

THE “CULTURE AUDIT”: A LEADERSHIP TOOL FOR ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING IN DIVERSE SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES*

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Abstract

This module is designed to introduce educational leaders to an organizational assessment tool called a “culture audit.” Literature on organizational cultural competence suggests that culture audits are a valuable tool for determining how well school policies, programs, and practices respond to the needs of diverse groups and prepare students to interact globally. Data gathered from culture audits can guide school and community-wide strategic planning efforts to close achievement gaps, promote prosocial behaviors, and develop global competencies.



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1 Introduction

Schools and colleges around the world must be culturally competent in order to prepare students to succeed in an increasingly diverse and globally interconnected environment. Generally defined, culturally competent

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educational organizations value diversity in both theory and practice and make teaching and learning relevant and meaningful to students of various cultures (Klotz, 2006). Educational leaders must be equipped with the necessary tools to assess how well policies, programs, and practices align with the needs of diverse groups and prepare people to interact globally. The “culture audit” is a valuable organizational assessment tool to guide strategic planning for diversity and global competence. Potential domains of focus and data collection strategies for schools and colleges are illustrated here. Cultural competence assessment strategies could be included in graduate educational leadership programs to better prepare educational administrators to effectively manage diverse schools and colleges.

2 What is a "Culture Audit?"

Researchers agree that school culture is an important, yet often overlooked, component of school improvement (Freiberg, 1998; Peterson & Deal, 1998). Wagner and Madsen-Copas (2002) stress the value of culture audits in determining the quality and health of school cultures and recommends using a five step auditing process that includes: interviews, observations, surveys, checklists, and presentations to community stakeholders.

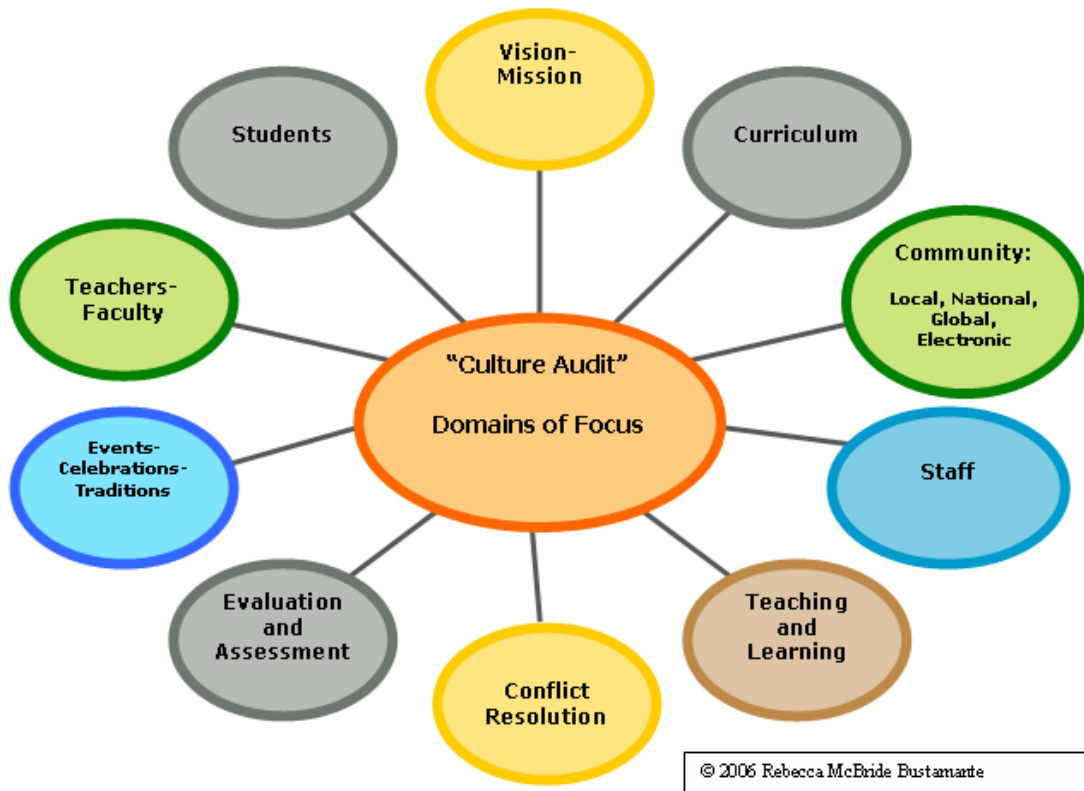
The concept of school culture is further complicated by the multiplicity of racial/ethnic cultures that are typically represented in schools and colleges. For this reason, organizational culture assessments are essential to ensuring the development of cultural competence in schools (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). Culture audits examine how diverse cultural perspectives are reflected in the values and behaviors manifested in the overall school culture (National Center for Cultural Competence, 2005).

Just as a financial audit reveals strengths and gaps in financial procedures and practices to inform strategic plans for financial improvement, a culture audit focuses on how well an organization incorporates perspectives of diverse groups to inform comprehensive school improvement.

3 Primary Domains of Analysis in School and College Settings

Practicing educational leaders frequently want to know what a culture audit “really looks like.” While auditing formats may vary depending on the specific school, college, or district, there are some key areas that can be examined to determine strengths and needs.

To help educational leaders visualize how a culture audit might look, the diagram below reflects ten potential domains of focus for conducting culture audits in schools and colleges. The domains are not meant to be exhaustive and may be expanded or reduced to accommodate the needs and interests of the individual organization.



Based on professional experience, research, and literature on organizational cultural competence and proficiency (Bustamante, 2005), examples of culturally competent practices are listed under each domain to provide a better sense of the kind of factors that can be observed in a culture audit.

I. Vision/Mission

- Stated commitment to diversity.
- Integrated global perspectives.

II. Curriculum

- Literature selections reflect a variety of cultural perspectives.
- Integration of world views, geography, and history.
- Linguistic and content objectives are addressed for second language learners.

III. Students

- Balanced racial/ethnic representation in advanced placement, honors, gifted programs.

- Regular meetings held with randomly selected groups to obtain feedback and consider student “voice” in decision-making.
- Variety of student leadership development opportunities for all students.
- Observed inter-racial/inter-ethnic social integration among students.
- Support programs to promote achievement and retention of lower achieving groups.
- Student-initiated community service.

IV. Teachers/faculty

- Conscious recruitment of diverse groups.
- Mentoring and support programs for new teachers.
- Vertical and horizontal teacher teaming according to individual strengths, leadership abilities, and interests.
- Conscious integration efforts to diverse teacher teams.
- Professional development that addresses race, culture, and language opportunities and challenges.
- Focused, long term professional development.

V. Teaching and learning

- Differentiated instruction.
- Researched strategies that account for various learning styles.
- Technology integration.
- Connections to student culture and prior knowledge.
- Second language learning and teaching strategies.
- Service learning.

VI. Communities

- Outreach to various local community constituency groups.
- Inclusion of all potential stakeholder groups in community-building forums through use of parent liaisons.
- Parent involvement programs for all culture groups.
- Established national and global ties through partnerships with similar organizations.
- Realization and utilization of the electronic community for relationship building and sourcing best practices.

VII. Conflict Resolution

- Recognition of the inevitability of intercultural conflict.
- Peer mediation and proactive approaches to conflict resolution.
- Practices to ensure classroom and school safety for all.

VIII. Evaluations and Assessments

- Authentic student assessments to complement standardized tests.
- Formative and summative program evaluations.
- 360 degree teacher and administrator evaluations.
- Ongoing organizational assessments aimed at continual improvement.

IX. Staff

- Opportunities for staff input into policies and procedures.
- Professional development opportunities on attitudes and behaviors toward diversity.
- Recognition of informal leadership roles.

- Focus on staff growth and integration.

X. Events/celebrations/traditions

- Examination of organizational traditions to check for exclusive/inclusive practices.
- Diverse representation at events and celebrations.
- Celebrations that reflect various cultures and introduce the community to new cultures.
- Integration of experienced and entry-level personnel in change management.

4 Data Collection Approaches

In conducting a culture audit, data collection methods would ideally include mixed methods that combine traditional quantitative and qualitative methodology. Some suggestions for data collection include:

- Document Analysis of internal/external communications, written curriculum, policies, newsletters, websites, correspondence, brochures, etc.
- Statistical analysis of demographic and achievement data (existing) to ID gaps and need areas.
- Checklists.
- Focus Groups and Interviews with various stakeholder groups (include students).
- Structured Observations of meetings, gatherings, artifacts, décor, social events, to check out actual behavior.
- Diagrams of informal leaders (teachers, students, staff members) group interactions.
- Surveys combined with other methods to triangulate perceptual data.

Data collection may be periodic or ongoing and may be incorporated into already existing assessments (e.g., school climate surveys, community meetings, etc.). Culture audits do not require extensive time or resources. They require the consideration of culture as a factor in student achievement and overall school improvement.

Educational leaders and organizations must make a paradigm shift in order to develop culturally competent and proficient policies, programs, and practices. The paradigm shift involves recognition of the role of culture in human existence and its influence on organizational and individual values, attitudes, and behaviors. “Culture audits” help make cultural factors in schools more tangible so that appropriate and effective school improvements can be more appropriately targeted.

Click Here to access The School-wide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist (Bustamante and Nelson, 2007; all rights reserved)²

5 References

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²See the file at <http://cnx.org/content/m13691/latest/Culture_Audit.pdf>