

# Cultural Intelligence

ABILITY TO ADAPT TO NEW CULTURAL SETTINGS

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Our schools and school libraries are becoming more diverse. What cultural barriers do you face in your position? Have you come across challenges in how you handle cultural situations with students, teachers, or administrators? If so, have you considered skills that can help you facilitate conversations more effectively? How would you rate your organization's effectiveness managing cultural situations? This article discusses how the use of cultural intelligence can address these concerns and help make us become more effective school library professionals.

### What Is Culture?

Culture matters when considering any situation. Because culture has many definitions, for purposes of this article, consider culture as shared beliefs, values, assumptions, and behaviors that distinguish one group from another. Think about how your own culture and the culture of others can have a positive or negative impact on a situation.

### What Is Cultural Intelligence?

P. Christopher Earley and Soon Ang officially defined cultural intelligence in 2003; however, it is not a new concept. We each have a cultural intelligence level (CQ) that measures how successful we are when dealing with cultural settings. There are times when an individual may be able to handle cross-cultural situations better than other people, and this is because of the individual's CQ.

Cultural intelligence is the capability to adapt and function effectively in new cultural situations. Earley and Ang (2003) initially introduced three facets or factors relevant to the cultural intelligence framework: cognition, motivation, and behavior. Soon Ang and Linn Van Dyne (2008) extended the model to include four types of factors that,

when used together, lead to effectiveness in adapting to different cultures: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral. In our own cultures we are usually well versed in our own norms, behaviors, and customs enabling us to understand what may be going on in a situation. It is when we interact with others from different backgrounds that we see that ideals and actions may mean something entirely different to someone else. At times like this we become stressed, worried, and, often, uncomfortable about a situation.

Think about a situation in which you worked with a student or parent and differing views came into play and created tension or affected the success of the interaction. If you had been applying your cultural intelligence, that interaction may have been completely different. To ensure that interactions are successful, we must be prepared and take action beyond only being *aware* of differences.

### Cultural Intelligence Factors

The CQ model is based on social and psychological aspects, building upon research by Robert Sternberg on the loci of multiple intelligences (1985). Part of the process of cultural intelligence is to examine, observe, and understand yourself and others based on cultural aspects.

The cultural intelligence model as illustrated by the Cultural Intelligence Center

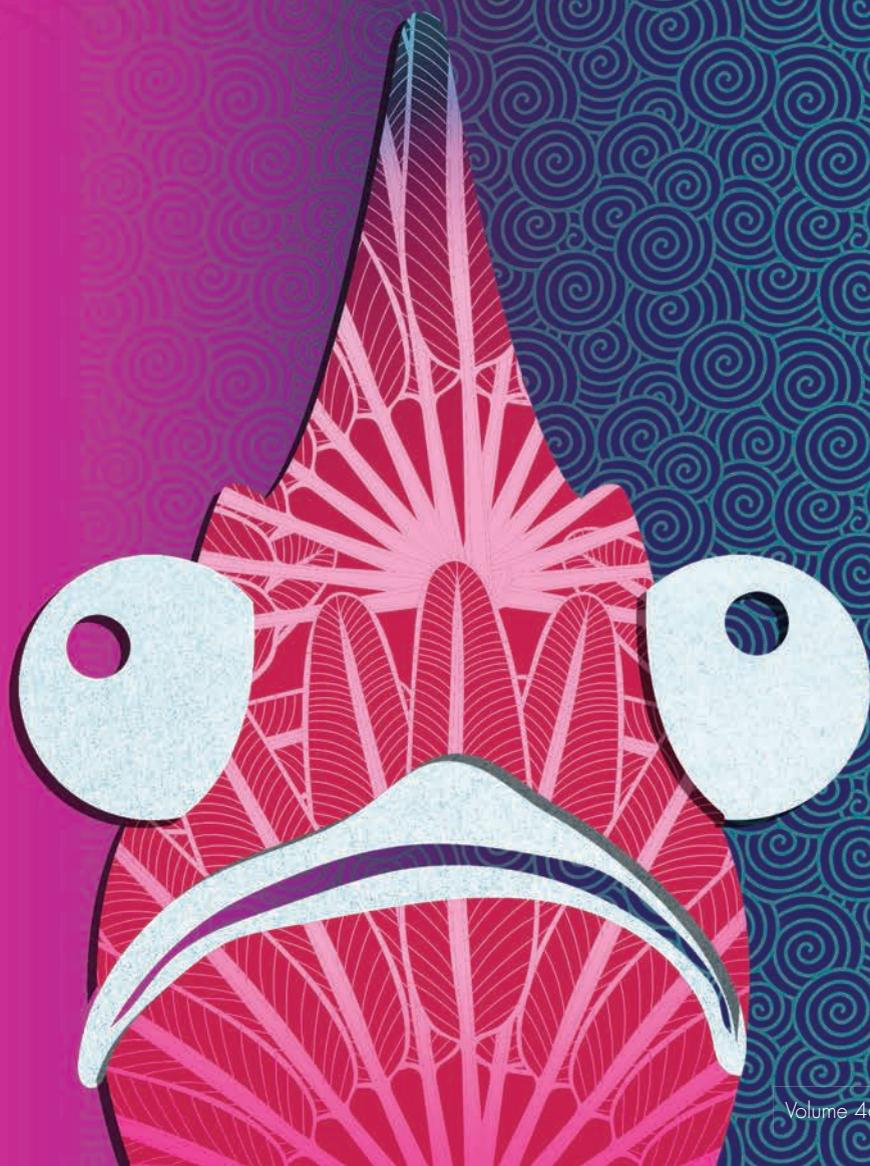
(2017) contains four factors that you can apply in your own work. Once you understand each factor, you can begin to apply them and see the impact you are making. The four factors are flexible; you can improve upon any area in which you may be weak. Think of each factor as a piece within a larger pie as seen in the cyclical image in figure 1.

The model begins with drive. Drive is your own motivation and confidence to succeed in unfamiliar multicultural situations. If you lack this drive—or it is weak—you may be ineffective in interactions with others who have perspectives different from your own. The second factor, knowledge, is the cognitive piece involving knowledge about other cultures. Do you understand similarities and variances of multiple cultures, including your own? Strategy, the third factor, relates to your understanding of your own judgments. How do you strategize and plan in light of them? This metacognitive element requires a plan for these interactions. The last factor, action, focuses on behavior

Figure 1. Four factors in the cultural intelligence model.



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based on that plan. What does your behavior look like when you are faced with a challenging cultural situation? Do you reflect, do you modify your behavior, or do you stay still and not change? Successful action reinforces drive, and the cycle continues.

Using all four factors is essential to employing cultural intelligence effectively. Our schools and libraries are very diverse. If we do not use our own cultural intelligence and try to improve ourselves in preparation for multicultural interactions, we will not be as effective. According to the research, high cultural intelligence has proven positive results, including positively impacting cross-cultural adjustment and morale, resulting in greater personal well-being, and leading to better work performance (Cultural Intelligence Center 2017).

### Applying Cultural Intelligence

Application of cultural intelligence can start with the smallest interaction (one-on-one) to a group or department interaction. You can start today! Here are a few examples within a school library that you may want to consider.

Are you entering into an agreement with a library and information science vendor for materials? Will you need to negotiate terms of the contract? If so, you can use your CQ to prepare, understand the vendor's mindset, and improve successful negotiations, particularly international negotiations.

Do you coach or mentor others at your school library or even within an association? If so, use your CQ to help develop these individuals into leaders within our profession.

How did you train for your own international assignment? If you are given an international assignment, prior to executing the assignment you should be trained on cultural intelligence to help with the transition.

Have you considered your own professional development? What conferences, events, or webinars do you participate in? You can incorporate cultural intelligence into your own professional development plans and create

an ongoing development plan. (E-mail me to ask how to take an online cultural intelligence assessment and learn more.)

Is diversity and inclusion training required at your organization? Instead of focusing on mere compliance with requirements, fostering development of cultural intelligence offers a new method and focus for these trainings.

Do you handle performance reviews or are you a school library professional who receives a performance review? If the answer to either is "yes," CQ can be used to assess candidates in their performance reviews whether for promotion, hire, or a raise.

Our school libraries are diverse and becoming more so. Did you know that we now have at minimum five generations (if not six, depending on where the generations split) in the workforce? This means that teachers, administrators, staff, vendors, etc. vary in their perspectives, and we need to be aware of how to interact culturally with each generation. We also need to be cognizant of our student population and the genera-



tional aspects of their age cohort. You can use the cultural intelligence model to help you understand those aspects. The framework above is both a process for approaching cultural situations and a means for measuring cultural intelligence. Cultural intelligence assessments provide greater understanding of your own group, or team levels of CQ, so that you can plan accordingly.

### Relevant Library Association Standards, Guidelines, and Statements

Standards and guidelines within our profession offer some insights about cultural competency and its role in learning. The new American Association of School Librarians (AASL) standards, *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries*, were launched in November 2017. Of the six Shared Foundations within the standards, cultural intelligence is most applicable and integrated within the Shared Foundation of Include. The Include Key Commitment for learners and for school librarians states that they will “demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to inclusiveness and respect for diversity in the learning community” (AASL 2018)—in other words, demonstrate empathy and equity as they embrace diversity and make informed decisions.

The four Domains (Think, Create, Share, Grow) within the AASL Standards align with the four capabilities of CQ as shown in figure 2. The Grow Domain when applied to

CQ is the opportunity to learn about others, but also to be motivated and energized to learn about differing opinions and beliefs. In the Think Domain as it applies to CQ, learners use their cognition to understand and learn about differing ideas. Within the Create Domain learners start to make connections and plan for encounters or strategize. Last is the Share Domain. To demonstrate respect when sharing, approaches to communicating with others who have diverse backgrounds and diverse thoughts may need to be adjusted.

As school library professionals, you can demonstrate diversity, inclusion, and equity in a number of ways, starting with awareness and engagement (CQ drive/AASL Think Domain). Next, you are interacting with diverse groups, a circumstance that offers a chance to understand and learn about differing views (CQ knowledge/AASL Create Domain). With CQ strategy/AASL Share Domain, you are now facilitating

experiences, planning for them, and contributing to differing conversations with diverse individuals. Last, CQ action/AASL Share Domain encompasses modifying actions and behaviors to take advantage of opportunities for providing a welcoming atmosphere and supporting learners’ empowerment in diverse situations. It is at this point that you are enacting CQ and demonstrating school librarian competencies as a whole.

AASL adopted a position statement on diversity in January 2011, and respect for the value of diversity permeates AASL’s vision statement, values statement, and 2009 strategic plan. In the position statement on diversity, AASL affirms its commitment to diversity of membership, inclusiveness, and fostering student success and empowerment in an inclusive environment. Looking at leadership roles and supporting efforts to increase diversity in this area are

Figure 2. Parallels between CQ factors and Domains in AASL Standards.



also important in the context of AASL values. The model of cultural intelligence is another way to look at diversity. Consider how you can incorporate demonstrating and fostering CQ in your schools to help embrace that diversity.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' *IFLA School Library Guidelines* (2015) focus on helping library staff with their efforts to provide students and teachers with effective programs and services. Culture is discussed throughout these guidelines in various areas, including instruction, curriculum, inclusion, community involvement, and resources. School librarians should take a close look at these guidelines, and determine how to get started and implement the cultural aspects.

Other standards and guidelines are also helpful for school library professionals to review because each document focuses on a unique audience. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), all divisions of ALA, each offer detailed information to help us understand where cultural competency fits within our profession. To review each association's standards and guidelines, view their dedicated pages on the ALA website:

*ACRL Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries* (2012) <[www.ala.org/acrl/standards/diversity](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/diversity)>

*ALSC Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries* (2015) <[www.ala.org/alsc/edcareers/alscorecomps](http://www.ala.org/alsc/edcareers/alscorecomps)>

*YALSA Core Professional Values for the Teen Services Profession* (2015) <[www.ala.org/yalsa/core-professional-values-teen-services-profession](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/core-professional-values-teen-services-profession)>

Your own school libraries or schools may have policies and standards in place that incorporate cultural competency. Now is the time to review those or take steps to revise or create policies and standards that include cultural intelligence.

### Getting Started with Cultural Intelligence

It is never too late to start understanding cultural intelligence. Beyond reviewing policies and guidelines, you can begin keeping the cultural intelligence framework in mind while observing interactions. Determine what factors are at play and what could be done differently



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to make the interaction successful. Interacting with an unfamiliar culture offers the opportunity to practice and explore your own use of cultural intelligence. Learning about others—for example, students' experiences, values, and perspectives—will help you to deliver better service. It is a time investment in yourself and our profession. Ongoing assessment, training, and a commitment to cultural intelligence can help us become more effective school librarians.

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