

# Cultural Proficiency Professional Development

## Definitions

*(Written Verbatim from the Noted Sources)*

**Culture.** Everything you believe and everything you do that identifies you as a member of a group and distinguishes you from other groups. You may belong to more than one cultural group. Cultures reflect the belief systems and behaviors that are informed by race and ethnicity, as well as other sociological factors like gender, ages, and physical ability. Both individuals and organizations are defined by their cultures.

**Diversity and Inclusion.** The presence of diversity indicates generally that many people with many differences are present in an organization or group. Diversity refers to socioeconomic, power, privilege, class, ethnicity, language, gender, age, ability, and sexual orientation and all other aspects of culture. Inclusion in an organizational setting means that the diverse groups are represented and included in all sectors of the organization and organizational life.

**Cultural Proficiency.** This is the most ideal point on the cultural competence continuum developed by Terry Cross (1989). It is the policies and practices of an organization, or the values and behaviors of an individual, that enable that organization or person to interact effectively with clients, colleagues, and the community using the essential elements of cultural competence: assessing culture, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge.

**Politically Correct.** This term describes language that reflects sensitivity to the diversity of a group, often without an understanding or caring about why such sensitivity is important. The intention of using such language is to stay out of trouble. Politically correct responses are usually insincere and do not reflect an understanding of or concern for why a group makes a particular request.

**Tolerance.** This begrudging acceptance of differences with which one disagrees or is unfamiliar is the first in a progression of steps that may lead to cultural proficiency. Teaching tolerance is a good way to get beyond genocide or cultural destructiveness.

**Praxis.** This integration of one's theory about a particular field with one's practice in that field involves critical reflection about why one does what one does and conscious application of what one believes to one's professional practice.

**Equity.** This is the outcome of practices that result in the same outcomes for members of a group. Equitable programs may make accommodations for differences so that the outcomes are the same for all individuals. For example, women and men may receive equitable, not equal, treatment in regard to parental benefits at work.

**Equality.** Equal treatment, or inputs, in the name of fairness involves treating all people alike without acknowledging differences in age, gender, language, or ability. Though considered by some to be fair, it is in fact culturally blind and often results in very unfair and unequal outcomes.

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**Cultural Informancy.** This reflects our experiences of having cross-cultural relationships that are authentic and trusting and allow for mutual learning and feedback that leads to personal growth.

**Dominant Culture.** It should be noted that the dominant culture paradigm that permeates schools tends to be present in most schools regardless of the communities where they are located. Every classroom has a great deal of cultural diversity present. By our definition, some cultures are readily visible while others may be hidden and not apparent. When we examine achievement, suspension, and expulsion data; assignment to certain categories of special education; or the lack of assignment to gifted, accelerated and advanced placement classes, it becomes clear that those who bring a different culture to the school do not receive equitable treatment and fail to attain equal levels of success.

**Ethnicity.** “...ancestral heritage and geography, common history, and, to some degree, physical appearance”.

**National Origin.** A designation used in the 1964 Civil Rights Act to specify that people were not to be discriminated against due to their country of birth or prior citizenship.

**Nativism.** The practice of valuing the rights of citizens born in this country over those of immigrants. This practice was promulgated throughout the U.S. during the nineteenth century to marginalize the waves of immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and Eastern Europe.

**Race.** Characteristics of a group of people by their physical appearances.

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# Response Sheet: Culturally Proficient Practices

<i>Essential Element</i>	<i>Current Practices</i>	<i>Proposed Practices</i>
<p><b>Assessing Culture</b> <i>Naming the Differences</i></p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the unwritten rules in your school?</li> <li>• How do you describe your own culture?</li> <li>• How does your school provide for a variety of learning styles?</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Valuing Diversity</b> <i>Claiming the Differences</i></p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the diversity in your current professional setting?</li> <li>• How do you react to the term <i>valuing diversity</i>?</li> <li>• How do you and your colleagues frame conversations about the learners?</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Managing the Dynamics of Difference</b> <i>Reframing the Differences</i></p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you handle conflict in the classroom?</li> <li>• What skills do you possess to handle conflict?</li> <li>• Describe situations of cross-cultural conflict that may be based on historic distrust.</li> </ul>		

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<i>Essential Element</i>	<i>Current Practices</i>	<i>Proposed Practices</i>
<p><b>Adapting to Diversity</b> <i>Changing for the Differences</i></p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How have you recently adapted to the needs of a new staff member?</li><li>• How has your school/district recently adapted to the needs of new members?</li><li>• Describe examples of inclusive language and of inclusive materials.</li><li>• How do you teach your parents/students about the school's/district's need to adapt to cultures?</li></ul>		
<p><b>Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge</b> <i>Training About Differences</i></p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What do you currently know about the cultural groups in your school/district and among your students/parents?</li><li>• What more would you like to know about these cultures?</li><li>• How do you and your colleagues learn about these cultural groups?</li></ul>		

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## Response Sheet: The Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency

### 1. Culture Is a Predominant Force.

Acknowledge culture as a predominant force in shaping behaviors, values, and institutions. Although you may be inclined to take offense at behaviors that differ from yours, remind yourself that they may not be personal; they may be cultural.

### 2. People Are Served in Varying Degrees by the Dominant Culture.

What works well in organizations and in the community for you and others who are like you may work against members of other cultural groups. Failure to make such an acknowledgment puts the burden for change on one group.

### 3. The Group Identity of Individuals Is as Important as Their Individual Identities.

Although it is important to treat all people as individuals, it is also important to acknowledge their group identity. Actions must be taken with the awareness that the dignity of a person is not guaranteed unless the dignity of his or her people is also preserved.

### 4. Diversity Within Cultures Is Vast and Significant.

Since diversity within cultures is as important as diversity between cultures, it is important to learn about cultural groups not as monoliths—for example, Asians, Hispanics, Gay Men, and Women—but as the complex and diverse groups that they are. Often, because of the class differences in the United States, people have more in common across cultural lines than within them.

### 5. Each Group Has Unique Cultural Needs.

Each cultural group has unique needs that cannot be met within the boundaries of the dominant culture. Expressions of one group's cultural identity does not imply disrespect for yours. Make room in your organization for several paths that lead to the same goal.

### 6. The Family, as Defined by Each Culture, Is the Primary System of Support in the Education of Children.

The traditional relationship between home and school is to place most of the responsibility for involvement directly with parents. While that

holds true for most cultural groups, cultural proficiency provides a different frame by which teachers, parents, and education leaders assume greater responsibility for finding authentic ways to engage in culturally proficient practices to support student achievement.

### 7. People Who Are Not a Part of the Dominant Culture Have to Be at Least Bicultural.

Parents have to be fluent in the communication patterns of the school, as well as the communication patterns that exist in their communities. They also have to know the cultural norms and expectations of schools, which may conflict with or be different from those in their communities, their countries of origin, or their cultural groups. In ideal conditions, their children are developing bicultural skills, learning to code switch appropriately as the cultural expectations of their environments change, yet parents may not have these skills. They are then penalized because they do not respond as expected to the norms set by educators, nor do they negotiate well the educational systems of the public schools.

### 8. Inherent in Cross-Cultural Interactions Are Social and Communication Dynamics That Must Be Acknowledged, Adjusted to, and Accepted.

People who belong to groups that have histories of systemic oppression have heightened sensitivities regarding the societal privileges they do not receive and to the many unacknowledged slights and putdowns that they receive daily. These microaggressions are usually unnoticed by dominant group members and, when brought to their attention, are often dismissed as inconsequential.

### 9. The School System Must Incorporate Cultural Knowledge Into Practice and Policymaking.

Culturally proficient educators are self-consciously aware of their own cultures and the culture of their schools. This is crucial knowledge, because in addition to the cognitive curriculum, the cultural norms and expectations of the school must be taught as well. First, culturally proficient educators must assess and raise consciousness about their own individual and organizational cultures. Then, as they teach the cultural expectations of the school and classroom to all students and their families, educators must learn about the cultures of their students.

# **Culturally Responsive, Standards-Based Teaching: Assessing My Strengths, Assets, and Goals**

1. What strengths do you have when it comes to including student culture in classroom activities?
2. What assets may you use from your environment, students, other teachers, administration, community, school, and so on?
3. One step I can immediately take to infuse my students' home, family, or community culture into the classroom is...?
4. Describe hurdles and challenges – from your perspective – for using culturally responsive, standards-based teaching and learning.
5. Which areas would you like to explore next? What are your goals?

# Self-Assessment on Classroom Environment

Read each of the statements and rate where you feel you are: developing, meeting, or exceeding. There are no right or wrong answers; this is merely a tool to help you grow in your culturally responsible, standards-based teaching practices.

Rating Scale: D = Developing, M = Meeting, E = Exceeding

<b>Classroom Environment</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>E</b>
My classroom environment reflects the cultures of the young people with whom I work.			
The instructional texts and resources that I use are culturally inclusive.			
My classroom incorporates multiple perspectives and materials that provide alternative explanations and worldviews.			
I have literature in the classroom that authentically depicts various cultures (race, family structures, gender, religion, socioeconomic background).			
I feel comfortable facilitating conversations in my classroom about my students' home, family, and community culture.			
I find ample opportunities to bring my students' home, family, and community cultures into the classroom, including the use of cultural traditions, community history, music, art, language, and literature.			
Many of the units, lessons, or activities that I do with my students illustrate the connections among and between diverse groups in this country.			
Reflections on my knowledge of my classroom environment:			

## Coming soon—the new Teaching Tolerance!

In mid-July, we will launch a brand-new website combining Teaching Tolerance resources with the power of our award-winning *Perspectives for a Diverse America* planning tool. If you would like to be notified when the new website is ready, [sign up here!](#)

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### Test Yourself for Hidden Bias

Psychologists at Harvard, the University of Virginia and the University of Washington created "Project Implicit" to develop Hidden Bias Tests — called Implicit Association Tests, or IATs, in the academic world — to measure unconscious bias.

To take Project Implicit's Hidden Bias Tests, [click here](#). You may be asked to register.

#### **About Stereotypes and Prejudices**

Hidden Bias Tests measure unconscious, or automatic, biases. Your willingness to examine your own possible biases is an important step in understanding the roots of stereotypes and prejudice in our society.

The ability to distinguish friend from foe helped early humans survive, and the ability to quickly and automatically categorize people is a fundamental quality of the human mind. Categories give order to life, and every day, we group other people into categories based on social and other characteristics.

This is the foundation of stereotypes, prejudice and, ultimately, discrimination.

#### **Definition of terms**

A *stereotype* is an exaggerated belief, image or distorted truth about a person or group — a generalization that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation. Stereotypes are based on images in mass media, or reputations passed on by parents, peers and other members of society. Stereotypes can be positive or negative.

A *prejudice* is an opinion, prejudgment or attitude about a group or its individual members. A prejudice can be positive, but in our usage refers to a negative attitude.

Prejudices are often accompanied by ignorance, fear or hatred. Prejudices are formed by a complex psychological process that begins with attachment to a close circle of acquaintances or an "in-group" such as a family. Prejudice is often aimed at "out-groups."

*Discrimination* is behavior that treats people unequally because of their group memberships. Discriminatory behavior, ranging from slights to hate crimes, often begins with negative stereotypes and prejudices.

#### **How do we learn prejudice?**

Social scientists believe children begin to acquire prejudices and stereotypes as toddlers. Many studies have shown that as early as age 3, children pick up terms of racial prejudice without really understanding their significance.

Soon, they begin to form attachments to their own group and develop negative attitudes about other racial or ethnic groups, or the "out-group". Early in life, most children acquire a full set of biases that can be observed in verbal slurs, ethnic jokes and acts of discrimination.

#### **How are our biases reinforced?**

Once learned, stereotypes and prejudices resist change, even when evidence fails to support them or points to the contrary.

People will embrace anecdotes that reinforce their biases, but disregard experience that contradicts them. The statement "Some of my best friends are \_\_\_\_\_" captures this tendency to allow some exceptions without changing our bias.

#### **How do we perpetuate bias?**

Bias is perpetuated by conformity with in-group attitudes and socialization by the culture at large. The fact that white culture is dominant in America may explain why people of color often do not show a strong bias favoring their own ethnic group.

Mass media routinely take advantage of stereotypes as shorthand to paint a mood, scene or character. The elderly, for example, are routinely portrayed as being frail and forgetful, while younger people are often shown as vibrant and able.

Stereotypes can also be conveyed by omission in popular culture, as when TV shows present an all-white world. Psychologists theorize bias conveyed by the media helps to explain why children can adopt hidden prejudices even when their family environments explicitly oppose them.

#### **About Hidden Bias**

Scientific research has demonstrated that biases thought to be absent or extinguished remain as "mental residue" in most of us. Studies show people can be consciously committed to egalitarianism, and deliberately work to behave without prejudice, yet still possess hidden negative prejudices or stereotypes.



"Implicit Association Tests" (IATs) can tap those hidden, or automatic, stereotypes and prejudices that circumvent conscious control. [Project Implicit](#) — a collaborative research effort between researchers at Harvard University, the University of Virginia, and University of Washington — offers dozens of such tests.

We believe the IAT procedure may be useful beyond the research purposes for which it was originally developed. It may be a tool that can jumpstart our thinking about hidden biases: Where do they come from? How do they influence our actions? What can we do about them?

### **Biases and behavior**

A growing number of studies show a link between hidden biases and actual behavior. In other words, hidden biases can reveal themselves in action, especially when a person's efforts to control behavior consciously flags under stress, distraction, relaxation or competition.

Unconscious beliefs and attitudes have been found to be associated with language and certain behaviors such as eye contact, blinking rates and smiles.

Studies have found, for example, that school teachers clearly telegraph prejudices, so much so that some researchers believe children of color and white children in the same classroom effectively receive different educations.

A now classic experiment showed that white interviewers sat farther away from black applicants than from white applicants, made more speech errors and ended the interviews 25% sooner. Such discrimination has been shown to diminish the performance of anyone treated that way, whether black or white.

Experiments are being conducted to determine whether a strong hidden bias in someone results in more discriminatory behavior. But we can learn something from even the first studies:

- Those who showed greater levels of implicit prejudice toward, or stereotypes of, black or gay people were more unfriendly toward them.
- Subjects who had a stronger hidden race bias had more activity in a part of the brain known to be responsible for emotional learning when shown black faces than when shown white faces.

### **Leading to discrimination?**

Whether laboratory studies adequately reflect real-life situations is not firmly established. But there is growing evidence, according to social scientists, that hidden biases are related to discriminatory behavior in a wide range of human interactions, from hiring and promotions to choices of housing and schools.

In the case of police, bias may affect split-second, life-or-death decisions. Shootings of black men incorrectly thought to be holding guns — an immigrant in New York, a cop in Rhode Island — brought this issue into the public debate.

It is possible unconscious prejudices and stereotypes may also affect court jury deliberations and other daily tasks requiring judgments of human character.

People who argue that prejudice is not a big problem today are, ironically, demonstrating the problem of unconscious prejudice. Because these prejudices are outside our awareness, they can indeed be denied.

### **The Effects of Prejudice and Stereotypes**

Hidden bias has emerged as an important clue to the disparity between public opinion, as expressed by America's creed and social goals, and the amount of discrimination that still exists.

Despite 30 years of equal-rights legislation, levels of poverty, education and success vary widely across races. Discrimination continues in housing and real estate sales, and racial profiling is a common practice, even among ordinary citizens.

Members of minorities continue to report humiliating treatment by store clerks, co-workers and police. While an African American man may dine in a fine restaurant anywhere in America, it can be embarrassing for him to attempt to flag down a taxi after that dinner.

A person who carries the stigma of group membership must be prepared for its debilitating effects.

Studies indicate that African American teenagers are aware they are stigmatized as being intellectually inferior and that they go to school bearing what psychologist Claude Steele has called a "burden of suspicion." Such a burden can affect their attitudes and achievement.

Similarly, studies found that when college women are reminded their group is considered bad at math, their performance may fulfill this prophecy.

These shadows hang over stigmatized people no matter their status or accomplishments. They must remain on guard and bear an additional burden that may affect their self-confidence, performance and aspirations. These stigmas have the potential to rob them of their individuality and debilitate their attempts to break out of stereotypical roles.

### **What You Can Do About Unconscious Stereotypes and Prejudices**

Conscious attitudes and beliefs can change.

The negative stereotypes associated with many immigrant groups, for example, have largely disappeared over time. For African-Americans, civil rights laws forced integration and nondiscrimination, which, in turn, helped to change public opinion.

But psychologists have no ready roadmap for undoing such overt and especially hidden stereotypes and prejudices.

### **Learned at an early age**

The first step may be to admit biases are learned early and are counter to our commitment to just treatment. Parents,

teachers, faith leaders and other community leaders can help children question their values and beliefs and point out subtle stereotypes used by peers and in the media. Children should also be surrounded by cues that equality matters.

In his classic book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, the psychologist Gordon Allport observed children are more likely to grow up tolerant if they live in a home that is supportive and loving. "They feel welcome, accepted, loved, no matter what they do."

In such an environment, different views are welcomed, punishment is not harsh or capricious, and these children generally think of people positively and carry a sense of goodwill and even affection.

### **Community matters**

Integration, by itself, has not been shown to produce dramatic changes in attitudes and behavior. But many studies show when people work together in a structured environment to solve shared problems through community service, their attitudes about diversity can change dramatically.

By including members of other groups in a task, children begin to think of themselves as part of a larger community in which everyone has skills and can contribute. Such experiences have been shown to improve attitudes across racial lines and between people old and young.

There also is preliminary evidence that unconscious attitudes, contrary to initial expectations, may be malleable. For example, imagining strong women leaders or seeing positive role models of African Americans has been shown to, at least temporarily, change unconscious biases.

### **'Feeling' unconscious bias**

But there is another aspect of the very experience of taking a test of hidden bias that may be helpful. Many test takers can "feel" their hidden prejudices as they perform the tests.

They can feel themselves unable to respond as rapidly to (for example) old + good concepts than young + good concepts. The very act of taking the tests can force hidden biases into the conscious part of the mind.

We would like to believe that when a person has a conscious commitment to change, the very act of discovering one's hidden biases can propel one to act to correct for it. It may not be possible to avoid the automatic stereotype or prejudice, but it is certainly possible to consciously rectify it.

### **Committing to change**

If people are aware of their hidden biases, they can monitor and attempt to ameliorate hidden attitudes before they are expressed through behavior. This compensation can include attention to language, body language and to the stigmatization felt by target groups.

Common sense and research evidence also suggest that a change in behavior can modify beliefs and attitudes. It would seem logical that a conscious decision to be egalitarian might lead one to widen one's circle of friends and knowledge of other groups. Such efforts may, over time, reduce the strength of unconscious biases.

It can be easy to reject the results of the tests as "not me" when you first encounter them. But that's the easy path. To ask where these biases come from, what they mean, and what we can do about them is the harder task.

Recognizing that the problem is in many others — as well as in ourselves — should motivate us all to try both to understand and to act.