## Cultural Proficiency

**What does it mean to be culturally proficient or culturally competent?**

“We define culture as everything that you believe and everything that enables you to identify with people who are like you and distinguishes you from people who differ from you. Culture is about ‘groupness.’ A culture is a group of people identified by their shared history, values and patterns of behavior…. You may need to expand your conceptual paradigm for culture to encompass everything that people believe and everything that they do that identifies them as members of a group and distinguishes that group from other groups.” (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009, p. 25)

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| **Organizational, occupational, and social cultures shape people’s values and affect their communication** | **Social cultures** arise among groups of people who share a common interest or activity (e.g. jogging, volunteer work, or arts and crafts).  **Occupational cultures** arise when a group of people shares involvement in a common vocation (e.g. teachers, administrators, lawyers, accountants).  **Organizational cultures** arise among people who work for the same organization (e.g., school or district). Not all organizations of a particular type have the same organizational culture.  Note: Adapted from Lindsey et al., 2009. |
| **Cultural competence: relating to people of a different background** | A skill that may soon be required on a job application is ‘cultural competence.’ Educators who are culturally competent understand how culture influences personal experience; they are aware of the norms, practices, and values of several different cultures; and they advocate cultural diversity. |
| **Definition of a culturally competent person** | **A culturally competent person . . .**   * **is actively engaged** in the process of becoming aware of his or her **own** assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, preconceived notions, personal limitations; * actively attempts to understand the worldview of **others**; * is in the process of actively developing and practicing appropriate, relevant, and sensitive intervention strategies and **skills.**   Note: These ideas were shared by Shannon Chavez-Korell, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; June 30, 2015. |
| **Culturally responsive practice in the classroom** | Culturally responsive teaching puts cultural competence into practice in classrooms. Geneva Gay defines culturally responsive teaching as the practice of using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through students' strengths. Culturally responsive teaching involves several key practices:   * Communicating high expectations and giving students the support needed to meet them * Helping student learn within the context of their own culture. * Teaching students about various different cultures. * Grounding curriculum in culturally relevant beliefs, texts, art forms, and so on. * Viewing teachers as facilitators. * Focusing instruction on students’ interests and strengths. * Communicating positive perspectives about parents and families. |

**Activity**

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| **ACTIVITY - What’s in a Name?**   * Introductions: share your full name with the small group. * What does your full name mean to you personally and professionally? What does it mean in relationship to your network of friends and family? * How does your full name relate to your cultural heritage? * Share your reflections with the small group. | **Observations on Identity:**   1. All of us have multiple identities. 2. We often experience contradictory feelings about having others pinpoint our identities. 3. Some identities confer benefits; other carry costs. 4. Some people have a choice about whether a part of their identity can stay hidden. Others don’t. 5. Individual identities are always changing and developing. 6. People with different identities can nevertheless share goals, aspirations, beliefs, and values.   Adapted from a workshop conducted by Shannon Chavez-Korell, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee at the Leading for Social Justice Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison; June 30, 2015. |

**Resources to Help Classroom Teachers**

**NEA’s Diversity toolkit**: - provides an introduction to the multiple facets of diversity. It offers basic information, a short list of strategies and tools, and suggestions for how to find out more.

[**http://www.nea.org/tools/diversity-toolkit.html**](http://www.nea.org/tools/diversity-toolkit.html)

**Edutopia** - provides information on relationship-building culturally responsive classrooms.

[**http://www.edutopia.org/blog/relationship-building-culturally-responsive-classroom-todd-finley**](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/relationship-building-culturally-responsive-classroom-todd-finley)

**PBIS Resources for Equity and Culturally Responsive Practices** – provides practice guides for educators, including leadership teams. [**http://www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis**](http://www.pbis.org/school/equity-pbis)

**References**

Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research and practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Lindsey, R., Robins, K. N., & Terrell, R. (2009). *Cultural proficiency - A manual for school leaders.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.