Jaime E. **WELBORN**   Tamika **CASEY**   Keith T. **MYATT**   Randall B. **LINDSEY**

LEADING CHANGE THROUGH THE LENS OF
Cultural Proficiency

An Equitable Approach to
RACE AND SOCIAL CLASS
in Our Schools

CORWIN

Thank you

FOR YOUR INTEREST IN CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Leading Change Through the Lens of Cultural Proficiency* by Jaime E. Welborn, Tamika Casey, Keith T. Myatt, and Randall B. Lindsey.

LEARN MORE about this title!

CORWIN

Leading Equity Starts With "Why"

Finding your why will help you find your way.

A great leader's courage to fulfill his vision comes from passion, not position.

—John C. Maxwell (2015, 2021)

CALIBRATION

Think about planning your equity journey—a trip to a new destination filled with cultural informancy (possession of cross-cultural relationships that are authentic and trusting and allow for mutual learning and feedback, leading to personal growth) and equitable outcomes for all students. We usually have many questions when planning for a trip:

> *Where do we want to go?*
>
> *Why do we want to go there?*
>
> *Will the trip be worth the time, effort, and money?*
>
> *How do we get there?*
>
> *Who is going with us?*
>
> *What do we need to take with us?*
>
> *How will we prepare for the unexpected on the trip?*

Before you begin this journey, we ask you to consider the most important question, *Why?* The intent of this chapter is to allow you time to reflect on why you chose this book and why we, the authors, chose the concepts that you will encounter as you read this book. We have organized this chapter to begin with you, and then we ask you to consider the foundational concepts of this book: school leadership, Cultural Proficiency, and race and social class. On the lines provided, take a moment to answer these *why*

questions: *Why are you reading this book? Why are you interested in equity? Why are you called to do this work?*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

WHY YOU?

You may be thinking about the challenges your school system is facing, the racial and social class contexts, or the differences that exist among your stakeholders. You may be searching for ways to foster diversity and inclusion and move your system toward equity and access. Whatever the reason may be for your ponderance, we want you to take one step back and think about you. Yes, you!

Cultural Proficiency is a process that begins with us, not our students, their families, or our school community. We, as leaders, are often hardwired to put others first, ahead of ourselves. In this case change only occurs if individuals are willing to examine their own assumptions about themselves and spend time sorting through the differences that exist between them and the individuals with whom they work. This includes their colleagues, their students and their families, and the environment in which they coexist.

Cultural Proficiency is a personal journey. It is an inside-out approach providing opportunity for individuals to explore their own personal values, behaviors, and beliefs, serving as a model for individual transformation. Using this mindset, Cultural Proficiency is a paradigm shift that allows you as a leader to view those who are culturally different from you as an asset to your life rather than an opposing person who is different, threatening, or even untenable to work with in any setting. The management of self (Gay, 2000); self-examination and reflection (Anderson & Davis, 2012); personal and professional growth in exploring your own attitudes, beliefs, and practices related to race and cultural difference (G. Howard, 2006); beliefs and individual truths (Nelson & Guerra, 2014); and "Who I am and What I am" (Taliaferro, 2011, p. 1) provides a research foundation for answering the question "Why you?"

As you continue to ponder, *Why you*, we ask you to focus on leadership. You are a leader; you have been called to do this work. The intentionality of culturally proficient leadership requires educators to use the inside-out approach for serving all students. Defining and relying on one's own personal values and beliefs drive actions, including all physical and verbal behaviors. Educational leaders can have a vision of a culturally proficient

district or school, but without intentional actions to build capacity and ensure a presence and involvement in the work, there will be little change or measurable progress.

In *The Culturally Proficient School: An Implementation Guide for School Leaders*, Randall B. Lindsey, Roberts, and CampbellJones (2005) wrote,

> Culturally competent school leaders understand that effective leadership in a diverse environment is about changing the manner in which we work with those who are culturally different from ourselves. Personal transformation that facilitates organizational change is the goal of cultural competence. (p. 79)

We ask you to think about the students in your school who are not thriving, be it academically, socially, physically, or emotionally. *Why you?* Without a doubt, those students need you! The moral imperative is our call to act by first transforming ourselves to understand the differences that exist and then managing those dynamics to adapt to diversity by changing the organization so each and every child in your system is thriving.

WHY DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP?

As you embark on this journey, we hope you begin to think about your leadership and the team of educators who will contribute to this quest for change. Fullan (2003) wrote, "Moral purpose means acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole" (p. 3). That is an insurmountable task if done alone. We want you to think about building capacity to start the work and sustain the work. With the right people on the bus, you will be able to start the work. School leadership will take you and your organization closer to actualizing the goals of transformation and replicable growth. You as the superintendent, central office administrator, building principal, or even department or grade-level chairs have the ability to use systemic transformative levers (STLs). These levers, such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, discipline, professional development, or hiring practices, serve as focus areas in which effective educators can leverage change in organizational policies and practices as well as individuals' values, beliefs, and behaviors. Figure 1.1 includes examples of focus areas considered STLs.

As cited in Block, Everson, and Guskey (1995), Berliner suggested the use of "big variables" when planning for school change. Big variables, attributes that make a school a school, exist in similar contexts as STLs. The inquiry process we will introduce to you in Chapter 2 will set you and your teams on a path to collect data and facts regarding big variables in school systems. The inquiry process will help in planning, implementing, and actualizing change in your educational policies and practices. These changes focus on school improvement and consider major attributes or factors of our systems such as assessment, expectations, curriculum, leadership, and community/parent involvement.

FIGURE 1.1 ● Systemic Transformative Levers

Community and parent involvement, partnerships, hiring practices, finances, professional development

Curriculum, instruction, assessment, interventions, special programs, resources

Student expectations, leadership, academic success, wellness, placement, extra-curriculars, classroom management, discipline

These attributes and factors of our system will be used as leverage points for change.

Those who hold administrative positions hold the power to use leverage leadership. Bambrick-Santoyo (2018) claimed that leaders have the ability to turn the lights on by *seeing it, naming it, and doing it*. He named seven levers to execute quality instruction and culture in school systems: (1) student culture, (2) staff culture, (3) managing school leadership teams, (4) data-driven instruction, (5) instructional planning, (6) observation and feedback, and (7) professional development. The work of Cultural Proficiency can be used to transform a school system into one where all students thrive and educational gaps are eliminated by increasing student achievement and well-being. The STLs can be used by district and school leaders during the journey of Cultural Proficiency to spur that change and open doors for students who have been historically underserved. We will continue to reference these levers throughout the book; however, we encourage you to focus on the essential step of planning and thinking about leading at the district and school levels to affect changes that last.

Ensuring that the work of Cultural Proficiency is being implemented at all levels in a school district or larger organization can establish lasting, systemic change results rather than the random acts of equity that check the box but do nothing for realizing outcomes. Singleton (2018) wrote, "Systemic equity transformation requires a shift in the organizational culture and climate of school systems and schools. That shift must flow

from the highest-ranking leadership to and between staff in all divisions of the district" (p. 30). This makes the case for why leadership is necessary at the district and school levels during the implementation phases. If we are to see transformation and organizational change, we must see our highest-ranking leaders, namely superintendents and principals, *talking the talk* and *walking the walk*. Explicitly, this means participating in professional development that includes reflection and dialogic processes related to the work of Cultural Proficiency at the same time as their teachers and leaders. In fact, many of the school districts in which we have facilitated learning over the past several years preferred to train their leadership teams first before implementing the work of Cultural Proficiency at the classroom level. Nevertheless, school leaders' commitment to equity and excellence for all students is essential for long-term, systemic change.

WHY CULTURAL PROFICIENCY?

Based on our historical chronicle of education reform over the past half-century, we have had some positive trends of progress for student achievement, equality, access, inclusion, and, in some cases, equity. What we do not have yet are equitable outcomes for *all* students. We have not found that magic key yet. The work of leaders and educators across our country, up until this point, is to be commended; however, there is still work to be done.

SO WHY USE THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY FRAMEWORK?

Detractors of the Framework tell the story of educators thinking that if we check the box, and thus use the Framework, we will someday be done with this reform effort. The truth is that this reform effort is here to stay and leaders who embark on this journey must accept that planning for sustainability, using the Cultural Proficiency Framework in their systems, is essential. It is planned change. Cultural Proficiency is a journey that will never be over. Nuri-Robins (2016) said, "It is important for teachers to understand that this isn't the latest educational Hershey Bar; it's something that has been around for a while and will be around for a while longer." She continued, "We can't know everything there is to know about everybody." We must continue to work every day, looking at all systems and using STLs to make changes for improved student outcomes.

Cultural Proficiency is a mindset developed by applying four tools of a framework to craft our schools' educational programs to be comparably effective with student populations across a wide spectrum of racial and social experiences. What all of our PreK–12 students have in common is the capacity and ability to learn. Our role as educators is to recognize our students' capacity to learn and to design and implement curriculum and instruction framed around the expectation that students can and will learn.

We want you to turn the pages to Chapter 2 of this book with confidence in your ability to lead positive, transformational change toward school

improvement. The Cultural Proficiency Framework includes four inter-related tools, not strategies or techniques (Cross et al., 1989; R. B. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, & Terrell, 2009). While we will cover the Cultural Proficiency Framework in detail in Chapter 2, we want to introduce you to this model or conceptual framework as you embark on this journey and consider your *Why*. Figure 1.2 shows the Tools of Cultural Proficiency and the ways in which they interact with and inform one another. The Cultural Proficiency Framework, along with additional information related to the Tools of Cultural Proficiency, can be found at The Center for Culturally Proficient Educational Practice website (ccpep.org). Image 1.1 provides access to this website.

CCPEP

The Tools of Cultural Proficiency, when applied strategically, can assist educational leaders in performing tasks such as developing and implementing school board policies, allocating resources, using assessment data, delivering curriculum and instruction, interacting with parents and community members, and planning and delivering professional development, with sustainability. We know from history that numerous school reform efforts have come and gone. Some have proven successful, while others have fallen flat. Fullan (2016) suggested,
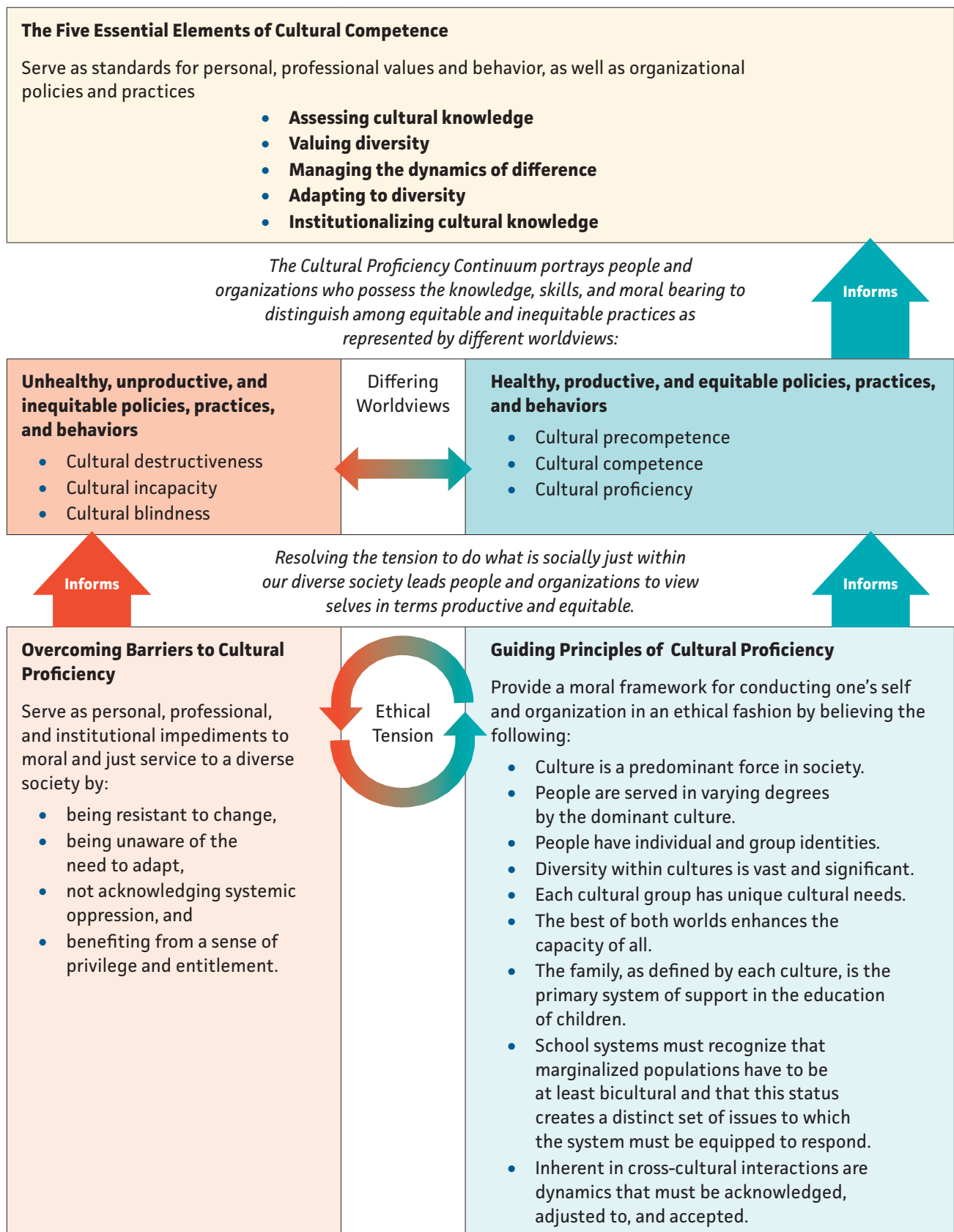
> If a healthy respect for and mastery of the change process do not become a priority, even well-intentioned change initiatives will continue to wreak havoc among those who are on the firing line. Careful attention to a small number of key details during the change process can result in the experience of success, new commitments, and the excitement and energizing satisfaction of accomplishing something that is important. (p. 8)

As you continue to answer the question "Why Cultural Proficiency?" we want to emphasize certain keys for the success of any school improvement program: (a) understanding change, (b) improving relationships, (c) developing a shared meaning by knowledge creation and sharing, (d) capacity building with a focus on results, and (e) fulfilling the moral imperative (Fullan, 2001). Through reflection and dialogue, leaders who use the Tools of Cultural Proficiency can conceptualize and then actualize school change. In other words, we dream it, then we do it.

Following are additional details as to why Cultural Proficiency could and should be used as a means for educator and school improvement reform:

- It is an asset-based approach to equity work that allows leaders to focus on the positive aspects students and their families' cultures bring to the school system.

- It provides four tools for planning for change at all organizational levels (district, school, and classroom).

- It is based on a focus on *you*, which follows research on change.

FIGURE 1.2 ● 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

- Cultural destructiveness
- Cultural incapacity
- Cultural blindness

Differing Worldviews

Healthy, productive, and equitable policies, practices, and behaviors

- Cultural precompetence
- Cultural competence
- Cultural proficiency

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

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).

- It is not a program to buy.

- Through inquiry-based learning, it allows leaders to focus on cultural identity differences, such as race and social class, in the context of continuous school improvement.

WHY RACE AND SOCIAL CLASS?

Research on the topic of culture presents many ideas and concepts related to race, ethnicity, social class, language, sexual orientation, ability, gender, age, and religion. In fact, culture has broadly been defined by a person's identity constructed of the aforementioned concepts, as well as one's beliefs, norms, customs, traditions, values, and behaviors (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Deal & Peters, 1991; Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

Take a moment, and think about what you know related to race and social class in education. Parker's quote "The greatest educational challenge of our time is upon us," as cited in the foreword of Culturally Proficient Education (R. B. Lindsey et al., 2010, p. viii), embodies one of the most pernicious and intractable education research topics—inequity and opportunity in educational practice and policy. For decades, education researchers who focus on the inequities within school systems and structures have shown the persistence of depressed educational outcomes among students from lower social class and racialized backgrounds (Apple & Beane, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Freire, 1970; Hammond, 2015; G. Howard, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008). Differences among individuals from various racialized and social class backgrounds play an integral part in our society, thus affecting student achievement and well-being in all educational settings.

Race and social class are socially constructed. Race and social class are identifiable in ways that privilege some students and marginalize other students. Race and social class hold meaning and implications regarding the differential inputs and outputs of your students' experiences. Simply put, race and social class cannot be ignored!

The theoretical frameworks of race and poverty, covered in greater detail in Chapter 3, are critical to the understanding of our history and years of educational reform in ways that focus our future work in improving educational outcomes specifically for those who have been chronically underserved. We offer the Cultural Proficiency Framework and its attendant tools to lead your thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors, as well as your school organization's practices, procedures, and policies toward equity and demonstrable, continuous school improvement.

We, the authors, do not hold the belief that race and social class determine the success of an individual but merely that educational leaders should be aware of and be able to assess the ways in which the beliefs and values of individuals lead to behaviors that affect others. Consider this: Stakeholders

in an organization enter a setting with their individual and shared history, beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior. These differences often give rise to culturally based conflicts in which the educators of the institution respond based on their experiences, beliefs, and values. Often, those responses are inadequate in that they unknowingly and unwittingly perpetuate a predictable failure for students who are culturally different from the dominant group. We want to make it clear that our belief is that all cultural identities and the intersectionality of cultural identities, for each and every student in our schools, are important. While we focus on the cultural identities of race and social class in this book, we recognize the importance of this work for opening doors for all students, including those of various national origins, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, religions/faiths, and abilities.

WHY DO WE EVEN HAVE TO CONSIDER OUR "WHY"?

We began this chapter with the question "Why you?" At that point you may have wondered, "Why should I ask *why*?" Simon Sinek introduced to the world of leadership, organizational learning, and development the importance of knowing our *why*. Put simply, *why do we do what we do?* Sinek (2009) provided needed and compelling provocations to help leaders understand and be able to articulate to self and others why we do what we do as leaders. No argument from us. In fact, full and total agreement. Sinek helped us understand the influence of *why* in the work of Cultural Proficiency:

> For values or guiding principles to be truly effective they have to be verbs. It's not "integrity," it's "always do the right thing." It's not "innovation," it's "look at the problem from a different angle." Articulating our values as verbs gives us a clear idea—we have a clear idea of how to act in any situation. (p. 53)

WHY ME? WHY US?

Too often in schools those championing the work of diversity and equity are challenged with a confrontive take on the *why* question. In those settings the *why* question often morphs into "Why do we have to do this work?"—followed by resistance masked with queries such as the following:

- "Are you serious? We did this a few years ago, but it had another name."

- Or "Are you saying there is something wrong with us? We don't need this training; as educators we are natural human relations people." And the variation: "It is the teachers and other educators who retired years ago yet are still with us."

- Or the venerable "Why us? It is [fill in the blank—the superintendent's cabinet, the 'suits' downtown, the restive parents) who could benefit from this training."

Yet leading Cultural Proficiency initiatives calls on us to be clear with ourselves as to why we are doing this work. It is only when we are clear within ourselves that we are positioned to serve as leaders for our colleagues and the communities served by our schools. This loops us back to the starting line: "Why do we even have to know our *why?*" Some might ask, "I know my subject matter craft, so why this other stuff?" It is our belief and experience that when educators believe they can educate all students, they do so. Students can learn, irrespective of the racial and social class demographics of educators in our schools or school districts.

You have been called to transform your system because of your leadership commitment to equity. Leaders play a vital role in the effectiveness of any school, having a significant impact on students' achievement and school culture (Augustine-Shaw, 2015). Leadership ranks second in effect size related to student achievement (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). We encourage you to think about your relationships and experiences with race and social class, the moral imperative of education, and change.

WHY AN "INSIDE-OUT" JOURNEY?

As you proceed through this book, the phrase "inside-out journey" recurs in intentional fashion. Cultural Proficiency is a journey to better understand our values and beliefs, while simultaneously preparing to better understand the policies and practices of our schools and school districts in service to children and youth from diverse communities. Okay, let's pause for a moment.

You may be thinking that you are in a homogeneous community that reflects little or no racial, socioeconomic, gender, sexual orientation, or religious diversity and that there is no reason to believe that demographic change is imminent. You believe your children and youth will be fine. This may be true in the near term; however, there is a good chance your students will leave your community and venture into a fully diverse society. Also, communities change. Trends and indications across the United States and Canada lead us to believe that our communities are undergoing demographic changes, albeit slowly. As educators it is incumbent that we prepare ourselves and thereby the students in our schools to be able to function in diverse settings—schools, workplaces, neighborhoods.

So we are full circle in this first part of our Cultural Proficiency journey. It comes back to us. Being clear why we do the work of access and equity is important. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the discrepancies in who is afflicted with the virus: disproportionately people of color, people from low-income communities, and the aged. It is more than coincidental that many children and youth of color and those from low-income communities are less successful in our schools. Our *why* is clear here—the gaps in data are unacceptable, untenable, and contemptible. Let us emphasize that

we are referencing much more here than just student academic achievement scores and rates of discipline referrals. Until we see the day when we can say without a doubt, "All of our students are thriving" or "When students graduate from our system, they are prepared to navigate and be effective in diverse spaces," we as educators must be focused on creating systems, through continuous improvement and mindset growth, that show each child their worth through equitable, accessible, and inclusionary outcomes.

The question continues, "Why do we do this work? Why is this work even needed? Why do we even have to pose the 'why' question?" If we were visiting a friend's house for a pool party and we witnessed a child struggling in the pool and in danger of drowning, we would not ask, "Why lend aid to the child?" That said, wide swaths of society still resist equity and inclusivity that lend aid to those afflicted. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to be clear as to our values and commitment in fostering an inclusive, socially just experience for all children and youth in our schools.

LOOKING IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

Crafting a response to "Why do we do this work of access and equity?" is central to our success with students from a broad array of backgrounds and experiences. Cultural Proficiency entails a journey of continuous, endless learning and self-discovery. We learn about others—our colleagues, students, and communities—served by our schools. We learn of our reactions to racial and social communities different from our own.

Today, educators across the United States and Canada come together to guide our societies and help move them in the direction of becoming inclusive democracies. Posing the *Why* question can be fundamental to recognizing our central role in creating an inclusive democracy. We shift from believing *all students can learn* to believing that *we can learn to educate all students.*

ON TO OUR NEXT DESTINATION

The next chapter begins with a discussion of the moral imperative of education. Setting education as a moral imperative requires a "whatever it takes" mentality. Following this introduction, we provide the foundations of the research behind this book. This will include comprehensive descriptions of the Cultural Proficiency Framework and an introduction to Eaveston School District. The descriptive case study, completed during a two-year implementation of the Cultural Proficiency Framework, illustrates the organizational change process at the district and school levels using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency.

REFLECTION, DIALOGUE, AND ACTION PROCESS

REFLECTION • Dialogue • Action

What calls you as an educational leader to act to achieve equity in our school districts, buildings, and classrooms?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Reflection • DIALOGUE • Action

Discuss the individual and collective reasons for engaging in the work of Cultural Proficiency with your team. Take note of your experiences while dialoguing with your colleagues.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Reflection • Dialogue • ACTION

The strategy used here includes recommended actions to prepare you for creating your own culturally proficient leadership plan. We ask you to start with "Why?" Before reading Chapter 2, please take some time and complete your first travel log by answering the most important question: _Why are you taking this journey of Cultural Proficiency?_ Think personally and professionally.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____