

The Culturally Proficient School

An Implementation Guide for School Leaders

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Continuum of Culture:

1. ***Cultural destructiveness: negating, disparaging, or purging cultures that are different from your own.*** It is often manifested through an organization's policies and practices or through an individual's assumptions and behavior. The "isms" are obvious – racism, sexism, heterosexism. It denies nondominant groups legitimacy in the school setting.
2. ***Cultural incapacity: elevating the superiority of your own cultural values and beliefs and suppressing cultures that are different from your own.*** We often did this with the "red birds, the blue birds, and the yellow birds" in our reading groups of "yesteryear." The expectations become evident – and groups live up (or down) to those "expectations."
3. ***Cultural blindness: acting as if differences among cultures do not exist and refusing to recognize any differences.*** What is stated and how the statement is experienced are often two different things. Blindness is in the speaker not being able to hear how others are receiving the statements.
4. ***Cultural precompetence: recognizing that lack of knowledge, experience, and understanding of other cultures limits your ability to effectively interact with them.*** People are beginning to know what they do not know! They recognize a need to change their practices! They recognize that they (not the parents) are the ones who have to change what they are doing if they want their students to learn what they expect them to learn. No excuses!!
5. ***Cultural competence: interacting with other cultural groups in ways that recognize and value their differences, motivate you to assess your own skills, expand your knowledge and resources, and, ultimately, cause you to adapt your relational behavior.*** It could be any policy, practice, or behavior that uses the essential elements of cultural proficiency for the individual or organization. The individual elements are 1) assessing culture, 2) valuing diversity, 3) managing the dynamics of difference, 4) adapting to diversity, and 5) institutionalizing cultural knowledge. Leaders become students of themselves and the culture of the school. They use the essential elements as leverage points for improving current practices and focusing on continuous improvement as the vision of the school. It's all about building bridges
6. ***Cultural proficiency: honoring the differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among a variety of cultural groups.*** Leaders are able to learn and teach about different groups in ways that acknowledge and honor all people and the groups they represent. They esteem cultures!!

"Leading effectively in a diverse environment is not about changing others; it is about our own personal work. To guide the personal work in which the school leaders examine their own values and behaviors and, in due time, the policies and practices of the school, the five essential elements of cultural competence serve as standards for culturally competent leadership." (p 79)

Essential elements of culturally competent school leadership:

- **Assesses culture: Claim your differences.**
- **Values diversity: Name the differences.**
- **Manages the dynamics of difference: Frame the conflicts caused by differences.**
- **Adapts to diversity: Change to make a difference.**

- **Institutionalize cultural knowledge: Teach about differences. (Address curriculum and instruction, assessment, training and professional development, parent and community outreach)**

Questions toward cultural proficiency:

1. What would cultural proficiency look like at our school?
2. What are chief challenges we face in putting some of these into action at our school site?
3. In light of the team's understanding of cultural proficiency, what are our values and beliefs as a team?
4. Based on our values and beliefs, what three bold steps are we able to take as a team that would embrace the values of cultural proficiency at our school sites/district?
5. What conditions for success will put these three bold steps in place?