

Indicator DFC2.4

The district promotes and supports school environments that demonstrate cultural proficiency and integrate cultural values that represent the students and community.

Why does this matter to our success as a district?

The first step in creating an environment of cultural proficiency is to establish a common understanding of the term. In *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders* (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999) the authors offer the following description:

Cultural proficiency is a mindset; it embodies a worldview. For those who commit to culturally proficient practices it represents a paradigmatic shift from viewing others as problematic to viewing how one works with people different from one's self in a manner to ensure effective practices (p. 21).

As a counterpoint to this view of diversity as an asset and in attempting to illuminate the need for a broader view of desirable culture perspectives, CampbellJones, CampbellJones, and Lindsey argue:

This moral position [the conceptual basis for the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)] springs from the knowledge that prior efforts in public education provided educational rigor for a few and sorted out the rest into a predetermined lower societal class. Moreover, schools overtly participated in establishing and maintaining a tradition of societal elitism and poverty along the lines of race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and ableism...

[W]e understand and acknowledge that educators are the products of our societal context, hence shaped by the education they received. We further understand that without critical self-reflection on the values and beliefs that define our morality, teachers and school leaders are inclined to continue in unquestioning fashion the educational traditions they received (2010, p. ix).

It is not uncommon for teachers to suggest that differential student performance in school can be attributed to the students' race or ethnicity, disabling conditions, or even gender. There is evidence that the variability is due more to differences in levels and types of engagement in the classroom rather than attributes inherent in the students themselves (CampbellJones, CampbellJones, & Lindsey, 2010).

CampbellJones et. al. point out that there is a well-documented achievement gap between white students in the US and their African-American and Hispanic counterparts on a school-by-school basis. This gap is evident throughout data from both the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and more recently from statewide achievement assessments mandated by NCLB (2010). These authors argue that this cannot be overcome by simply modifying the curriculum and enhancing teacher behaviors targeting teacher practices that serve the interests of the mainstream culture. Instead, a modification of teachers' values and beliefs is central to

this effort to better address the needs of all students regardless of the students’ backgrounds and how these values and beliefs might differ from those of the teaching staff.

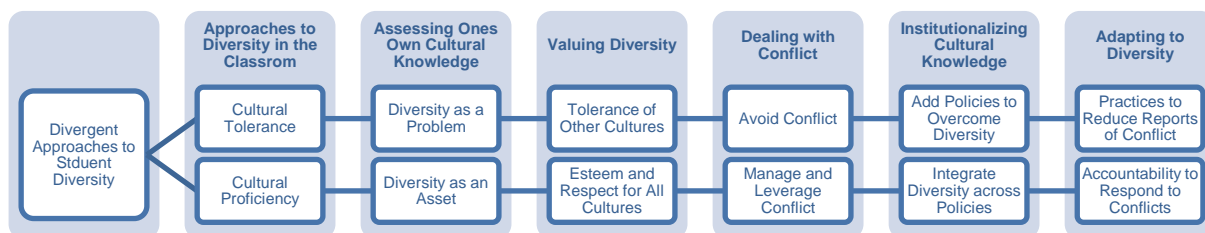
How does this look in a district when well implemented?

Lindsey and Daly offer a description of becoming culturally proficient as:

[R]aising the awareness of, and closing the gap between, a person’s and/or school’s expressed values and how he/she and the school are actually perceived and experienced by colleagues and the school community...[cultural proficiency focusses] teaching and learning on the responsibility of educators and adults in the community to teach all students (2012, p. 152).

The culturally proficient teacher does not merely tolerate or even celebrate cultural differences. These teachers incorporate those differences into the classroom as an inherent, desirable, and unavoidable aspect of bringing students from various backgrounds together in an educational setting (CampbellJones, CampbellJones, & Lindsey, 2010). This change in the functioning of the classroom, school, and district requires nothing less than a shift in values for many educators and the parents and children they serve.

While cultural proficiency is a personal matter, it can be driven by district policies. One-off or even long-term programs of professional development cannot lead toward cultural proficiency. Professional development and professional learning are necessary but insufficient efforts to change classroom practices. While learning can change the individual’s attitude, the practices that are needed to fully engage in cultural proficiency cannot be managed at the individual level (CampbellJones, CampbellJones, & Lindsey, 2010; Lindsey & Daly, 2012).



Adapted from Lindsey, R. B., Robins, K. N., & Terrell, R. D. (1999). *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, p. 155.

As shown in the diagram above, districts working toward cultural proficiency do not merely tolerate and accommodate “other cultures” but instead value all cultures and acknowledge the value that diversity adds to the classroom. These districts establish both policies and practices that incorporate the “funds of knowledge” found in this diversity and enhance the education of all by including alternative perspectives and values into instruction (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2001). This approach eliminates the common concern of students lacking experience, particularly those students living in poverty. Instead, the culturally proficient teacher values the experiences the students have and is empowered to work from this positive point of view rather than from a deficit model. Cultural proficiency acknowledges the value of the student’s experience and capitalizes on that value to advance educational goals.

Districts working to achieve cultural proficiency in staff establish policies that encourage first the change of attitude necessary and then the changes in practices that accompany that change in attitude. These districts start with a vision of educational services that encourages teachers to value the cultural differences among the students and families served by the district. This vision then drives the change needed in the district.

The vision supports a sequence of staff development needed to create the cognitive dissonance necessary to encourage change in staff. Parallel to this staff development are changes in policies that encourage and facilitate the engagement of culturally diverse groups in the functioning of the district; this includes inclusion in such things as the selection of texts and other instructional materials, development of curriculum, and selection and planning for cultural events in the district. This effort does not simply engage families but takes advantage of the funds of knowledge that are inherent in their diversity of both culture and experience.

The vision also is reflected in the recruitment of staff into the district, both in a preference for culturally proficient individuals and in an effort to fill positions with individuals representing the breadth of cultures found within the district.

All of this is done with an emphasis on student achievement of the state standards. Cultural proficiency does not preclude the need to fully address the standards. Instead, it allows teachers the opportunity to increase their effectiveness by taking into account the background and experience of their students and, given this alternative starting point, more appropriately address students' needs.

What are practicing educators and researchers doing to achieve this?

Note: These are example searches only and can be supplemented using alternative search terms.

Resources (links use google.com):

- [cultural proficiency](#)
- [cultural competence](#)
- [inclusive classroom](#)
- [guiding principles of cultural proficiency](#)
- [continuum of cultural proficiency](#)
- [essential elements of cultural proficiency](#)

Research (links use scholar.google.com):

- [cultural proficiency +education -health -military](#)
- [cultural competence +education -health -military](#)
- [inclusive classroom](#)
- [continuum of cultural proficiency](#)