CHAPTER 2

....

CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

The Conceptual Framework and Tools

"*If you want to teach people a new way of thinking, don't bother trying to teach them. Instead, give them a tool, the use of which will lead to new ways of thinking.*"

R. Buckminster Fuller

We have written this book to provide you with a way to apply some of the learning from *A Culturally Proficient Society Begins in School: Leadership for Equity* (Franco et al., 2011). In that book, we used our personal stories and experiences to chronicle our journeys to becoming among the very first female Latina urban superintendents of our generation. Our stories, replete with trials and tribulations, opportunities and setbacks, resources and lack of them, mentors and detractors, best-laid plans, and detours, were also suffused with many barriers and incidents of discrimination that might have derailed our trajectories but did not. We survived. We overcame! We celebrate every painful and joyful experience that contributed to our success. Hemingway (1929) wrote in *A Farewell to Arms* that "the world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong in the broken places." Although we are now stronger in our broken places, the discrimination we encountered on our paths echoes palpably every time we encounter similar situations in classrooms and schools, where it is obvious that some students and parents are valued less than others, and in the disparity of educational

outcomes that separate poor children and children of color from their white and middle-class peers. Getting strong in our broken places had a lot to do with who we were at the core. Our cultural identities as Latinas and women taught us to survive with grace. One of the lessons we shared in our first book was how important our cultures were in shaping how we see others and ourselves—how we think, learn, communicate, teach, and lead. Our cultural identities define how we celebrate, love, and grieve. The intersection of who we are as women and who we are as Latinas has always been a pillar of strength to support us along the way and the main influence on our classroom and leadership pedagogies. The formidable role that culture plays for us is often absent for members of the dominant culture, who may not understand why we must define ourselves as Latina superintendents and not just superintendents. We cannot separate who we are from our struggles and our many first-generation accomplishments. We cannot see ourselves as just successful educational leaders without first considering who and what and how we are in this world. In sharing our stories about the formative role culture plays in our lives, we found kindred spirits with similar stories, challenges, and questions about the correlation between culture and educational success. While much research has been published about the culture and learning connection, none of it suggests causality. Yet many cannot help believing that poor children, children of color, and non-English-speaking children are simply fated to fail and that pouring resources into some demographic groups is an investment with little or no return. Still, while there is no causation, there is a disturbing correlation between who kids are and how they perform in school. Year after year, studies reveal that some students who start school with less of everything are given even less in school, as if they do not deserve it or we cannot justify offering the best resources to help them succeed.

One of the requirements of using Cultural Proficiency (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2009, 2013; Nuri-Robins, 2011) as a lens to examine and address inequity in schools is that we not see community members as underperforming but rather as underserved by a system that does not have the will or the skill to meet their learning needs. This lens forces us to examine what *we*, not *they*, can do differently to close gaps. Cultural Proficiency does not blame others for their lack of progress. Instead, it points the finger back at those in the system who must take responsibility for the many intentional and unintentional policies, decisions, and actions that impede educational progress for some students. We are adding to the conversation the perspective that when we focus on our practice as educational leaders, we can make a difference for all our students and their communities *if* we pay attention to who our students are and what their particular needs are, rather than our needs or the needs of the school system.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AS A GUIDE: THE FOUR TOOLS OF CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

The purpose of this chapter is to explore Cultural Proficiency as a lens, a framework, and a set of tools to begin the work of both examining our current practices and planning for system-wide changes to create and sustain equity-driven systems that better meet the needs of *all* students, not just those whose backgrounds, experiences, opportunities, and resources better prepare them for school.

Cultural Proficiency helps us examine where we are, where we are not, and where we would like to be to better meet community members' needs. Cultural Proficiency is a mindset, a worldview. Those who commit to culturally proficient practices experience a paradigmatic shift from viewing others as problematic to viewing how one works with people different from oneself in a manner that ensures effective practices and outcomes. Cultural Proficiency is composed of an interrelated set of four tools, which, when used authentically, provide the opportunity to improve one's own practice in service of others. The tools of Cultural Proficiency are *not* strategies or techniques. They are guides to provide you with the means to examine and perform your professional responsibilities in a culturally proficient manner. Yet you can perform tasks related to educator functions and never utter the words *Cultural Proficiency*. Cultural Proficiency is about being effective in cross-cultural situations. In the context of schools, Cultural Proficiency is foremost about being effective in educating *all* students. It is also about respect for diversity, inclusion, successful cross-cultural communication, and relationships. But if disparate results exist between some demographic groups, then it is obvious that we are ineffective in handling diversity, inclusion, and cross-cultural communication. Therefore, while the optics of having vision statements and goals about "diversity" or "inclusion" are politically helpful, such goals do not mean a thing if we are not narrowing and closing the chronic, pernicious educational gaps (access, opportunity, and achievement gaps) that exist disproportionately for some student groups (students of color, students impacted by poverty, English-language learners, and special-needs students). These gaps are what racism and oppression look like in schools. The gaps are fueled by the policies and practices, values, and beliefs that well-meaning individuals like you and us mete out daily. Cultural Proficiency forces us to start our work by examining the self and our own organizational practice. What do our data say? What are our gaps? Between and among what groups? Let us be clear: Cultural Proficiency is not about improvement or getting better; better than what? The only thing that moves us further toward

Cultural Proficiency is narrowing and closing the gaps. From an equity standpoint, improvement does not matter if gaps are not closing.

Because we must start this work by examining our own values, beliefs, and practices, Cultural Proficiency also is not something we immediately unload onto others. It starts with the leaders, not the people they hire and supervise. Therefore, another requirement of Cultural Proficiency work is that we understand it is an *inside-out* process in which a person is, first and foremost, a student of their own assumptions, beliefs, and actions. We apply this inside-out process to examine school policies and practices that either impede or facilitate equity. And we need not be defensive when we discover that we, with all our best intentions, might actually be in the way of progress. Cultural Proficiency provides a comprehensive, systemic structure for school leaders to discuss difficult, often controversial issues facing schools today. The four tools of Cultural Proficiency provide educators with the means to assess and change their own values and behaviors and school policies and practices in ways that serve all students and, therefore, eventually our society. Cultural Proficiency has little to do with the outcomes we *intend* and everything to do with the outcomes we *actually get*.
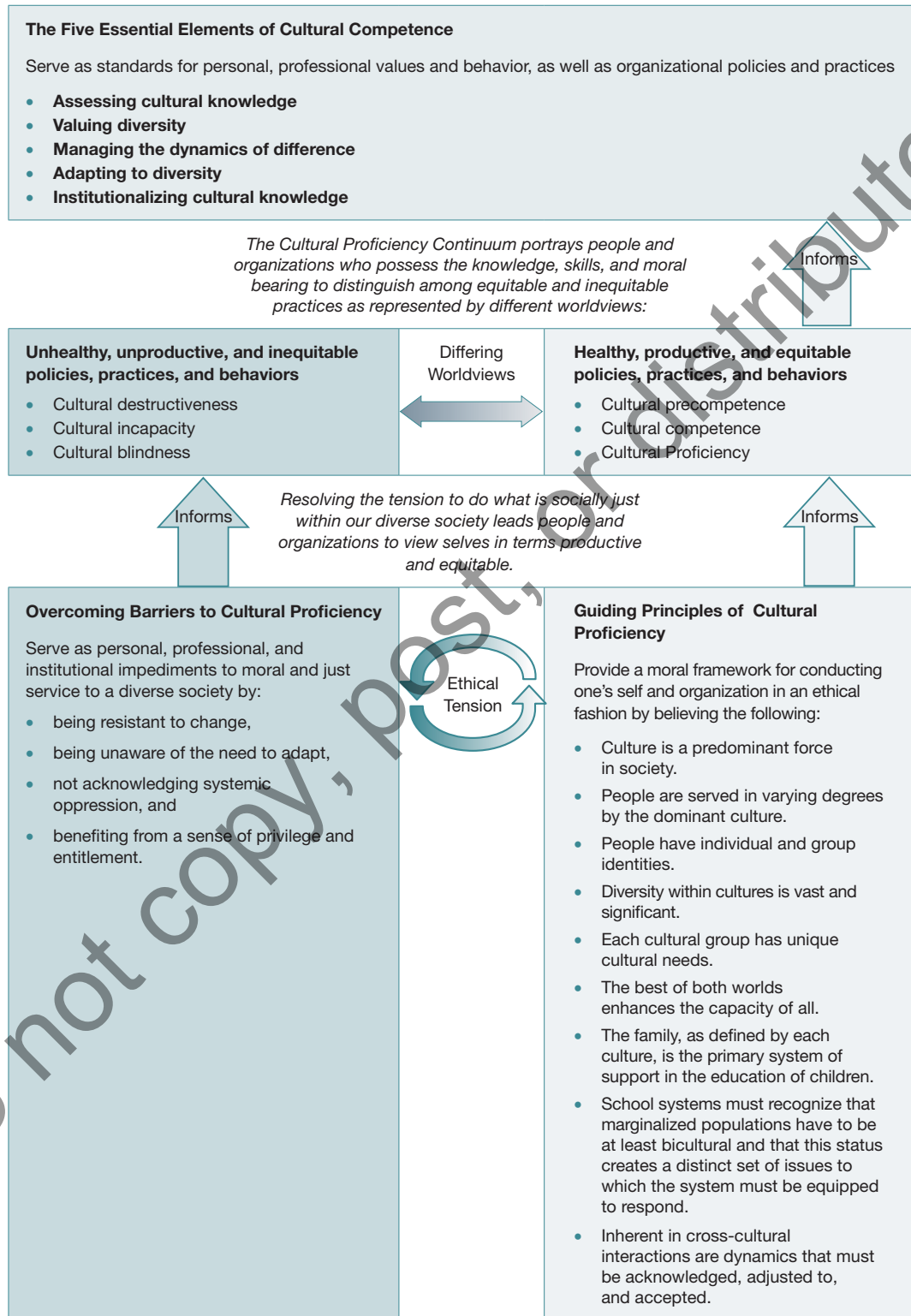
Cultural Proficiency also is not necessarily something new to put on our already overflowing plates. It is a lens through which we see all the work we currently do and must do. It is possible to take the journey to Cultural Proficiency without a formal plan because we already have numerous plans that guide our work, and it is easy enough to simply shift our focus and our mindset and envision different outcomes, *outcomes for equity*, for the plans we already have in place.

In this section, we summarize the salient feature of each of the four tools of Cultural Proficiency. The tools, organized into a framework, will guide your thinking and provide common language and concepts to make difficult conversations less contentious and help you move forward with intentionality for equity.

Figure 2.1 references the table in our book *A Culturally Proficient Society Begins in School: Leadership for Equity* (Franco et al., 2011, p. 61) and shows the four tools of Cultural Proficiency and their relationships to one another.

Begin by reading Figure 2.1 from the bottom up. The framework is built on understanding why you need to change and where and how you might encounter resistance for the work to begin. We often refer to the baseline organizational change that needs to take place as changing the mindset.

FIGURE 2.1 THE CULTURALLY PROFICIENT FRAMEWORK

The Five Essential Elements of Cultural Competence

Serve as standards for personal, professional values and behavior, as well as organizational policies and practices

- **Assessing cultural knowledge**
- **Valuing diversity**
- **Managing the dynamics of difference**
- **Adapting to diversity**
- **Institutionalizing cultural knowledge**

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum portrays people and organizations who possess the knowledge, skills, and moral bearing to distinguish among equitable and inequitable practices as represented by different worldviews:

Informs

Unhealthy, unproductive, and inequitable policies, practices, and behaviors	Differing Worldviews	**Healthy, productive, and equitable policies, practices, and behaviors**
• Cultural destructiveness • Cultural incapacity • Cultural blindness	⟷	• Cultural precompetence • Cultural competence • Cultural Proficiency

Informs

Resolving the tension to do what is socially just within our diverse society leads people and organizations to view selves in terms productive and equitable.

Informs

Overcoming Barriers to Cultural Proficiency

Serve as personal, professional, and institutional impediments to moral and just service to a diverse society by:

- being resistant to change,
- being unaware of the need to adapt,
- not acknowledging systemic oppression, and
- benefiting from a sense of privilege and entitlement.

Ethical Tension

Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency

Provide a moral framework for conducting one's self and organization in an ethical fashion by believing the following:

- Culture is a predominant force in society.
- People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.
- People have individual and group identities.
- Diversity within cultures is vast and significant.
- Each cultural group has unique cultural needs.
- The best of both worlds enhances the capacity of all.
- The family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children.
- School systems must recognize that marginalized populations have to be at least bicultural and that this status creates a distinct set of issues to which the system must be equipped to respond.
- Inherent in cross-cultural interactions are dynamics that must be acknowledged, adjusted to, and accepted.

SOURCE: Adapted from R. B. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, and Terrell (2009, p. 60).

<section type="boilerplate">Copyright ©2023 by SAGE Publications, Inc.
This work may not be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means without express written permission of the publisher.

Do not copy, post, or distribute</section>

The Barriers to Cultural Proficiency

Our careers have been marked by both challenging and positive experiences. Some of the challenges have to do with the resistance we met along the way. As you read our case stories in Chapter 4, be mindful of the barriers we encountered and that you may also have experienced or are experiencing, as well as barriers that exist for students in your schools and districts. Recognizing why some stakeholders resist change helps the leader know how to challenge assumptions behind the resistance and inertia. These barriers manifest in the following stakeholder beliefs and actions.

Being resistant to change: We all have examples of this barrier. It manifests in organizations that have a culture of just doing the same thing, in the same way, year after year, despite changing demographics, changing societal events, or major educational reforms. Organizations tend to remain committed to the status quo unless forced to change. This barrier is often accompanied by an inherent mistrust in decisions made by top-level managers and governing agencies. Building trust and open communication are essential to counter this barrier.

Being unaware of the need to adapt: Constituents who are relatively satisfied with services from the schools tend to be those parents who feel that their children's needs are being met because they have access to additional resources and opportunities to augment what is offered. They may be unaware of changing demographics or performance data that correlate with demographic shifts, so they see no need to change. Sharing data and discussing their implications help alter this faulty perception.

Not acknowledging systemic oppression: This barrier often manifests in statements such as, "It is not I who needs to change," "I have been a successful educator for years," and "These kids/parents just need to get a clue!" This barrier arises when stakeholders believe in a meritocracy where everybody receives their just rewards according to what they "deserve." This belief comes from the notion that the world is fair and everybody has the same chance to succeed. Those who do not or cannot succeed are seen as not having worked hard enough or not being worthy or deserving of success through some fault of their own. Even if barriers for some students are perceived, allowing accommodations for them to be successful is resisted because doing so is seen as watering down standards and giving some people an unfair advantage.

Benefiting from a sense of privilege and entitlement: When some community members have cultural traits that align with the cultural traits of the school (for example, white, middle-class, English-language dominant, competitive, self-determined, and individualistic), they see no reason for schools to change. Classrooms taught in English with a pedagogy of individualism, competition, and survival of the fittest work quite well for some students. Some students and parents feel that structures such as cooperative learning and student-team-centered projects limit opportunities for students with dominant cultural traits to excel above the others. These students and parents resist practices to democratize the classroom because if they cannot compete or excel, they feel they have lost the leading edge they think they need to be successful in school and society. These ideas are often expressed by the loudest or most influential stakeholders, who can and do block changes that do not benefit people like them.

Regardless of which kinds of barriers leaders encounter, they must assess the extent to which the barrier is espoused by a few stakeholders or enough stakeholders to derail progress altogether. Educators must engage in intentional conversations about how parents and students who are different from them interact and learn. Educators must also use data to *tell the truth* about the extent to which public schools are educating all children to high standards. Cultural Proficiency is an approach for public entities to examine their effectiveness in advancing the public good. Sharing data with the educational community about schools' effectiveness in educating all students surfaces assumptions and values about which students succeed and which do not. This awareness can unblock resistance as people gain more understanding and some degree of compassion for community members who have unique and valuable differences compared with dominant groups.

The Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency

The guiding principles of Cultural Proficiency help you know and understand how people think, talk, and act when a culturally proficient mindset is emerging within yourself and your organization. They provide a framework for examining and understanding the core values of individuals and schools making a mind shift for equity. The guiding principles and school-based examples of each one are as follows:

- *Culture is a predominant force in society.*

  <u>Illustrations</u>: Holidays, religious observances, heroes, and sports interests are examples of culture that affect educators, students, and parents. For

some, often members of disenfranchised groups, culture is a defining aspect of their identity. Those who do not define themselves by their racial/ethnic identity may still ascribe to some group that defines them, such as retired, vegan, baby boomers, Gen Xers, athletes, musicians, and so forth. In other words, it is human nature to look for and identify with groups that we feel help define who we are.

- *People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.*

  <u>Illustrations</u>: Those represented in the curriculum, achievement gains, and college and university enrollment are examples of those best served by the dominant culture, and those same individuals continue to prevail in establishing the purpose of school, writing curricula and textbooks, defining proficiency levels, and continuing to represent the predominant culture(s) working in schools. Furthermore, the school calendar, instructional materials and methodologies, the language of instruction, assessment options, the way we reach out to parents, the faces and stories in textbooks, and even the food in the cafeteria are all examples of how schools serve some cultural groups better than others.

- *People have individual and group identities.*

  <u>Illustrations</u>: Each educator, parent, guardian, student, and community member is an individual person with an identity that makes them unique. At the same time, they have gender identity, have sexual orientation, may be a member of a religious group, know their racial/ethnic background, and most likely are a member of other formal and informal groups. In our elementary schools, we know that elementary students have different needs from high school students, but within those large groups, we can further identify the needs of second graders as different from those of fifth graders. And even among all second graders, there are myriad individual needs.

- *Diversity within cultures is vast and significant.*

  <u>Illustrations</u>: Latinx, African American, European American, Asian Pacific Islander, and other racial/ethnic groups are not monolithic. Within each larger group, there are numerous sub-ethnic, dialectical, religious, gender, social class, economic, sexual orientation, and generational classifications with which people can and do identify. Within school districts, we often speak of the organizational cultural differences among schools or among the grade levels or departments within the same school.

- *Each cultural group has unique cultural needs.*

  <u>Illustrations</u>: The varied and intersectional cultures that schools serve have varied learning needs. Home experiences, traditions, rituals,

holidays, and generational and gender roles differ from culture to culture and within the same culture. These must be acknowledged and understood by staff who want to better understand and meet families' needs.

- *The best of both worlds enhances the capacity of all.*

  <u>Illustrations</u>: Being bicultural is an asset. It develops abilities and capacities in the student that can enhance learning. Students need to feel like they belong in both cultures, and they and their parents need to be acknowledged and valued for what they *do* know and *can* do and how such knowledge and ability can enhance student success in school.

- *The family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children.*

  <u>Illustrations</u>: Often grandparents, aunts, or older siblings of children with working or absent parents attend school meetings and take part in follow-up. Same-sex parents, foster parents, co-custodians, and parents who are temporarily incarcerated, in rehabilitation, or absent are still parents and should be acknowledged as such and deserve to be involved in the education of their children.

- *School systems must recognize that marginalized populations have to be at least bicultural and that this status creates a distinct set of issues to which the system must be equipped to respond.*

  <u>Illustrations</u>: Often students must attend school and other meetings with parents to translate for them. Schools must realize that children may play the role of adult or caretaker to parents who do not speak English or know how to navigate complicated systems like health care, the motor vehicle department, and/or insurance requirements. These roles compete with students' study and homework time. To feel empowered and see themselves in both cultures, children must retain ties to the home culture, values, beliefs, and language(s) while learning to become competent in the culture and language of schools. These children are multitasking, and schools need to understand the stress and complexity of some students' lives and that the cultural knowledge children have and their ability to multitask are assets for learning.

- *Inherent in cross-cultural interactions are dynamics that must be acknowledged, adjusted to, and accepted.*

  <u>Illustrations</u>: Dimensions of culture vary from group to group. Some cultures desire children to be compliant at school, while teachers may expect active involvement, initiative, and competition. Hierarchical structures at home may conflict with blurred expectations for gender

roles and authority figures at school. Parents may prefer their children to follow the rules, be good, be helpful, and be courteous, as opposed to teachers who expect students to be inquisitive, competitive, and self-reliant. Neither is more correct than the other. Schools need to honor all styles and use them as assets in the learning process.

Read the guiding principles. To what extent do you and your colleagues believe these principles? They are the foundation for your work. If you cannot believe them or cannot get buy-in from a critical mass of stakeholders in your organization, your progress may be delayed. Notice the principle that states, "People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture." Some may balk at the term *dominant culture,* but when you think about it, there are many vestiges and manifestations of the dominant culture in schools today that we take for granted, such as the language of instruction; the stories, people, and events in our textbooks; the food in the cafeteria; the school calendar; our system of teaching and grading; and the diversity of the staff, just to name a few. No one wants to assume that these structures were invented to dominate or harm some students, but no one can deny that many of these structures do, in fact, benefit some students and parents more than others. Hence, *people are served to varying degrees by the dominant culture.* Here is where educational gaps begin: where some students benefit more than others from the school experience. While you cannot require people to believe in these principles, you can facilitate a greater understanding of them over time. Do not underestimate the importance of having those with whom you work understand and buy in to these principles. Before the planning stage, before making programmatic changes, it is important to share data, have cross-group conversations, and offer various equity-based training opportunities to create an understanding of these principles, which creates the readiness for Cultural Proficiency work. Please note the zone of *ethical tension* between the barriers and the guiding principles in Figure 2.1. Being able to accept the beliefs exemplified by the guiding principles enables leaders to want and begin to transform systems for equity. Not being able to accept the beliefs exemplified by the guiding principles forces leaders into a situation of believing that those who are underperforming are to blame for their lack of progress and must either make changes themselves to better access the resources and opportunities schools offer or forever have limited access to success. The tension is extant in those who are eager to transform for equity versus those who can barely tolerate diversity. This is the pivot point where leaders have two stark choices:

- We choose to stay stuck in the inertia of believing either in cultural deficit theory or, every bit as damaging, the intractability of systemic oppression.

NOW WHAT? CONFRONTING UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS ABOUT INEQUITY IN SCHOOLS

- We choose to believe in the guiding principles and in *our capacity to do whatever it takes* to make changes that benefit historically underserved students and their parents.

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum provides specific descriptions of both unhealthy, unproductive, and inequitable as compared with healthy, productive, and equitable *policies, practices, and behaviors* of individuals and organizations. In addition, the continuum can help you assess your current state and project your desired state. In this manner, it is a model for change. Movement along the continuum is the goal and represents paradigmatic shifts in thinking. The illustrations are not unique; they are samples, and any other examples could substitute as long as they portray the general worldview of that point along the continuum (from *cultural destructiveness* to *Cultural Proficiency*). Often the continuum becomes the tool that practitioners find most practical in guiding their work, as it can be valuable in showing forward progress. However, the continuum is not all there is to the work. Neither can the continuum be useful unless users understand the pillars on which it is based and how the other tools inform it. Note that the three points on the left side of the continuum (i.e., *cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, cultural blindness*) focus on *the others* as being problematic, and the three points on the right of the continuum (i.e., *cultural precompetence, cultural competence, Cultural Proficiency*) focus on *us* or our *practices*. Culturally destructive, incapable, and blind behaviors demonstrate attitudes about how students (or other groups) are blamed for their lack of progress or success and referred to as *underperforming*, while the next three points—culturally precompetent, competent, and proficient behaviors—demonstrate how educators and leaders refer to the ways people and practices *underserve* our students and their communities. The six points on the continuum are these:

- *Cultural destructiveness—see the difference; stomp it out.* Seeking to eliminate vestiges of the others' cultures. Often these attitudes and behaviors are intentional.

  Illustrations: Historical examples include the system of slavery, the westward expansion of the United States that resulted in the near extinction of First Nations, and the presence of school curricula that seek to ignore these and other egregious acts in our history. Modern examples range from physical acts such as gay bashing to educational practices that perpetuate generational underachievement of demographic groups. Other examples include missing or distorted histories of some groups in the curricula and textbooks, the chronic under-education and

miseducation of children of color, and the limited life-affirming options for such children beyond school.

- *Cultural incapacity—see the difference; make it wrong.* Intentional or non-intentional practices that exclude, disrespect, disempower, or limit access for some cultural groups.

  Illustrations: Historical examples include legislation such as immigrant exclusion laws that severely curtailed Asian immigration, the executive order that remanded U.S. citizens of Japanese ancestry into "relocation camps" during World War II, and law-based discriminatory hiring practices used throughout our country until the late half of the twentieth century. Current school-oriented examples include the expressed assumption that parents from some cultural groups do not care about their children's education if they do not come to school events, or the belief that students who are not fluent in English cannot learn or require low-level materials. Most recently, during the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many students in need lost access to resources and services they depended on for online learning, nutritional well-being, and mental health. Even providing computers for online learning was not nearly enough for some students and parents who needed the other support services that kept students safe and healthy. These good intentions based on a recognition of what was needed by most students just did not go far enough for some students, and the result was that too many students were, in fact, punished during the pandemic by losing access to school support services. Therefore, too many students who were already struggling in school fell far behind their peers and are unable to catch up to this day.

- *Cultural blindness—see the difference; act like you don't.* Refusing to acknowledge the cultures of others, and promoting the belief that everyone is served equally by the same policies and practices.

  Illustrations: Historical examples include the failure to recognize or even see the artistic, athletic, economic, and political accomplishments of women, nondominant ethnic groups, and LGBTQ individuals. Cultural blindness is represented by colleagues who profess to be color-blind and are, therefore, unaware of learning barriers and achievement gaps that exist for some groups, or see the learning barriers but are not willing to make accommodations for some students, thinking it provides an unfair advantage to them.

- *Cultural precompetence—see the difference; maybe or maybe not respond appropriately.* This level of behavior on the continuum acknowledges that people recognize that they do not know everything

NOW WHAT? CONFRONTING UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS ABOUT INEQUITY IN SCHOOLS

there is to know about working in diverse settings. At this level, we see initial levels of "recognition" about gaps, after which an individual/ organization can move in a positive, constructive direction, or they can falter, stop, and possibly regress. Often at this level, leaders who are anxious to know what they do not know seek one-shot, short-lived, quick-fix programs or opportunities with promising outcomes but limited results for closing gaps. Or they may order such professional development for staff but not attend themselves. Disillusioned by hard work or stalled efforts, leaders may regress to old ways or look outside of themselves for other "silver bullet" solutions, which never materialize. The work is *inside-out*, meaning it starts on the inside, by examining the self, one's own professional practices, and one's own organizational data, not by first reaching out to outside experts or programs. External supports will eventually enhance your work, but the first steps start with examining the self and one's readiness and capacity for knowing and serving others better.

<u>Illustrations</u>: In our recent past, there have been numerous attempts to address the needs of underachieving students that included "pullout programs," gender- or race-based academies, and other ability grouping that has led to tracking. The distinguishing characteristic of culturally precompetent educators who seek to learn how to best serve the needs of all students is that while they may implement programs that seem promising, they track progress and do not perpetuate approaches that fail to result in equitable outcomes. These leaders continue to research, learn, and implement practices to serve all students well and then share best practices with networks of like-minded colleagues also wanting to change the mindset for equity.

- *Cultural competence—see the difference; redress bias and inequity*. Behaviors at this level of the continuum intend to redress wrongs, reallocate resources, rebalance services offered, and accelerate progress for underserved students. The leader enters diverse settings in a manner that is additive to cultures that are different from their own while learning about and evolving their understanding about their own cultural identity and status to adapt to meet the needs of others.

  <u>Illustrations</u>: Examples include educators who acknowledge changing demographics in their schools and adapt the curriculum and instructional practices to "recognize and respond" to students in classrooms today, not the ones who used to attend our schools. In these classrooms and schools, culture is a normal part of educator conversations. Educators make cultural and linguistic adaptations to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Textbooks, materials, and public

resources will abound with diverse images, including those of groups who are not members of the current student population.

- *Cultural Proficiency—see the difference, esteem the difference, and advocate for equity.* Behaviors at this level of the continuum intend to and do rebalance or re-level power dynamics and relationships in schools and in other institutions in society. Educators and leaders make the commitment to lifelong learning for the purpose of being increasingly effective in serving the educational needs of current cultural groups while keeping an eye on making adaptations needed to meet the needs of future students.

  Illustrations: Educators who strive to achieve Cultural Proficiency recognize and value professional development for themselves and their colleagues, are activistic in their advocacy, and have the will "to do whatever it takes" to close gaps and make education a truly inclusive and democratic enterprise where no one is left on the margins and everyone has the optimal opportunity to participate in meaningful ways in a just society.

Cultural Proficiency continua or rubrics have been developed to examine equitable practices in specific areas of education, such as curriculum and instruction, assessment and accountability, parent and community engagement, professional development, and educational social justice, to name a few.

The Five Essential Elements of Cultural Competence

The *five essential elements of cultural competence* represent five distinct areas of practice to help us further organize, understand, and navigate the continuum. The five essential elements are behavioral standards or skill sets that can be observed in individuals or organizations that begin to develop the changing mindset for cultural competence. They represent values, behaviors, policies, and practices that hold us accountable for doing deep transformation work that changes outcomes for underserved clients. Typically, these standards or skills are most observable at the fifth level of the continuum, or *cultural competence*. The five essential elements are as follows:

- *Assessing cultural knowledge*—Being aware of what you know about others' cultures and your own, how you react to differences in others' cultures, and what you do to be effective in cross-cultural situations.

- *Valuing diversity*—Making the effort to be inclusive of people whose viewpoints and experiences are different from yours and that will enrich conversations, decision-making, and problem-solving.

- *Managing the dynamics of difference*—Viewing conflict as a natural and normal process that often has cultural contexts that can be understood to enhance cross-group communication and trust-building. Managing the dynamics of difference helps leaders use conflict for constructive and supportive problem-solving rather than being intimidated by it.

- *Adapting to diversity*—Having the will to learn about others and the ability to use others' cultural experiences and backgrounds in educational settings. This essential element means being able to adapt to the cultural needs of others instead of expecting others to adapt to your needs.

- *Institutionalizing cultural knowledge*—Learning about one's own culture(s) and the culture(s) of others and their experiences, perspectives, and needs is an integral part of individual and organizational lifelong learning to hold individuals and organizations accountable to effectively meet the needs of the current public with an eye toward the future and changing demographics and needs.

In the next chapter, we will introduce a continuum and five essential elements tailored specifically to guide leaders in their practice. The Cultural Proficiency Leadership Rubric integrates the six levels of Cultural Proficiency discussed above with the five essential elements or standards of Cultural Proficiency. In addition to sharing the specific Cultural Proficiency Leadership Rubric with our readers in Chapter 3, we will use it to analyze four authentic case stories in Chapter 4 to contextualize the theoretical nature of this tool in real-life professional settings.

REFLECTION: OVERALL

- How comfortable are you with your knowledge about Cultural Proficiency? What questions do you have? How do you see the tools helping you and members of your school community narrow and close educational gaps?

_____

_____

_____

_____

- What conversations do you need to start with your school community?

_____

_____

_____

_____

- What partners or support networks will you seek to begin this work?

_____

_____

_____

_____

REFLECTIONS: BARRIERS

- What barriers are preventing you from starting your Cultural Proficiency work? How will you begin to eliminate those barriers?

_____

_____

_____

_____

REFLECTIONS: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- To what extent do people on your staff believe or buy in to the guiding principles of Cultural Proficiency? Considering the principle *People are served to varying degrees by the dominant culture,* to what extent do people you work with know this? How can you increase their awareness of it? Given that they know it, to what extent do they care enough

about this principle to do something about it? How can you demonstrate more concern and interest about this guiding principle?

_____

_____

_____

_____

REFLECTIONS: CULTURAL PROFICIENCY CONTINUUM

- Given that we can be at different levels on the Cultural Proficiency Continuum depending on various diversity issues, where on the continuum do you think you fall, overall? Where does your organization fall, overall? How might you use the continuum to build knowledge and capacity among stakeholders in your educational community?

_____

_____

_____

_____

REFLECTIONS: FIVE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE

- Which elements are most visible in your practice? In the practices of others? How can you build capacity for more people to embrace and use the essential elements?

_____

_____

_____

_____