

CHAPTER 2

The Cultural Proficiency Framework: Research and Planning

That all students and teachers benefit in terms of desirable goals, that the gap between high and low performers becomes less as the bar is raised, that ever-deeper goals are pursued, and that the culture of the school becomes so transformed that continuous improvement relative to the previous three components becomes built in.

—Michael Fullan (2003, p. 31)

It's not differences that divide us.

It's our judgments about each other that do.

—Margaret J. Wheatley (<https://www.inspiringquotes.us/author/8821-margaret-j-wheatley>)

CALIBRATION

Imagine being given a roadmap to meet the moral imperative of education—the imperative of leading change in education in a way that every single student is given a fair and substantive opportunity to not only learn but also thrive. As a leader in your district or school, we invite you to reflect on Fullan's quote to help center yourself in the context of this journey in which you are about to embark. The quote references the challenges of educational practice and policy, educational gaps, goals toward continuous school improvement, and culture. We ask you to draw yourself a bit closer in reflection of this quote related to the gaps between higher and lower performers in your school organization, be it at the district, school, or classroom level. Who is not thriving in your organization? To what degree does

the current culture of your district or school support those students who are not thriving?

ON-RAMP TO PLANNING, RESEARCH, AND CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

We invite you on this journey and provide you with a road map that guides your decisions and work so that students and teachers benefit, gaps narrow as expectations rise, goals become increasingly focused on results for historically underserved students, and transformation of the school culture creates an environment where continuous school improvement is embedded into the DNA of the school system. Equity is built into the systems, the places, and the people. Equity becomes “the way things are done around here.”

The purpose of this chapter is twofold:

- To provide the context for using a case study and an inquiry-based approach to school change
- To provide a rationale for using the Cultural Proficiency Framework for leading that change

The context used throughout this book is a research-based case story, findings from the study, a model for inquiry, and an application of practice for use in your schools. District-level and school-level leaders like you can use the context to embark on your own journey and lead others in examining and changing educational practices for increased equitable access and outcomes for students, using the Framework of Cultural Proficiency. Throughout the book, you are given the opportunity to use reflection, dialogue, and action (RDA) processes to pace yourself and make progress throughout the implementation of this call to action.

This chapter introduces you to the case of Eaveston School District. A real district in the United States, the name *Eaveston* is pseudonymous, and the case is carried through each chapter of the book. We use this research-based application of the Cultural Proficiency Framework to provide a context for the road map that you may use to implement the work of Cultural Proficiency in your organization. This section in Chapter 2 includes a synopsis of the background, rationale, review of the literature, and methodology

for the research study used to investigate Eaveston’s implementation of their experiences with Cultural Proficiency. We provide thoughts around the importance of research-practice partnerships. Resource B, at the end of this book, contains the research case study publications.

Additionally, we introduce you to an inquiry-based learning model to help you in implementing your work. In this section, we review select inquiry-based models and then introduce one to guide your work, focusing on student outcomes using a systemic educational reform approach. The Cultural Proficiency journey is not for the faint of heart or for leaders looking to check the boxes of compliance. Simply put, this journey should be ongoing without end. The Cultural Proficiency pathway becomes the way in which you educate all students in your system and a lens for defining success.

If you are just beginning your journey toward Cultural Proficiency or have been on the highway for many years, we ask that you ponder the answers to the questions below before engaging and collaborating with others. The Cultural Proficiency journey is a personal one that begins with you. It is this deep understanding that will allow you to successfully lead change in your district or school. Take a moment to reflect on you.

- To what cultural groups do you belong? How does your culture affect others? How does your race and social class influence your work as a school leader? Who are you as a cultural being?
- What are examples of programs or practices in your organization that provide every child a fair and substantive opportunity to learn? What are your organization’s areas of strength and areas of opportunity for growth?
- What is the principle that compels you to act? What is your moral imperative as a school leader?

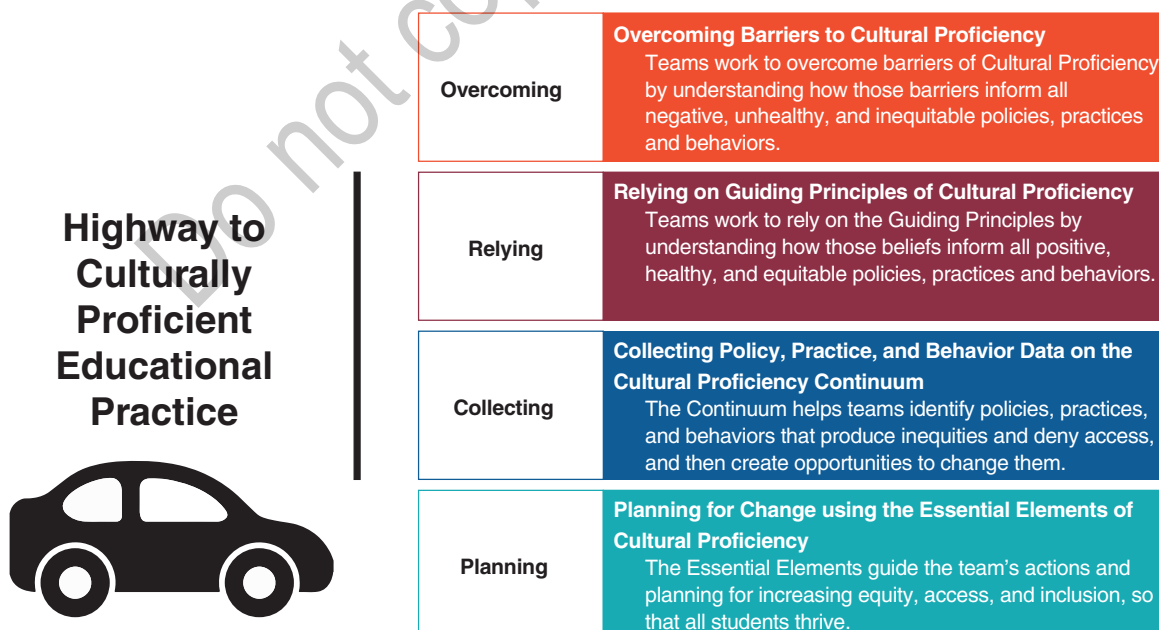
THE FRAMEWORK AND TOOLS OF CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

For this book one of the Cultural Proficiency authors summarized in very personal terms the societal realities of race and class. A few days after the slaying of Michael Brown in the St. Louis area in 2014, Raymond Terrell and Randall Lindsey were involved in deep discussion. This was not their first

discussion on violence being visited on African Americans. During this discussion Raymond paused, took a deep breath thinking of his much-loved four-year-old grandnephew and asked the universe, “How do I tell an innocent, beautiful young Black child that people will not like him solely because of the color of his skin?” After a moment of silence, each recommitted to working with colleagues at all levels of education on ways to overcome the structural barriers of systemic oppression, the sense of privilege and entitlement that fuels individual and systemic resistance to change, and the need to adapt to the communities in their schools’ service areas. Adapting to the communities in their schools’ service areas means seeking out and building on the assets present in their cultures and neighborhoods as opposed to lamenting wistfully for the students who used to attend our schools or the students we wished were enrolled in our schools. To conceptualize the work referred to in the above story, we present the Conceptual Framework of Cultural Proficiency.

THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY FRAMEWORK

The Tools of Cultural Proficiency are adapted from the work of Terry Cross and his associates (1989) and applied to the field of education. The term tools is used to communicate the processes and strategies used to guide educators’ and related community members’ reflections on their values and behaviors in ways that surface, examine, and seek to change unknown and often unacknowledged biases. Each tool is discrete and independent, yet they come together into a “framework” to guide personal and organizational change for ensuring that all demographic groups of students succeed in our schools. No hierarchy is implied or suggested among the tools as they function interdependently to guide individual educators’ and all school members’ actions. In Chapter 1 we provided the Cultural Proficiency Framework in Figure 1.2. Image 2.1 is a new graphic representation of the Cultural



Proficiency Framework. In this representation we invite you to examine the role of teams as they apply the Tools of Cultural Proficiency on this highway to culturally proficient educational practice.

You may want to take another quick glance at The Center for Culturally Proficient Educational Practice website (ccpep.org) before reading the information that follows. Take the time to scan the QR code below to access this website from your device. You will find additional resources to help you on your journey.



THE TOOLS OF CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

Briefly, the tools are as follows.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

This tool unlocks educator and school inactions. Learning about systemic oppression, privilege and entitlement, resistance to change, and adapting to the communities our schools serve is always an enlightening, if not challenging, experience for educators. The authors have had numerous occasions in recent years to pose the question that follows to educator colleagues in schools across the United States and Canada.

Do you believe that at some point in our country's history racism did exist?

The question is followed with this one:

Do you believe racism persists today?

Then, the authors pose the same questions for discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation and identity, social class, religious affiliation, English as a second language, or disability, among others, depending on the community. Almost uniformly, the first two rounds of questions are met with expressions such as these:

"Did" exist? Are they serious?

Never is there any equivocation about historical and current oppressions existing and persisting. Posing these somewhat naive questions creates the opportunity for observations such as this:

Then, if we can agree that people have been and are oppressed and marginalized by individual, political, and social forces, that means there are folks who benefit in ways they may not even recognize. Am I right?

The expressions that surface in the room serve to describe a sense of privilege and entitlement. With participant attention at hand, we proceed to the intended observation: *Once we become aware that such political, social, and economic forces exist and persist, then our responsibility is to respond in ways that provide equitable educational access and outcomes for all demographic groups of students in our schools.*

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

In juxtaposition to the negative core values embedded in the Barriers, the Guiding Principles serve to inform and to guide the development of inclusive educator values and behaviors, as well as inclusive school policies and practices. The nine Guiding Principles provide an opportunity to explicate the expressed “values” related to issues that emerge in serving diverse school communities. Consideration of the Guiding Principles allows educators and their schools to develop asset-based core values. These values serve and inform the development of healthy practices, policies, and behaviors that increase access to quality education for students and create conditions in which all students can thrive.

THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY CONTINUUM

The six points of the Continuum describe educator values and behaviors and schools’ policies and practices. Three points on the left are negative and three points on the right are positive. *Cultural Destructiveness*, *Cultural Incapacity*, and *Cultural Blindness* describe actions and practices that create hierarchies and separation. *Cultural Precompetence*, *Cultural Competence*, and *Cultural Proficiency* reflect the development of educator actions and school practices of inclusivity to meet the educational needs of all demographic groups of students.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

The Essential Elements serve as actionable verbs, guiding the development of educator values and behaviors and school policies and practices to serve all students equitably. Located at the fifth point of the Continuum, *Cultural Competence*, the Essential Elements are derived from the Guiding Principles and are intended for here-and-now use. The sixth point of the Continuum, *Cultural Proficiency*, extends the Essential Elements in ways that are future focused on the changing demographics of the community and a commitment to lifelong learning.

For your reference, QR Code 2.2 includes several rubrics, organized by the Cultural Proficiency Continuum and the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. You may download and use these rubrics to guide your consideration of topics including the following:

- Curriculum and instruction
- Parent and community outreach
- Educators’ inclusion and support of English-learning students and their communities
- Professional learning
- Mentoring and leadership

The next section introduces you to the case story of Eaveston School District, as leaders in the district implemented the Cultural Proficiency Framework for leading organizational change.



Rubrics

A CASE STUDY: NARRATIVES AS ILLUSTRATIONS OF AN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE PROCESS USING THE TOOLS OF CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

A DEEPER LOOK: EAVESTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

Eaveston School District, a state and national award-winning district, is a diverse suburban, public P–12 school district in the United States. We, the authors, use a pseudonymous name, Eaveston, throughout the book to provide illustrations of an actual district implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework. The name was changed to protect the identities of the school district and its employees, families, and community members, while maintaining efforts to gain reliable and valid findings from the case study research.

Eaveston was established as a place that fosters opportunities for children to learn, grow, and live as valuable members of the community. Although fewer than 10,000 students, Eaveston School District has multiple schools, serving students in grades P–12. The location of Eaveston School District is unique in its geographical and historical contexts. Positioned close to the county line that separates the urban center of a city and the suburban areas called the “county,” Eaveston is situated in a corridor of numerous intersecting major interstate systems. Because Eaveston stands among many businesses and factories in a metropolitan county of more than 1 million people, the district receives approximately 90% of funds from local sources.

Most notably, Eaveston School District is rated as one of the most diverse school districts in the state. The student population represents 78 different countries, speaks 48 languages, and demographically is approximately 50% White, 30% African American/Black, 10% Hispanic, 5% multiracial, and 5% Asian. Intersectionality of cultural differences among Eaveston’s students is at the heart of the Cultural Proficiency work in Eaveston School District, as nearly half of the district’s students live at or below the U.S.-defined poverty line.

Central to the mission and core values of Eaveston School District is the focus on all students’ opportunity to learn at high levels regardless of cultural identity. The district’s asset-based core values guide the development and implementation of many practices and policies. Over the past two decades Eaveston has faced major geographical and economic challenges and changes in the larger community. These changes prompted increases in student body diversity, such as in culture, race, and social class; however, Eaveston leaders held fast to their belief that the diversity is a positive contribution to the values and assets of the school district.

In recent years Eaveston School District has been recognized as one of the best school districts in the state, according to state rankings. District leaders believe those rankings do not happen by chance. They happen because

transformational leadership, focused on efforts of organizational change, transforms policies and practices to better serve Eaveston School District's students. District and school-level leaders believe their leadership actions have influenced the improvement in the district's accreditation status, student achievement indicators on state performance ratings, and demographic group achievement levels (i.e., subgroups disaggregated by race/ethnicity and free and reduced-price lunch status). Most important, they believe their leadership in embedding Cultural Proficiency in all aspects of the district and schools has led to shifts in educators' mindsets and changed conversations. In Chapter 4 you will read about the importance of teams, collaboration, and professional learning structures that aid in creating a culture where students feel like they belong.

EAVESTON'S WHY FOR CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

You may be pondering these questions:

Why is the work of Cultural Proficiency important?

How is the work being implemented in schools and school districts?

Case study methodology allows us to shape “why” and “how” questions and then answer them (Yin, 2018). Eaveston's mission is to ensure success for all learners, and leaders in Eaveston rely on their expressed core values of *diversity, knowledge, commitment, care, safety, learning, interdependence, contribution, strength, freedom, and success* to guide, develop, and implement their school improvement processes and programs to achieve the mission.

Block and colleagues (1995) summarized the importance of innovative school improvement programs as having a bold style and substance. While the Framework of Cultural Proficiency is not a program, it is a set of tools that allows for mindset shifts that lead to changes in educational policy and practice. Block et al. wrote,

Each (successful school improvement programs) offers optimistic beliefs about learners, teachers, and schools—beliefs about all students' capacities to learn well, fast, and/or confidently; beliefs about all teachers' capacities to teach excellently, quickly, and or/humanely; and beliefs about all schools' capacities to educate effectively, efficiently, and/or invitingly. Each offers, too, an amalgam of ideas and techniques for realizing these beliefs, an amalgam that forms a scaffolding for the conduct of a particular school's curriculum-building, teaching, or testing affairs. This scaffolding is specific enough to suggest some general school reform/restructuring tasks, yet general enough to allow school leaders to accomplish these tasks in their own specific ways. (p. 4)

Now more than ever, school leaders are called to invest in school improvement programs, including professional learning that is *core, big, research-based, and institutionalized* (Block et al., 1995). These key elements of school

improvement lead us to think about the possible outcomes of using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency in the current school reform landscape. The core of Cultural Proficiency allows educators to address issues of inequity in the classroom; the *big and research-based* elements of Cultural Proficiency allow educators to address issues of professional self-determination; and the *institutionalization* element of Cultural Proficiency allows educators to address inequities and professional self-determination over time (Block et al., 1995). So why did leaders in Eaveston commit to using the Framework for Cultural Proficiency? The rationale for selecting this Framework included the need to:

- systemically address opportunity and educational gaps among students based on demographics such as race, ethnicity, and social class (*core*);
- manage the dynamics of difference from the high level of cultural, racial/ethnic, and social class diversity (*core, big, research-based*);
- provide stakeholders in the district with tools to examine current implementation and outcomes of practices and policies and to make changes to those adversely affecting student success (*core, big, research-based, institutionalized*); and
- develop a common language around increasing school improvement efforts through opportunity, access, and equity while building capacity among all district stakeholders to initiate and sustain significant changes over time (*institutionalized*).

What leaders in Eaveston wanted was planned change (Everson, 1995). They wanted to improve by making reasoned, data-informed decisions about the actions they would take to create change, specifically increased equity, access, and opportunity in the district for all students, especially those who were not thriving in Eaveston. The question “Why Cultural Proficiency?” for Eaveston was easy to articulate: They wanted to see “the ‘possibilities’ for change available to school leaders as they clarify their school’s problems and seek appropriate solutions to those problems” (Everson, 1995, p. 434).

FOR THE RESEARCHER/SCHOLAR COMMUNITY

There is always a space where the worlds of researchers, scholars, and practitioners collide. We know that researchers and practitioners cannot work in isolated silos. We need researchers to help uncover best practices for practitioners, and we need practitioners to inform research efforts toward continuous growth and improvement. Perhaps we should ponder the similarities in worldview of researchers and practitioners.

Creswell (2014) described a research worldview by identifying social constructivists as individuals who “seek understanding of the world in which they work and live” (p. 8). A constructivist researcher addresses the process of interactions among individuals and relies on the specific contexts

in which people work and live to understand the historical settings and cultural identities of the individuals. Practitioners involved in this work lead in much the same way.

We ask you to think about your role as a researcher or scholar. Think about your understanding of self and how research can help others understand differing values and beliefs and how they influence daily decision-making and behaviors in schools. If we consider research in the name of students who are not thriving in our education systems, we lean on a transformative worldview of research.

As cited in Creswell (2014), Mertens (2010) suggested that research inquiry situated in a transformative worldview is connected to politics and political change agendas that confront social oppression at whatever levels it occurs. “Thus the research contains an action agenda for reform that may change lives of the participants, the institutions in which participants work and live, and the researcher’s life (Creswell, 2014, p. 9). We ask you to consider in your planning how will you build partnerships with the research community.

PARTNERSHIPS: SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY

As you embark on this journey, we hope you begin to think about your relationship with either researchers and scholars or practitioners in school systems who will contribute to this quest for change. How can the research community support school leadership at district and school levels and vice versa?

There is a growing trend of research-practice partnerships (Penuel, Allen, Coburn, & Farrell, 2015). Partnerships between school leaders and the research community can take you, and the organizations you work with, closer to actualizing the goals of transformation and replicable growth. Research-practice partnerships are collaborations between practitioners and researchers that are organized to investigate problems of practice and provide solutions for improving schools and school districts over a long period of time (Coburn, Penuel, & Geil, 2013). As you read this book and navigate your own journey, we ask you to consider your own research-practice partnerships, like the one developed between the researcher and practitioners in Eaveston School District.

In Resource B, we provide a summary of the literature reviewed, methodology, findings, and conclusions of the case study conducted in Eaveston School District. This feature is something new that has not been presented in such detail in previous books on Cultural Proficiency. The research information used in this book was collected by one of the authors over the course of two years. Because of the close relationship with the district, the author provides exclusive details related to action, change, milestones, challenges, and the realities of doing this work. We present three QR codes that provide you with three published articles from the case study to further your reading beyond this book.

Welborn, J. E. (2019). Increasing equity, access, and inclusion through organizational change: A study of implementation and experiences surrounding a school district's journey towards culturally proficient educational practice. *Education Leadership Review*, 20(1), 167–189.



Welborn, J. E., & Lindsey, R. B. (2020). A descriptive study of the case of Eaveston School District: Core values from deficit-based to asset-based. *Journal of Leadership, Equity, and Research*, 6(1). <https://journals.sfu.ca/cvj/index.php/cvj/article/view/73>



Casey, T., & Welborn, J. E. (2020). Cultural proficiency as an advocacy tool to build a diverse workforce. *Leadership Magazine*, March/April. <https://leadership.acsa.org/cultural-proficiency-as-an-advocacy-tool-to-build->



Now that you have an understanding of the conceptual framework of Cultural Proficiency and have been introduced to the case study of Eaveston School District, the next section will provide a context for using an inquiry-based approach to leading organizational change in your district or school.

INQUIRY: A GUIDE FOR LEADING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE TOWARD EQUITY, ACCESS, AND INCLUSION

We, the authors of this book, used an inquiry-based approach to the journey of Cultural Proficiency because we believe in Schwab's (1960) idea that individuals are able to learn by investigating problems and scenarios through social experiences. The work of continuous school improvement, as well as research, is conducted in much the same way. Bybee and Landes (1990) developed the 5E instructional model, which was used to design science lessons and is based on cognitive psychology, constructivist-learning theory, and best practices in science teaching. Bybee (1997) declared that “using this approach, students redefine, reorganize, elaborate, and change their initial concepts through self-reflection and interaction with their peers and their environment. Learners interpret objects and phenomena, and internalize those interpretations in terms of their current conceptual understanding” (p. 176). The work of Cultural Proficiency requires educators to use the same approach to redefine, reorganize, elaborate, and change their initial concepts through self-reflection and interaction with their peers and their environment. This precisely means changing their educational practice to be more culturally proficient.

Furthermore, appreciative inquiry, developed by Cooperrider and Whitney (2005), takes a positive, transformative approach to change. “Appreciative Inquiry offers a positive, strengths-based approach to organizational development and change management” (p. 1). This model is complementary to

the Cultural Proficiency Framework because of its asset-based design. In the appreciative inquiry process, school leaders focus on *discovery*, *dreams*, *designs*, and *destiny*. The four phases of appreciative inquiry are described as follows:

1. *Discovery*: Mobilizing the whole system by engaging all stakeholders in the articulation of strengths and best practices—identifying “the best of what has been and what is”
2. *Dream*: Creating a clear, results-oriented vision in relation to discovered potential and in relation to questions of higher purpose, such as “What is the world calling us to become?”
3. *Design*: Creating possibility propositions of the ideal organization, articulating an organization design that people feel they can drawing on
4. *Destiny*: Strengthening the affirmative capability of the whole system, enabling it to build hope and sustain momentum for ongoing positive change and high performance

Table 2.1 includes the steps for each inquiry-based approach described above. While the words of action appear to be different in definition, there are similarities that exist. The most important conceptual learning to be gained from this table is how each approach relates to the work of Cultural Proficiency and involves using the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency

TABLE 2.1 • The Essential Elements and Inquiry-Based Approaches to Change

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS (CROSS ET AL., 1989; R. B. LINDSEY ET AL., 2019)	CULTURALLY PROFICIENT INQUIRY (R. B. LINDSEY, GRAHAM, WESTPHAL, & JEW, 2008)	APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY (COOPERRIDER & WHITNEY, 2005)	INQUIRY-BASED APPROACH (SCHWAB, 1960)	5E SCIENTIFIC INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL (BYBEE & LANDES, 1990)
Assessing cultural knowledge	Define the context. Establish the purpose. Define the scope.	Discovery	Ask	Engagement
Valuing diversity	Identify and select the inquiry participants.	Dream	Investigate	Exploration
Managing the dynamics of difference	Design the process.	Design	Create	Explanation
Adapting to diversity	Collect and analyze the data.	Design	Discuss	Elaboration
Institutionalizing cultural knowledge	Interpret and report the results.	Destiny	Reflect	Evaluation

through the RDA process. We invite you to consider how you will approach your inquiry-based journey to Cultural Proficiency.



LOOKING IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

As we prepare to leave this destination, we must continue to look in our rearview mirrors with our newly discovered context for using a case study and an inquiry-based approach to school change, as well as the rationale for using the Cultural Proficiency Framework for leading that change. Once we cross over into our destinations of Chapters 5 through 8, you will continue to rely on the narratives of Eaveston School District as illustrations that can support the planning, implementation, and sustainability of the Cultural Proficiency Framework in your district or school.



ON TO OUR NEXT DESTINATION

Our next destination, Chapter 3, serves as a review of race and social class in education, including differential opportunity, access, and achievement, and related educational gaps. We introduce the term *Intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1989) to provide reasoning for this book's focus on race and social class related to educators, students and their families, and the community. Because this work of providing equity and access to students who have been historically underserved by our school system structures and the people who maintain their status quo is a call to action, we shift the latter part of the chapter to Critical Race Theory and today's inequities.

REFLECTION, DIALOGUE, AND ACTION PROCESS

REFLECTION • Dialogue • Action

Before reading this chapter, what were your understandings and thoughts around Cultural Proficiency? School improvement work? Equity work? As a person and leader in an educational organization, what are you thinking now about this work? We have asked you to think about students who are not thriving in your buildings. To what degree have you been thinking about those students in the contexts of race/ethnicity and social class? How does what you have learned in this chapter influence your mindset and the lens through which you lead change in your school or district? Please use the following space to record your thoughts, observations, and questions.



Reflection • DIALOGUE • Action



Following the opportunities to reflect on your learning and your thinking, we invite you to scan the QR codes below to hear from us, the authors, in the very first episode of our podcast, *Leading Through the Lens of Cultural Proficiency*. In this episode we tell our stories about our journeys of Cultural Proficiency to introduce the purpose and importance of the dialogue with others, seeking to understand others.



TELLING OUR STORIES

What might be some reasons why you are interested in the journey of Cultural Proficiency? Use the lines below to record your new learning.



FACEBOOK
Join our Facebook page to engage and dialogue with others.

Reflection • Dialogue • ACTION



Reflect on your school organization’s mission statement. What do the words reflect? What values are identified in this statement? Is there something the organization’s mission statement is missing? Write down your mission statement. What is the world calling you to become? What steps are necessary for you as the leader of your organization to take in order to accomplish this mission?

Examine the vision and goals of the school organization. Who is not thriving under this vision? Who is not able to meet these goals? If you are to lead change by asking all stakeholders to join you on this journey toward Cultural Proficiency, what pieces are missing that would be part of the ideal organization that you would propose/create?

