culture of the classroom. • Support students in discovering their own cultural identities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the culture of the school. • Articulate the cultural expectations to all who interact there.
Value Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach all subjects from a culturally inclusive perspective. • Insist on classroom language and behavior that values differences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate a culturally proficient vision for the school. • Establish standards for holding teachers and staff accountable for the vision.
Manage the Dynamics of Difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use conflicts as object lessons. • Teach students a variety of ways to resolve conflict. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training and support systems for conflict management. • Help faculty and staff members learn to distinguish between behavioral problems and cultural differences.
Adapt to Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn own instructional and interpersonal styles. • Develop processes to enhance them so that they meet the needs of all students. • Help students understand why things are done in a particular way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine policies and practices for overt and unintentional discrimination. • Change current practices when appropriate.
Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach students appropriate language for asking questions about other people's cultures and telling other people about theirs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model and monitor school-wide and classroom practices.

Culturally Proficient Communication

By Karen Schwartz

The author draws on her classroom experience and research to create the story of an elementary teacher who realizes that she needs to explore how an awareness of her own culture affects her behavior, values, perceptions, and interactions with students and families.

Although in her fifth year teaching fourth grade at an urban Massachusetts elementary school, Jane finds herself increasingly frustrated as she tries to meet the needs of her culturally and linguistically diverse group of students and families. While Jane insists that it is precisely this diversity that led her to teach in such a setting, she admits surprise at how challenging it has been to connect and communicate with the families of her students. With a working Spanish vocabulary, time spent learning some basic Creole and Mandarin words, and a genuine interest in how to pedagogically celebrate the various cultures that enter her classroom as strengths, Jane somehow thought that by now she would be having greater success connecting with the families of her students. In an effort to start her fifth year of teaching off with greater success, Jane sends a “cultural inventory questionnaire” home with her students during the first week of school. She wants to know more about the parents/guardians of her students - how they feel about their children’s experience at school and how comfortable they are being involved with the school? She wants to know if the parents feel that their individual cultures are being honored/respected at school.

Despite the fact that her students are encouraged to help translate and write answers with their parents/guardians, only half of the questionnaires are returned by the due date. Rejecting a colleague’s comment, that “these parents just don’t care enough to take the time to fill out school related forms,” Jane decides to explore what the responses (or lack of them) reveal about

parents’ perceptions and experiences. One survey, while otherwise blank, has one line across the top – written in Spanish and then translated underneath (in English) in her student’s handwriting. It says, “We are interested in these questions. This is not easy. It would be better if we could talk about this with other parents who understand.” As she gathers answers from the surveys to put in her own “document for examination”, Jane pulls out a point found across a few surveys, - that parents/students wish that the teachers at the school showed an understanding of their culture that goes beyond food, music, or language. With much to consider already, Jane is most surprised by another emerging theme – parents want to know about **her!** Their questions mirror her own! They want to know who she is and where she comes from. She wonders if perhaps they are trying to sort out how capable she is of understanding, respecting, and teaching their children?

With so much of her focus spent on exploring and celebrating the range of cultures in her classroom, Jane realizes that she hasn’t taken the time to develop a greater awareness of her own cultural heritage and how these differences might impact her role in the classroom. Seeking out the camaraderie of the fourth grade teaching team, Jane proposes a series of article/discussion groups as a means of engaging in a process of developing greater cultural self-awareness. As a white, privileged, third generation college educated woman, Jane wonders about possible biases she may have as a member of the “dominant culture” and if they might be impacting how she

perceives and interacts with her students and their families. While Jane knows that there is still much that she can do to increase understanding of the cultures in her classroom, assessing her own culture seems a crucial place to start. Her group begins by gathering together for a discussion prompted by the “getting centered” questions offered in *Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach*. With a “micro-lab” protocol in place, the team of nine 4th grade teachers breaks into groups of three to tackle the following questions: “What do you know about your own learning style? What do you know about how your own cultural background and experiences affect your learning? Under what conditions do you learn best? How do you respond as a learner when you are asked to do the same task, in the same way, within the same time period, using the same materials as the other members of the group? Has an instructor ever asked you to describe the best way to teach you? Who is responsible for your learning-you or the instructor?” The conversations are lively, challenging, and informative. When the break-out groups join back together for reflections, they share a common thread: that teachers don’t usually take the time to reflect on their own cultures, but that such exploration can help increase understanding and connection in the classroom and beyond. In the end teachers agree that “assessing their cultures” is the first step of many in gaining greater proficiency in communicating with the diverse families in their school.

To become cross-culturally competent in the classroom teachers must understand important ways in which cultures differ and how this affects the ways in which their students behave.

Yvonne Pratt-Johnson

Understanding Cultural Differences

Knowing and understanding the differences of cultural groups may appear to be a daunting challenge for classroom teachers and school or district administrators who serve a number of culturally diverse populations especially in changing communities. Awareness of the general differences among cultures can assist teachers in developing culturally proficient skills for teaching and communicating with all students and their families. As Yvonne Pratt-Johnson writes in *Communicating Cross-Culturally: What Teachers Should Know* (2006), acquiring cultural proficiency can begin with recognizing the 6 basic cultural differences that teacher are likely to encounter in the culturally diverse classroom or school. Pratt-Johnson's guidelines help teachers understand and respect differences in students and provide insights into student behavior

Ways of Knowing

For some cultures information derived from books, libraries and newspapers is highly valued while other cultures value knowledge that is gained through personal experience, inquiry and oral tradition. In some cultures students and families may have had limited access to books and academic materials and have depended upon elders and their expertise for information. In many cultures inter-generational story telling is a highly valued way of learning.

Ways of Solving Problems

Not all cultures use the same approach to problem solving. The ways that students structure problems and seek answers or solutions is impacted significantly by their culture. When seeking and finding answers, students are often influenced by their cultural values and beliefs. For example, cultures that value cooperation tend to see competition as less important than those which value individual achievement. Problem solving is viewed as a collaborative effort by some cultures more than others. How students frame problems or the outcomes they seek may also reflect their cultural norms.

Ways of Communicating Non-Verbally

Non-verbal communication is interpreted differently by diverse cultures. Students' expressions, body language, signals, gestures and eye contact often indicate socially acceptable behavior in their dominant culture. For many students making direct eye contact is considered disrespectful while certain hand gestures such as the thumbs up sign may be seen as rude or offensive. In some cultures smiling is a sign of embarrassment or is seen as frivolous. Realizing that students' non-verbal communication is reflective of their cultures will help teachers better understand their students' actions and feelings.

Ways of Learning

In many cultures teachers are held in the highest esteem and viewed as the sole authority and source of all information in a classroom. Students from those cultures may have only experienced teacher-centered learning and be reluctant to participate in class, ask questions or know how to contribute during collaborative learning activities. Teachers need to recognize the cultural norms that may prevent students from actively engaging in classroom activities.

Ways of Dealing with Conflict

Some cultures resolve conflict through confrontation while others avoid it and value harmony at all costs. Cultural perspectives of conflict also impact how conflict is resolved. In some cultures raising your voice is unacceptable and indicates a high level of conflict. In other cultures loud exchanges may be viewed as lively or exciting discussions.

Ways of Using Symbols

Symbols often have different meanings in diverse cultures. A common example of a symbol that means different things in different cultures is the swastika. While a symbol of hate, violence and anti-Semitism in western culture, its origins date back to ancient Hindu civilization. In the Hindu religion it is a symbol of good fortune and well-being.

Understanding the basic differences in cultures guides teachers in their interactions with students and families and helps them to better understand student behaviors. Building relationships with students, cultivating their own curiosity, and listening to their students' verbal and non-verbal communications are essential for teachers who strive for cultural proficiency.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

From the Education Alliance at Brown University

Teachers who use and respect their students' languages, cultures, and life experiences follow these principles:

Communication of high expectations

Consistent messages are delivered, from both the teacher and the school that students will succeed, based upon a genuine belief in student capability.

Active teaching methods

Instruction promotes student engagement by requiring students to play an active role in crafting curriculum and developing learning activities.

Teacher as facilitator

Within an active teaching environment, the teacher's role is one of guide, mediator, and knowledgeable consultant, as well as instructor.

Positive perspectives on families of culturally diverse students

School teachers and staff participate in an ongoing dialogue with students, families and community members on issues important to them. The people and discussions are included in classroom lessons and activities.

Cultural sensitivity

Teachers gain knowledge of the cultures represented in their classrooms and translate this knowledge into instructional practice.

Reshaping the curriculum

A reshaped curriculum is culturally responsive to the background of students.

Culturally mediated instruction

Instruction is characterized by providing students with culturally rich learning environments and culturally valued knowledge.

Student-controlled classroom discourse

Students are given the opportunity to control some portion of the lesson, which allows teachers to see how speech and negotiation are used in students' homes and communities.

Small-group instruction and academically related discourse

Instruction is organized around low-pressure, student-controlled learning groups that help develop academic goals.

Other Resources

American Federation of Teachers: *Human Right Resources for the Classroom*. <http://www.aft.org/about/world/resources-opportunities/humrights.cfm>

The Education Alliance, Brown University: *Teaching Diverse Learners*. <http://brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/>

National Association of Elementary School Principals: *What does it Mean to Be Culturally Proficient?* Anthony Moyer and Janice Clymer. http://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Principal/2009/nov/N-D_p14.pdf

National Association of Secondary School Principals: *Diversity and Social Equity*. <http://www.nassp.org/KnowledgeCenter/TopicsofInterest/DiversityandSocialEquity.aspx>

The National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt): *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practice*. http://www.nccrest.org/professional/culturally_responsive_pedagogy-and.html

National Education Association: *Online Resources for Culturally Responsive Teachers*. <http://www.nea.org/home/16723.htm>

New York University Metropolitan Center for Urban Education: *Culturally Responsive Differentiated Instructional Strategies*. <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/uploads/005/120/Culturally%20Responsive%20Differentiated%20Instruction.pdf>

Teaching Tolerance, A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center: *ELL Best Practices*. <http://www.tolerance.org/ell-best-practices-collection>

University of Minnesota Educator Development and Resource Center: *Resources for Work in Cultural Competency*. <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ppg/Partnerships/CCAB-resources.html>

**WORKING GROUP
FOR EDUCATOR
EXCELLENCE**

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Special thanks to all
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Mission of the Working Group for Educator Excellence

WGEE is a broad coalition of 60 individuals from 26 statewide organizations who are united in the belief that the most effective way to provide every child with an excellent education is to take a systemic approach to influencing what teachers and educational leaders know and can do. We believe when key elements of the human resource system are strengthened to align with one another and with a common research-based, field-tested core of professional knowledge, the cumulative effect will be improved student achievement and a more efficient and effective system that strengthens teacher and leader expertise.

Human Resource Pilot Project

The pilot project, funded by the RTTT initiative, is a joint effort by the WGEE and DESE to systematically and strategically create, strengthen, and align the key influences on the quality of teaching and leadership in three school districts: Attleboro, Brockton, and Revere. The influences, or levers, include Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement, Comprehensive Induction, Professional Development, Supervision and Evaluation, Teacher Leadership, Organizational Structure, and Adult Professional Culture. Through qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, we aim to determine whether alignment will improve the quality of teaching and leadership. The goals of the project include increasing student achievement; using cost, time and resources with greater efficiency; improving teaching and leadership practices; increasing the satisfaction and retention of teachers and leaders; and improving school and district culture. The project fosters integration of lever plans with other district initiatives, promotes the use of district change plans to guide decisions and infuses the knowledge base of teachers and leaders.