

# Research Brief

## Cultural Proficiency

**Question: What is cultural proficiency?**

**Summary of Findings:**

### In a Nutshell

Cultural proficiency and diversity are often used interchangeably, yet there are some distinct differences between them. Cultural proficiency is the umbrella under which diversity falls. According to one source, “Cultural proficiency is a way of being that allows individuals and organizations to interact effectively with people who differ from them” (*Cultural Proficiency: What is it?*). Diversity includes: race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, social class, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, language, friends, geography, political views, and social organizations (*Cultural proficiency: Definitions; How to teach students who don't look like you: Culturally relevant teaching*). Teacher turn over in urban schools is around 50%, higher than in low-poverty schools, and more than half transfer or leave the profession in five years (*Editor's review of See you when we get there: Teaching for change in urban schools by Gregory Michie*). Public schools have been viewed as the place where all students go to become Americanized. “Furthermore, far too often, the cultural differences of these children are equated with cultural inferiority and not surprisingly, children from these groups are more likely to do poorly in school, get into trouble, or drop out” (Confronting the challenge of diversity in education).

The literature is rich with information and guidance about how individuals and organizations can develop significant cultural proficiency. It continuously states that this capacity must first be developed from the “inside out.” Some common barriers when examining cultural proficiency and diversity are: having a sense of entitlement; feeling that there is “power over”; and being unable to see the need to adapt or change. Things an individual must ask him/herself and honestly answer when embarking on this journey are: “What is my reaction to people who are different from me?;” “How aware am I of how people who are culturally different from me react to my presence?;” (*Transforming organizations from the inside out with cultural proficiency: An interview with Richard Martinez*) “What are our similarities?;” and “What are the cultural expectations about education (*Editor's review of See you when we get there: Teaching for change in urban schools by Gregory Michie*). However, once a personal shift from “tolerating diversity” (stereotypical visions) to “transforming for equity” (personal approach to change) is made, true acceptance is achievable.

When a school is examining their cultural tolerance and program, the following should be explored and investigated:

- **Assess the culture**  
How are people treated? Included? Who are those on the “inside?” Identify those on the “outside.” Acknowledge the cultural heritages that students bring to the culture. Recognize that cultures are not homogeneous.
- **Value diversity**  
Positively affirm and endorse the individual’s values and beliefs. Validate the students, their backgrounds, experiences and learning styles. Ask students questions and seek knowledge about other’s cultures. Make realistic connections between home and school.
- **Handle the vigorousness of differences**  
Look at diversity through new lenses and different perspectives. Provide ample opportunities for students to acknowledge themselves and each other. Use conflict as a method to learn about and from each other.
- **Adapt**  
Openly, respectfully and sensitively discuss and acknowledge differences. Make curriculum meaningful to everyday life. Support students in the exploration of their cultural identity.
- **Institutionalize**  
Acknowledge and implement change. Training of all staff should be on-going and continuous.

**Resources:**

- **Addressing cultural diversity in schools: Culturally responsive pedagogy**  
This brief is a succinct, yet thorough description of things educators can do to become more aware of and sensitive to cultural and linguistic diversity in students.  
[http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Diversity\\_Brief.pdf](http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Diversity_Brief.pdf)
- **Confronting the challenge of diversity in education**  
Viewing diversity in educational systems as an advantage and strength rather than a disadvantage is explored in this article.  
<http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/pndivers.html>
- **Cultural proficiency – Definitions**  
Descriptions and definitions of the many characteristics of cultural proficiency are provided in this piece.  
<http://www.sjcccd.org/hr/attachments/msc/eval%20handout%20cultural%20proficiency%20.pdf>

- Cultural proficiency: What is it?  
This piece defines cultural proficiency and the important aspects of awareness for organizational awareness.  
[http://p21.us/resources/Cultural\\_Proficiency.doc](http://p21.us/resources/Cultural_Proficiency.doc)
- Culturally responsive teaching  
Concise descriptions of culturally appropriate pedagogy are given in this piece.  
<http://www.intime.uni.edu/multiculture/curriculum/culture/Teaching.htm>
- Editor's review of See you when we get there: Teaching for change in urban schools by Gregory Michie  
This is an extensive description of the book cited in the above title. An overview of the five excellent teachers of color from Chicago along with their beliefs and pedagogy are provided in this review.  
<http://www.hepg.org/her/abstract/18>
- Educating teachers for diversity  
This brief article describes programs that can be used with preservice teachers to train them in working with diverse student populations.  
<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/presrvce/pe300.htm>
- Elements of cultural proficiency  
A chart is provided in this piece that cites the elements of cultural proficiency for teachers, site administrators, boards of education, district administrators and community.  
<http://www.google.com/search?q=%22cultural+proficiency%22&hl=en&client=safari&rls=en&pwst=1&start=10&sa=N>
- How to teach students who don't look like you: Culturally relevant teaching  
This site provides rich excerpts from this book, which include understanding diverse learners and the achievement gap.  
[http://books.google.com/books?id=d1r0uTMuOZYC&pg=PA8&lpg=PA8&dq=%22cultural+proficiency%22&source=web&ots=x-Sp46b8Lf&sig=ACO4\\_wopRN21D8fzABm2zPH-JsI#PPP1,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=d1r0uTMuOZYC&pg=PA8&lpg=PA8&dq=%22cultural+proficiency%22&source=web&ots=x-Sp46b8Lf&sig=ACO4_wopRN21D8fzABm2zPH-JsI#PPP1,M1)
- Linguistic and cultural diversity  
Active links to information about this topic are provided on this site.  
[http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/resabout/culture/3\\_diversity.html](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/resabout/culture/3_diversity.html)
- Research knowledge and policy issues in cultural diversity and education  
Although this article is from 1994, it provides relevant and current questions about what it means to have cultural membership.  
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/EdReformStudies/SysReforms/tharp1.html>
- The benefits of diversity in education for democratic citizenship  
This study looks at some of the effects of Brown V. Board of Education. "Positive benefits of diversity were demonstrated in a study comparing students in a curricular diversity

program with students in a matched control group ( $n=174$ ), and in a longitudinal survey of University of Michigan students ( $n=1670$ ).”

<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~pgurin/benefits.html>

- Transforming organizations from the inside out with cultural proficiency: An interview with Richard Martinez  
A thorough description of critical elements for individuals and organizations to explore in order to develop meaningful cultural proficiency are provided in this article.  
<http://www.pegasus.com/levpoints/martinezint.html>
- What’s your cultural literacy?  
This brief piece provides the six points along the cultural proficiency continuum that show how people see and respond to differences.  
<http://www.yesmagazine.org/article.asp?ID=1457>

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