1

Cultural Proficiency

Any student who emerges into our culturally diverse society speaking only one language and with a monocultural perspective on the world can legitimately be considered educationally ill-prepared.

—Sonia Nieto (2004, p. xv)

Rolling Meadows Unified School District has been getting some bad media coverage. In the past month, local newspaper feature articles about the school district have blared:

"RUSD Misses AYP Target for 2nd Straight Year"

"Local Attorney Alleges Racism at High School"

"Once Proud District, Now Troubled?"

Superintendent Hermon Watson is concerned and privately incensed. He has provided leadership for this district for the past 20 years, and he is not happy to have this kind of press coverage. One of the reasons people live in this bedroom community is that, historically, it has been a stable, safe, family-oriented neighborhood in which to raise kids. It has been a place where people move because the schools are good and people don't have to deal with the issues caused by integrated schools and neighborhoods.

At the same time, Superintendent Watson knows there is basis in fact for the news coverage. First, two of the schools in the district have missed their AYP targets. Second, one of the few black parents in the district, Barbara Latimer, an attorney, has accused some of the high school teachers of racism. However, he reacts strongly to any suggestion that the district is "troubled."

Although Rolling Meadows has its own business and civic center, the majority of the population makes a long commute into the urban center for work. The trade-off is a community that is not fraught with problems associated with larger, urban areas. Today, the paper is quoting parents as saying, "We came out here to get away from these people. Now all they are doing is moving here stirring up trouble and lowering the quality of education for our kids."

Hermon shudders as he imagines his board members reading such news articles over their morning coffee. "We have handled every single incident that has occurred in this district. We don't have racist teachers, we are working to be able to educate all students, and we certainly are not a racist district," Hermon says as he reviews the most recent Tribune *article with his cabinet.*

"No one is perfect, and we have had only a few isolated incidents of educators acting inappropriately. We handled them discreetly, involving as few people as we could, and once handled we don't speak of them again. Likewise, we are putting resources into schools so that we can be more successful with these kids from impoverished backgrounds. My goal is that when we look at the faces in a classroom, or out across the commons area at lunchtime, we don't see colors, we just see kids."

Later in the day at an emergency cabinet meeting, Winston Alexander, the assistant superintendent for business, clears his throat. "I'm not sure, Hermon, but do you think that we ought to hire a consultant? It might look good right now to bring in some outside experts so they can tell the press what a good job we are doing."

"That's a fabulous idea," exclaims Holly Kemp, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. "We just finished the Regional Association of Schools and Colleges (RASC) accreditation review, so the documents describing our programs and students are in order. We could hire consultants to provide a cultural accreditation of some sort. We are not bad people—surely they will know that."

His cabinet rarely lets him down, Hermon muses. That is why they have been honored as a nationally distinguished district three times in the past 10 years. Aloud he says, "A cultural audit. Good idea. Winston and Holly, can the two of you put together a request for proposal (RFP) this week? Ask our attorney friend, Barbara Latimer, to give you a hand. That should quiet her down for a while, and it will also let her know that we really mean to do well by her people."

"Winston, what kind of money can you find for this? We may need to dig deep to climb out of this hole."

CULTURAL PROFICIENCY: AN INSIDE-OUT APPROACH TO DIFFERENCE

In 1989 Terry Cross, executive director of the National Indian Child Welfare Association in Portland, Oregon, published a monograph that changed our

lives. *Toward a Culturally Competent System of Care* provides several tools for addressing the responses to diversity that we have encountered in our work in schools and other organizations. Although Mr. Cross addressed the issues of difference in mental health care, his seminal work has been the basis of a major shift in how organizations across the country respond to difference. We adapted cultural proficiency to our work for several reasons:

- Cultural proficiency is proactive; it provides tools that can be used in any setting, rather than activities and techniques that are applicable in only one environment.
- The focus of cultural proficiency is values based and behavioral, not emotional.
- Cultural proficiency is to be applied to both organizational practices and individual behavior.

Cultural Proficiency

Cultural proficiency is a model for shifting the culture of the school or district; it is a model for individual transformation and organizational change. Cultural proficiency is a mind-set, a worldview, a way a person or an organization make assumptions for effectively describing, responding to, and planning for issues that arise in diverse environments. For some people, cultural proficiency is a paradigm shift *from* viewing cultural difference as problematic *to* learning how to interact effectively with other cultures.

Culturally Proficient Leadership

Culturally proficient leaders display personal values and behaviors that enable them and others to engage in effective interactions among students, educators, and the community they serve. At the organizational level, culturally proficient leaders foster policies and practices that provide the opportunity for effective interactions among students, educators, and community members. Culturally proficient leaders address issues that emerge when cultural differences are not valued in schools and other organizations.

This book is an approach for responding to the environment shaped by its diversity. It is not an off-the-shelf program that supplements a school's programs or a series of mechanistic steps that everyone must follow. As you will learn in this book, cultural proficiency is a powerful set of inter-related tools to guide personal and organizational change.

THE FOUR TOOLS

Cultural proficiency enables educators, schools, and districts to respond effectively to people who differ from one another. Cultural proficiency is

a way of being, a worldview, and a perspective that are the basis for how one moves about in our diverse society. It is our experience that once people learn cultural proficiency, they embrace it as a natural, normal way to interact with and respond to people culturally different from them. We have also found that for some people embracing cultural proficiency entails a paradigmatic shift in thinking. People and organizations that view cultural difference as something to overcome are often surprised that it is they who have to change to be effective in cross-cultural situations.

Cultural competence is behavior that aligns with standards that move an organization or an individual toward culturally proficient interactions. There are four tools for developing cultural competence:

1. **The Barriers:** Caveats that assist in overcoming resistance to change

2. **The Guiding Principles:** Underlying values of the approach

3. **The Continuum:** Language for describing both healthy and non-productive policies, practices, and individual values and behaviors

4. **The Essential Elements:** Behavioral standards for measuring and planning for growth toward cultural proficiency

The Barriers

Creating conditions for effective personal and organizational change begins with an informed view of the landscape. There is no disputing the fact that our schools are not effective with all demographic groups of students. Since the end of World War II, public and private schools in Canada and the United States have served increasingly diverse groups of students. Students in today's P–12 schools are diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, ableness, faith, and social class in ways that could not have been imagined in 1945. As the demographics of schools have changed, educators have been very successful in some locales but, for the most part, continue to struggle to serve all students equitably. Cross (1989) provided three caveats of which we must be mindful as we work with our colleagues to create personal and organizational change:

- The presumption of entitlement
- Systems of oppression
- Unawareness of the need to adapt

The **presumption of entitlement and privilege** means believing that all of the personal achievements and societal benefits that one has accrued are due solely to merit and the quality of one's character. It often makes people blind to the barriers experienced by those who are culturally different from them. **Systems of oppression and privilege** are the societal forces that affect individuals due to their membership in a distinct cultural group. Systems of oppression do not require intentional acts by perpetrators; they

can be the function of systemic policies and practices. Resistance to change often is the result of an **unawareness of the need to adapt**. Many people do not recognize the need to make personal and organizational changes in response to the diversity of the people with whom they and their organizations interact. They believe, instead, that only the others need to change and adapt to them.

The Guiding Principles

The guiding principles are the core values, the foundation on which the approach is built. They are a response to the barriers, and they equip educators and their schools with a moral framework for doing their work.

- Culture is a predominant force; you cannot not have a culture.
- People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.
- The group identity of individuals is as important as their individual identities.
- Diversity within cultures is vast and significant.
- Each group has unique cultural needs.
- The family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children.
- Marginalized populations have to be at least bicultural, and 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.
- The school system must incorporate cultural knowledge into practice and policymaking.

The Continuum

Six points along the cultural proficiency continuum indicate unique ways of seeing and responding to difference. The first three points along the continuum are comprised of unhealthy values, behaviors, policies, and practices that emerge from the barriers to cultural proficiency:

1. *Cultural destructiveness*—Seeking to eliminate the cultures of others in all aspects of the school and in relationship to the community served

2. *Cultural incapacity*—Trivializing and stereotyping other cultures; seeking to make the cultures of others appear to be wrong or inferior to the dominant culture

3. *Cultural blindness*—Not noticing or acknowledging the culture of others and ignoring the discrepant experiences of cultures within the school; treating everyone in the system the same way without recognizing the needs that require differentiated interaction

The three points at the other end of the continuum are informed by the guiding principles of cultural proficiency and represent healthy individual values and behaviors, as well as healthy organizational policies and practices:

4. *Cultural precompetenc*e–Increasing awareness of what you and the school don't know about working in diverse settings. At this level of development, you and the school can move in a positive, constructive direction, or you can falter, stop, and possibly regress.

5. *Cultural competence*—Aligning your personal values and behaviors and the school's policies and practices in a manner that is inclusive of cultures that are new or different from yours and the school's and enables healthy and productive interactions

6. *Cultural proficiency*—Holding the vision that you and the school are instruments for creating a socially just democracy; interacting with your colleagues, your students, their families, and their communities as an advocate for lifelong learning to serve effectively the educational needs of all cultural groups

The Essential Elements

The essential elements of cultural proficiency provide the standards for individual values and behavior and organizational policies and practices:

- *Assess culture*—Identify the differences among the people in your environment.
- *Value diversity*—Embrace the differences as contributing to the value of the environment.
- *Manage the dynamics of difference*—Reframe the differences so that diversity is not perceived as a problem to be solved.
- *Adapt to diversity*—Teach and learn about differences and how to respond to them effectively.
- *Institutionalize cultural knowledge*—Change the systems to ensure healthy and effective responses to diversity.

A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Our work with cultural proficiency has evolved from a number of efforts to address issues that emerge from cross-cultural contact. Some of the efforts are derived from legal processes and others from the need and desire to promote healthy interactions. Principle among those efforts have been desegregation, integration, race relations, human relations, antiracism, anti-oppression, tolerance training, cultural competence, and multicultural transformation. Each term represents changing responses to issues of diversity.

Societal response to diversity has changed a lot in the past 50 years. Each decade has spawned new social policies in response to the current issues of concern. Schools have responded to these changes as well. To understand fully the forces of policy evolution and the multiple factors that have led to policy shifts in U.S. society, particularly in schools, one must track the development of social policies related to the issues of diversity, the major movements in schools, and the concomitant resistance to these changes. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed historical context of cross-cultural contact. We invite you now to reflect on your knowledge of the major social movements, and the terms used to describe them, that affected schools and school policies over the past 50 years:

Prior to the 1950s: Segregation

1950s: Desegregation

1960s: Integration, equal access, equal rights

1970s: Equal benefits, multiculturalism

1980s: Diversity

1990s: Cultural competence

2000s: Cultural proficiency

Prior to the 1950s—Segregation

Before the 1950s, legal separation of cultural and racial groups in the United States was the norm. In the Southern United States, legal forms of segregation included slavery and Jim Crow laws, which defined racial groups, mandated the separation of those races in public settings (e.g., schools, buses, and restaurants), and dictated extremely different ways of treating individuals based on the physical characteristics that identified their ethnicity. The oppression of people of African descent through slavery and Jim Crow systems was based on legislative decisions by Southern states and upheld by state and federal court review. An understated reality in U.S. history is the widespread segregation that existed throughout the Northern states during this same period. Even without the force of law behind it, separation of the races was as evident in the North as it was in the South.

The remanding of people of America's First Nations, Native Americans, to reservations is another example of actions taken by federal and state legislatures, courts, and chief executives. As a further denigration of First Nations people, people of Northern European descent uprooted many and moved them to even less desirable locations when they discovered valuable mineral deposits or otherwise coveted property occupied by the First Nations. Beginning with the Mexican Cession of 1848 (though the

encroachment had been underway for well over a century), native residents of what is now the Southwestern United States were often excluded from the political and economic mainstream and increasingly marginalized as European Americans immigrated into that area.

The Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882 and 1902 were federal legislation supported by the executive and judicial branches of the U.S. government. These acts of Congress were specifically designed to control and minimize immigration once the Chinese were no longer needed in labor-intensive projects, such as building railroads throughout the Western United States. Another example of legally sanctioned segregation is Executive Order 9066, initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and supported by Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court, which herded U.S. citizens of Japanese ancestry into relocation camps during World War II.

The 1950s—Desegregation

The 1954 *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decisions that ended segregation in public facilities had its genesis in countless legal initiatives. A few years before the Brown decisions, the state of California, in the 1947 *Mendez v. Westminster* decision, invalidated school attendance patterns that were drawn to exclude Mexican-American children from their local schools. In 1946, President Harry S. Truman issued an executive order to desegregate the military. However, it has taken the half century since Truman's order to desegregate the military. Even now, a compelling argument can be made that although the command structure has been desegregated, African Americans, Latinos, and other people of color and people of low socioeconomic status are overrepresented among the frontline combatants who receive the greatest casualties during conflict.

Throughout the history of the United States, disenfranchised groups have used the courts and the legislatures to seek redress of their grievances. The *Brown* decisions are widely acknowledged to have been the civilian apex of those efforts. Though the *Brown* decisions officially ended de jure (by law) segregation, de facto (actual) segregation did not end. To this day, de facto segregation—segregation practices that are not the result of legal mandates—continues. Nonetheless, the *Brown* decisions provided the legal and political leverage by which segregation policies and practices that permeated every region of this country could be legally dismantled.

The process of school desegregation has been fraught with problems from the very beginning. Despite many situations in which children have benefited from school desegregation (Hawley, 1983; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2007), public attention has chiefly focused on cases of resistance and failure. In Southern states, private academies quickly emerged to offer segregated alternatives to European American students. Throughout the country, families have fled to the suburbs to escape unwanted assignments to schools in urban areas. In some cases, these parents did not want to have

their children attend a school outside their neighborhood, but in many cases, parents simply wanted to isolate their kids from children with cultural backgrounds different from their own. Often, they viewed different children as genetically or culturally inferior to themselves. In response, the children and parents who were the targets of these reactions were alienated from the dominant culture.

The 1960s—Integration
for Equal Access and Equal Rights

The shift from desegregation to integration was monumental. The 1960s was the decade of domestic revolutions. There were sit-ins, love-ins, bra burnings, freedom rides, and insurrection in urban centers. It was a period of activism for social justice, with the push for civil rights expanding from the Southern states and broadening to include women and other cultural groups. Although the focus was on the tension between black and white people, in the Western and Southwestern United States, Latino and First Nation children were included in desegregation programs.

In schools, the push to desegregate had two consequences. First, voluntary and mandatory school desegregation efforts were designed to provide children of color the same opportunities that white children were receiving. Second, the expansion of entitlement programs (e.g., Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Emergency School Assistance Act) led to many children of color being placed in programs for the culturally and economically disadvantaged. The unintended consequence of these programs is that certain labels became permanently associated with certain ethnicities, and students in desegregated schools continued to receive substandard educations. During this time, educators became aware of the effects of teacher expectations, gender bias, and second-language acquisition on the quality of instruction.

The 1970s—Equal Benefits and Multiculturalism

During this period, people of color in the United States were striving to extend the legal gains won during previous decades to broader societal contexts, such as the workplace. As educators engaged with more and more children of diverse cultures in their classrooms, they needed new approaches, strategies, and techniques for teaching them. Thus, the educational emphasis on multiculturalism was spawned. Multiculturalism represents a departure from the assimilationist, or melting pot, model, which had worked well for Eastern and Southern Europeans but did not work as well for people of color. Additionally, many educators questioned the appropriateness of assimilation as the goal for every cultural group. During this period, women's issues entered the multiculturalism discussion in many schools. In the broader society, Gay Men and Lesbians also began to claim their rights to equal opportunities and benefits in society.

The 1980s—Diversity

During this era, corporate America discovered that it was good business to address diversity-related issues. Many companies began offering diversity training for managers and other employees, and others began developing distinctive marketing strategies to target various sectors of society. As with most things, however, businesses did not uniformly embrace diversity throughout all companies or even throughout all industries. For example, the banking and the automobile sectors have recognized the money to be made in diverse markets, but the technology sector still appears to be lagging far behind. Similarly, while the leaders in some companies enthusiastically embraced diversity training, others bristled at the mere suggestion of it. During this period, the aspects of diversity included in this training were also expanded from ethnicity, language, and gender to include issues of sexual orientation, disability, and age.

The 1990s and the 21st Century—Cultural Proficiency

The essential elements of cultural competence provide basic behavior standards for interacting effectively with people who differ from one another. Cultural proficiency is a way of being that enables people to engage successfully in new environments. The work of Comer (1988), Levin (1988), Sizer (1985), and Slavin (1996) appears to be consistent with the basic tenets of cultural proficiency. These researchers believe that all children can learn, and they demonstrate that children from any neighborhood can learn well—if they are taught well. Although the national debate over school desegregation has not ended, it now focuses on the equitable distribution of human and capital resources. One of the many contemporary trends in education focuses on finding ways to appreciate the rich differences among students.

Many educators wonder how—or even whether—the previous decade's focus on multiculturalism really differs from the next decade's emphasis on diversity. This shift is not merely a superficial change in terminology but a much needed, profound change in perspective. Unlike multiculturalism, which focused narrowly on students' ethnic and racial differences, diversity responds to societal trends, urging us to take a broader approach to addressing equity issues and encompassing a wide range of differences, including race, culture, language, class, caste, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and physical and sensory abilities among students.

"Culture" Is Inclusive

Culture involves far more than ethnic or racial differences. Culture is the set of practices and beliefs that is shared with members of a particular group and that distinguishes one group from others. Most people think of culture as relating to one's race or ethnicity. We define *culture* broadly to include all shared characteristics of human description, including age,

gender, geography, ancestry, language, history, sexual orientation, faith, and physical ability, as well as occupation and affiliations. Defined as such, each person may belong to several cultural groups. An ethnic group is defined by shared history, ancestry, geography, language, and physical characteristics. Individuals may identify most strongly with their ethnic group, as well as several other groups that influence who they are.

Culturally proficient educators demonstrate an understanding of the cacophony of diverse cultures each person may experience in the school setting. Although they accept that they will not necessarily have intimate knowledge about each of the cultures represented in a classroom, school, or district, they recognize their need to continuously learn more. They develop a conscious awareness of the cultures of their districts or schools, and they understand that each has a powerful influence on the educators, students, parents, and communities associated with that district or school. By incrementally increasing their awareness and understanding, they begin to find the harmony within the diversity.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?

Cross, Bazron, Dennis, and Isaacs (1993) noted that a number of shifts in society gave rise to a cultural imperative: shifting population demographics, a shifting global economy, a shifting of the social integration and interaction paradigm, and a shifting of the goal from assimilation to biculturalism. Educators must respond to these and other issues of diversity, because effective responses to diversity target several mutually interactive goals about which educators care deeply. Following are effective responses to issues that emerge in a diverse environment:

- Enhance students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach.
- Prepare students to find their own places in the global community they will enter when they leave their school communities.
- Promote positive community relations.
- Prepare students for outstanding citizenship.
- Foster effective leadership.

LEARNING AND TEACHING EFFECTIVELY

Addressing the many complex issues associated with diversity is tough under any circumstances. Such issues become even more complex in school settings with large numbers of students whose experiences reflect diverse ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, languages, genders, and sexual orientations. Sometimes, the challenge may seem so daunting as to be impossible. Educators must rise to the challenge, however, if they are to

teach their students effectively. For students to learn what their teachers have to offer, they must feel fully appreciated as individuals within the context of their own distinctive ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds and with their own particular genders, sexual orientations, and sensory and physical abilities. Educators need to address the issues that arise in the midst of diversity and respond sensitively to the needs of students in ways that facilitate learning.[1] Additionally, educators need to address issues of diversity to provide mutual support to one another so that every educator feels understood and respected for who they are and the groups to which they belong.

LIVING IN A GLOBAL COMMUNITY

Over the last 10 to 15 years, it has become increasingly apparent that issues of diversity play a vital role in the economic and political life of the United States. During this time, our work has taken us to Canada, as well as the United Kingdom, France, and Korea. We find that the ability to understand and appreciate diverse peoples both within and across international borders profoundly affects one's ability to flourish in the global economy and the world political community. Educators must prepare learners to function well and to interact effectively with the richly diverse peoples of their worlds. To do so, educators can start by helping students to address issues of diversity in each of their school and home communities.

Educational leaders who are successful in creating culturally proficient learning communities will enable all students to play vital roles wherever they go in the global community. Technology has made the world much smaller. As the business community has learned, this nation's economic and political well-being depends on the ability of educators to foster an appreciation of diversity. If educators are to prepare future adults for this challenge, they must commit themselves to address effectively the issues that arise in diverse environments. These efforts will benefit students who are currently thriving in the public schools, as well as those who are being underserved.

PARTICIPATING IN THE COMMUNITY

Educators play a key role in enhancing the relationship between the school and the community, both as individuals and as participants in schoolwide and districtwide decisions. As you respond to issues of diversity, you can change policies and practices that may negatively affect

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[1]Specific issues of instruction are addressed in our book *Culturally Proficient Instruction* (Nuri Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2006).

community members whose ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, language, or ability differs from that of school leaders. A holistic approach to issues that emerge in diverse environments provides tools for examining the school and the district to eliminate inappropriate policies, procedures, and practices that create negative outcomes for many students. If teachers and administrators have not been prepared to teach, lead, or work with people who differ from them, then the educational leader must take the initiative and create a learning community so that they can master these skills on the job.

PROVIDING LEADERSHIP

Through a successful approach to diversity, you can improve staff and student morale by improving the effectiveness of communication, reducing complaints, and creating a more comfortable and rewarding climate for all people in the school. As an educational leader, you can learn concepts and skills and translate these into new initiatives, curricula, programs, and activities that will enrich school life for all students and staff. As greater awareness and understanding develop in schools, so too will the awareness and understanding of the larger community be expanded. Very few educators intend to hurt their students or their colleagues. An effective approach to issues of diversity provides everyone with the information and skills that educators need to avoid unintentional slights or hurts (i.e., microaggressions) and to improve the quality of life for school and home communities.

THE CASE

We have worked with many school districts across the country and have spent our careers eavesdropping on conversations among educators. We present snippets of those conversations along with our observations of the people with whom we have worked. We hope that you are enlightened and encouraged by the stories we have woven into a case. In each chapter, we use vignettes from the case—at the beginning of the chapter and, sometimes, integrated into the chapter—to illustrate the points that we make.

To help you use the stories and to prevent them from becoming an impediment to your learning or slowing you down as you move through the text, we present here a description of the two school districts in our fictionalized county and the characters you will meet throughout the text (see Table 1.1). These are the people you will read about in the vignettes that introduce each chapter and who are used to illustrate the points we make in the text. The entire case is presented in the last chapter of the book.

Table 1.1   The School Districts

Rolling Meadows Unified School District	
District Administrators	
Hermon Watson	Superintendent
Winston Alexander	Assistant superintendent for business
Holly Kemp	Assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction
School Administrators	
Dina Turner	First African American high school principal
Teachers	
Bobby	A consistently unhappy high school social studies teacher and counselor
Celeste	A seasoned high school teacher of mixed heritage
Parents	
Barbara Latimer	An attorney, one of the few black parents in the district. She is on the high school site council and is also on the board of the Citizens Human Relations Council, which deals with issues throughout the county. She is known in both school districts. Her daughter, Kim, attends school in Rolling Meadows.
Coolidge Unified School District	
District Administrators	
Bill Fayette	Superintendent
Leatha Harp	Director of credentialing and certification
James Harris	A diversity consultant who began his career as a social studies teacher
School Administrators	
Steve Petrossian	Elementary school principal
Richard Díaz	Middle school principal
Grace Ishmael	High school principal
Teachers	
Brittney	A naïve, second-year middle school teacher who is working with a provisional credential
Derek	A seasoned and effective middle school social studies teacher who is a friend of DeLois
DeLois	A middle school teacher with a big heart who will do anything to make certain that all of her students learn
Harvey	A jaded middle school teacher
Lane	A middle school teacher who is Harvey's friend

There are two school districts in the case. Rolling Meadows Unified School District is a suburban district serving a largely professional, European American student population. The Coolidge Unified School District is an urban district with an ethnically diverse population. Both districts are moving toward cultural proficiency, though at different paces and with mixed results.

Rolling Meadows Unified School District

Rolling Meadows is a bedroom community that has its own business and civic center. The majority of the population makes a long commute into the urban center for work. The district is growing; it currently has about 15,000 students in three high school clusters, a continuation high school, and an adult school. Ten years ago, 82 percent of the student population of the district was white with 4 percent Asian and Pacific Islander, 6 percent Latino, 2 percent African American, and 1 percent First Nation students. Five years ago, the percentage of white students had declined to 52 percent, while the Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino, African American, and First Nation student populations had increased proportionately. In contrast to the changing student demographics, the teaching force has been relatively stable for the past 10 years. Ten years ago, 90 percent of the teachers were white; today, the percentage has decreased by only 5 percent.

Hermon Watson, the superintendent of the Rolling Meadows District, decides to hire consultants to conduct a cultural inquiry study of the district. As you read the text, you will meet his cabinet and some of the teachers as they respond to the idea of a cultural study.

Coolidge Unified School District

On the other side of the county, Coolidge Unified School District serves the families that live in the urban center where many Rolling Meadows parents work. Coolidge High School continues to be among the schools in the county that earn top academic honors. The advanced placement classes have fewer than 10 percent African American and Latino students. In the last five years, the Title 1 population has increased from 5 to 35 percent. In that same period, the English as a Second Language (ESL) classes have grown from serving less than 2 percent of the student population to serving slightly more than 35 percent of the student population.

These trends have had two results. The first has been decreased sections of honors classes and a dramatic increase in remedial and heterogeneous classes. The heterogeneous

classes in English and social studies were created to overcome criticism about the negative effect of tracking; however, placement in mathematics and science classes has served to stratify the English and social studies classes, despite their alleged heterogeneity. The second effect of the demographic changes has been that the school's standardized test scores have steadily declined, giving local media the impression that the quality of education at the school has deteriorated. Teachers still have an interest in a traditional academic approach to curriculum. They also place a high value on a tracked system in which the highest achievers are allowed to move at an accelerated rate.

The extracurricular programs of the school, except for football and basketball, tend to be associated with cultural groups. Though the sports program is nominally integrated, swimming is perceived to be a European American sport, wrestling a Latino sport, track an African American sport, and tennis a sport for Asians and Pacific Islanders. Student government reflects the demographic profile of the school, but one ethnic group dominates most of the clubs and other organizations. Of the major ethnic groups at the school, Latino students participate least in clubs and other organizations. In recent years, there has been tension among ethnic groups. Some fights and retaliatory attacks have received wide coverage in the newspaper.

Bill Fayette, the superintendent of the Coolidge District, recently hired a diversity consultant, James Harris, to provide training for faculty on cultural proficiency. As you read, you will be able to eavesdrop on conversations among these characters.

RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPING CULTURALLY PROFICIENT LEADERS

We use structured activities in this book to help schools and other organizations move toward cultural proficiency. The activities are not designed to be used as the sole vehicle for making change, nor are they designed to be used as the only intervention in a diversity program. Rather, they are intended for use as part of a comprehensive plan for approaching diversity issues in your school or district. Some of these activities will help you build trust among the members of the planning group. Others will help you introduce and reinforce the guiding principles and essential elements of cultural proficiency. The remainder of the activities will help you explore the concepts that we have presented in the book, or they will help you to facilitate the planning necessary to embrace cultural proficiency as an approach for a school or district.

While this book offers a number of activities that we believe are appropriate for reinforcing or exploring the concepts in the book, we encourage

you to not limit yourself. Most of the activities have several variations and in different contexts will be useful for teaching more than one idea. Never conduct an activity simply as a space filler. Always relate the activity to something that the participants are learning and to concepts you want to reinforce. If you have new activities or variations on the activities we have provided, please contact us so that in future books, we can share your ideas with others who are on the road to cultural proficiency.

In most workshops, the papers that are distributed to participants are called *handouts.* In this book, we label any material that is intended for distribution a *response sheet.* The responses that these sheets elicit may be different for each sheet and each group in which you use them. Some have directions, others provide information, and some invite you to complete them with your own ideas and reflections. Most are tied to an activity. You have our permission to duplicate these pages as they are printed, with copyright notice intact, for work within your school or organization.

READ THE TEXT FIRST

With so many activities for getting people to think about issues of diversity and to reflect on their own developing cultural competence, you may be tempted to skip the text and to proceed to the activities. We do not recommend that approach; each activity is linked to the text and the portion of the case study found in each chapter. Reading the text and discussing the case study will provide a context for these activities.

Base your decisions to use a specific activity on its purpose, the skill of the facilitator, and the maturity of the group. Before conducting an activity, assess the readiness of the group and the expertise of the facilitator in working with groups on issues of diversity. We have rated each activity so that you can see the minimum level of experience and readiness we recommend for it to be successful.

Readiness is determined by the experience the group members have in doing the following:

- Effectively responding to conflict situations
- Openly discussing difficult issues
- Honestly articulating their feelings
- Comfortably interacting with people who strongly disagree with them
- Willingly examining their own values and behavior
- Candidly examining the school's policies, procedures, and practices for benign discrimination

The expertise of facilitators is determined by the following:

- The work they have done on their own issues related to diversity
- The amount of time and variety of experiences they have had facilitating groups as they address issues of diversity
- The experience they have had working with hostile or reticent groups
- Their sensitivity to the dynamics of group process
- The skills they have in focusing and supporting groups ready for change
- Their recognition that debriefing is the most important part of a structured activity
- The skills they have for eliciting and integrating insights and conclusions during debriefing sessions
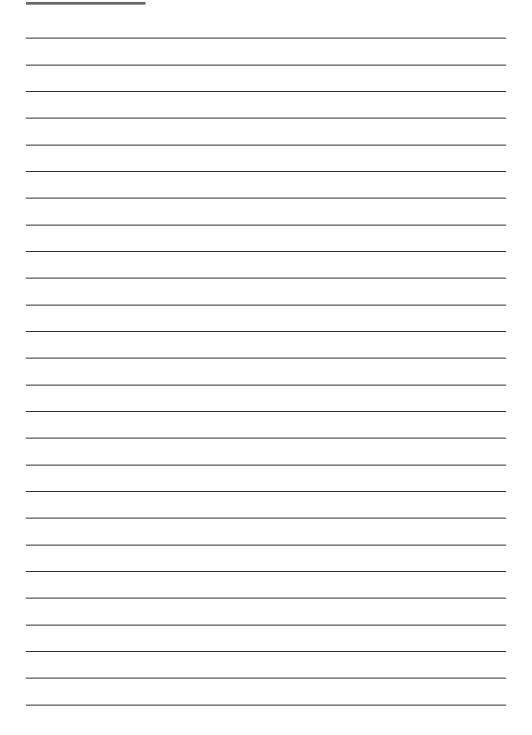
THE MATRIX

No, not the movie—the one that follows Chapter 9! We are often asked to recommend our books for specific purposes. To assist you in deciding which book would be most appropriate as you continue your journey toward cultural proficiency, we provide you with a matrix that lists our other books and describes how you might use them. Once you are comfortable using the tools of cultural proficiency, you will find these books even more helpful as you approach your work from a culturally proficient perspective. Specifically, the books examine culturally proficient instruction, coaching, schools as systems, inquiry, leadership, learning communities, and approaches to poverty and counseling.

GOING DEEPER

At the end of each chapter, we include questions or activities that will take you farther along the path toward cultural proficiency. You may want to spend some time with these questions now.

1. When did you begin working in the field that is now called "diversity"?

2. What was it called when you started?

3. Have you heard the terms *cultural competence* or *cultural proficiency* before reading this book? In what context?

4. What are your personal goals for doing the work in this book?

REFLECTION

The Culturally Proficient Professional

This is a description of the culturally proficient behavior of someone who works using the five essential elements of cultural proficiency. As you read it, think about how you would describe the specific culturally proficient behaviors of someone in your profession.

- **Assesses culture**. The culturally proficient professional is aware of her own culture and the effect it may have on the people in her work setting. She learns about the culture of the organization and the cultures of the clients, and she anticipates how they will interact with, conflict with, and enhance one another.

- **Values diversity**. The culturally proficient professional welcomes a diverse group of clients into the work setting and appreciates the challenges that diversity brings. He shares this appreciation with other clients, developing a learning community with them.

- **Manages the dynamics of difference**. The culturally proficient professional recognizes that conflict is a normal and natural part of life. She develops skills to manage conflict in a positive way. She also helps clients to understand that what appears to be clashes in personalities may in fact be conflicts in culture.

- **Adapts to diversity**. The culturally proficient professional commits to the continuous learning that is necessary to deal with the issues caused by differences. He enhances the substance and structure of his work so that all of it is informed by the guiding principles of cultural proficiency.

- **Institutionalizes cultural knowledge**. The culturally proficient professional works to influence the culture of her organization so that its policies and practices are informed by the guiding principles of cultural proficiency. She also takes advantage of teachable moments to share cultural knowledge about her colleagues, their managers, the clients, and the communities from which they come. She creates opportunities for these groups to learn about one another, to engage in ways that honor who they are, and to challenge them to be more.