

A New Paradigm for the 21st Century

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Only together can we create educational institutions that facilitate all students learning 21st century skills in culturally democratic learning environments.

Culturally courageous leadership (CCL) is already practiced to some extent by a few persons in some school community stakeholder groups. However, the practice of collaborative CCL by all school community stakeholders is a totally new concept. This chapter begins with a review of needed actions, based on what is discussed in Chapters 1 through 6. These needed actions are the basis for the CCL paradigm.

KWL EXERCISE

1. Even if you cannot personally relate to any of the previously discussed biases and barriers to achievement at high levels, what do you think has been, other than limited financial resources, the major obstacle to high achievement by “historically underserved students”?
2. What questions are you most interested in having addressed so you can be more effective when attempting equity transformation?
3. In your experience, which conditions in school communities have been the greatest barriers to achievement at high levels by historically underserved students?



“MAJOR ACTIONS NEEDED” BY CULTURALLY COURAGEOUS LEADERS

One of the central ideas advanced in Chapters 1 through 6 is the critical relationship between various stakeholders’ personal identities, institutional biases, barriers, and educational outcomes.

I found several commonalities in low-performing schools where I was retained to identify major barriers to achievement at high levels, but the contextual variables in each school community require serious consideration when deciding *what* combination of things need to be addressed and *how* they should be addressed. Each school community is unique in some respects, and no one size fits all.

In all of the school districts where I served as a district administrator or external evaluator, some teachers said they found it difficult to teach and model equity in the classroom when they didn’t experience more equity and support in their school environment. More support for teachers was articulated as essential for them to provide equitable educational opportunities, given increased class sizes and a broader array of student readiness levels in their classes. The actions needed in all of the schools are listed. The actions reflect many of the conditions described in the guide.

1. Engage in ongoing collaborative efforts that involve persons from various school community stakeholder groups, to improve cross-cultural communication and conflict management within and between various cultural/racial groups.

These efforts should also be aimed at confronting and changing culturally destructive attitudes, behaviors, and norms. It is important to be mindful that there are major cultural differences in self-identity, worldview, values, and priorities *within* racial/cultural groups. For example, not all Blacks, Latino/a’s, Asians, or Whites think alike when it comes to anything, and especially when it comes to their opinions about what if any obstacles keep them from achieving to their fullest potential and what should be done to get rid of these obstacles.

2. Change the nature of cultural politics that usually emanate from human fears.

The media play a major role in helping to perpetuate identity politics, also known as cultural politics. Such politics includes competition for scarce resources to fund curriculum or program priorities of different constituencies, all of whom are trying

to achieve more support for their perceived needs being adequately addressed. For example, advocates for improvements in English language development and bilingual programs may be competing with advocates for improvements in head-start or enrollment options that used to be euphemistically called “school choice,” “desegregation,” or “integration” programs. Such programs in the past may have been characterized as Latino/a priorities or Black priorities. Labeling such advocacy in this manner is very divisive and counterproductive to collaborative joint efforts to achieve equitable educational outcomes.

3. Change the toxic hidden curriculum, which would involve helping teachers engage in critical self-reflection and receive helpful feedback from peer or supervisor observation.

Related needed actions are an increase in the courage and savvy of peers and supervisors to collaboratively confront and help change conditions or teaching behaviors that prevent teaching all students at high levels. Remembering that “hidden curriculum” includes attitudes, communication, collaboration, and conflict management norms as well as expectations, a “toxic hidden curriculum” reflects dysfunctional relationships between adults or between adults and students. Any school norms that are culturally insensitive may cause emotional abuse of students. Such norms work against cultural democracy and compromise any efforts to achieve equitable outcomes by student subgroups in such areas as disciplinary practices, test scores, graduation rates, successful completion of higher level courses, and referrals to special education.

4. Increase the capacity of teachers and administrators to identify and effectively confront racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, and so on in their school environments.

There is a strong relationship between deficiencies in teacher and administrative preservice preparation and on-the-job professional development programs and teachers/administrators ineffectively dealing with racism, ethnocentrism, ageism, and sexism. The “ism’s” also include classism (i.e., discrimination against persons of low socioeconomic status) as well as bias based on primary language, disability, religion, phenotype characteristics such as obesity, and sexual orientation. Most teachers and administrators have probably had minimum exposure to coursework or professional development on how to identify and effectively confront both the blatant and even the most subtle but very destructive manifestations of these discriminatory practices. This includes alternative ways to confront and eliminate them when making decisions about all major educational functions in a school and district, such as facilities, business operations, personnel, instructional, administrative, and school/community and support services.

The work of Judith Warren Little (1982) on teacher collegiality and experimentation is a professional development model worthy of being used to facilitate teacher collaborative focus on identifying and eliminating the “isms” and biases in

the curriculum, in schools in general, and in facilitating teacher capacity to engender achievement at high levels by students of African and Latino/a descent.

5. Increase team and trust building to reduce cultural dissonance and achieve equity.

The relationship of cultural dissonance within/across stakeholder groups to long-term failure of equity transformation efforts is not given nearly enough attention. Deep-seated equity initiatives are extremely difficult to achieve, such as offering sufficient incentives to attract many of the most experienced teachers to work in schools of the most academically needy students. Another equity initiative that might meet a firewall of resistance is requiring all staff in a district to engage in developmentally appropriate professional learning programs that focus on creating culturally responsive schools. Cultural dissonance is when there is some discord, discomfort, and disagreement between persons with very different attitudes, behaviors, and priorities that are influenced by a host of factors, such as one's socioeconomic status and perception of their life chances.

Cultural dissonance occurs between persons who have very different ways of interpreting and judging what they witness or learn. So when equity initiatives such as those mentioned above are attempted, there is the distinct possibility there will be major conflicts or dissonance within stakeholder groups, such as teachers, and also between stakeholder groups, such as teachers and parents. Such dissonance within and between groups may contribute to erosion of support for equity programs in place, and the inclination by district- or site-level decision makers to not attempt other equity initiatives. Dissonance within groups and across groups can increase when there aren't ongoing leadership efforts to improve communication and trust/team building.

Team building usually includes attention to increasing awareness of personal similarities, differences, life experiences, and strengths in a variety of areas, and engaging in group activities that enhance comfort with and respect for each other as well as the ability to effectively utilize each other's strengths on complex tasks.

Trust building will sometimes go a step further by engaging participants in completing tasks that require sharing personal values on controversial topics, appropriately sharing other aspects of one's hidden self or taking risks that may go beyond one's comfort zone. The goal of trust building is to strengthen the capacity of culturally/racially diverse groups to fully and unequivocally commit to some equity priorities. Another goal is to function effectively with high levels of trust in very stressful conflict-ridden environments where there is little control over what can happen at any given time.

6. Increase ongoing advocacy and support for in-depth equity transformation.

It is seldom acknowledged that a lack of political mobilization and community organizing for increased advocacy of particular equity initiatives can result in having

no sustained support for deep-seated equity transformation of any kind. For example, if there is no ongoing effort to develop a constituency of support among parents, community persons, district office administrators, principals, teachers, or higher education faculty for professional learning related to teacher expectations, then such training is not likely to occur or be sustained over time for a critical mass of persons.

Deep-seated equity transformation is defined as when both in-depth personal and organizational transformation is being pursued simultaneously. If there are fledging efforts to improve the academic expectations that a small group of teachers has for historically underserved students, with no follow-up support, then such training is not likely to continue and few results will be observed in the classroom. The quest to engage teachers in personal transformation related to their expectations of students in the classroom must be accompanied by advocacy and support for transforming the entire district or school related to student expectations.

When there is an absence of such advocacy across stakeholder groups, with little positive results for whatever is done on a piecemeal basis, then the likelihood of generating widespread advocacy and support for more ambitious equity transformation is negligible.

Education is a very political process, meaning there are always competing agendas and interpretations or rationales of what is most needed to achieve desired results. In-depth equity transformation would include more than cosmetic changes like one-time-only professional development sessions and annual school or classroom activities during the appropriate month for celebrating the heritage and accomplishments of a particular group.

Many equity initiatives are not comprehensive and play around the edges of including cultural and structural transformation that would significantly affect the development of cultural democracy and the achievement of equitable educational outcomes. Such outcomes are not possible without unrelenting advocacy and support from a supermajority of the school board, and a superintendent willing to utilize all of the leverage at his or her disposal in implementing the board's progressive vision related to equity transformation.

Boards may need to be lobbied by the superintendent and an articulate, persistent constituency in the community for them to provide such support. Superintendents will likely need the same kind of community support and advocacy even when they have the public support of their board of education. There will be a lot of naysayers and resistance to deep-seated equity transformation from all levels in the school community. Opponents of equity transformation may think they have a lot to lose regarding the privileges held by many under the status quo.

Advocacy and support are different phenomena. Advocacy involves public lobbying by educators and community activists for particular issues or changes and the solicitation of funds as well as volunteers to help increase such advocacy. Support involves employees having both the psychological disposition and work-related skills, providing their expertise, and taking the initiative to recruit others who will assist in the successful implementation of equity policies and practices that result in achieving

cultural democracy and equitable educational outcomes. “Cultural democracy” and “equitable educational outcomes” must be more than mere slogans; they must be broken down into specific policies and practices, the sequence in which they should occur, with implications for the functioning of each stakeholder group. Benchmarks are essential to use as guideposts for monitoring progress in achieving desired outcomes, coaching and use of exemplars must be used to facilitate success, and evaluation criteria must be used to determine whether the benchmark targets have been achieved. This is the outline of an accountability process that is essential for equitable educational outcomes to have a meaningful chance of being achieved.

7. Involve a representative group of stakeholders in systematic investigations of any alleged bias and in investigating how schools are run related to equity reform/transformation.

When there is any reasonable doubt of good faith on the part of educators in how schools are run for historically underserved students, appropriate accountability actions need to be proposed. There are several norms that probably need to be established for any biases to be defused, neutralized, or eliminated. These norms include the creation of new joint ventures by school districts and community organizations that result in coalitions across racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and stakeholder groups. These coalitions could expand those meaningfully participating in developing a strong political constituency for equity reform/transformation.

Community participants need to learn the educational, problem-solving, decision-making, and accountability processes within schools and districts related to equity goals. Systematically attacking biases must be based on a strong knowledge base and includes not taking on too much at once. It might be wise to start with efforts to correct one biased area where there is greater likelihood of being successful. Such a strategy can also be characterized as piloting and phasing in equity initiatives.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. Based on your experience attempting to reduce or eliminate any racial achievement disparities, what are the three most *needed actions* in the above list, and which are the least needed, if any?
2. What are some other problems and needed actions you feel must be addressed to achieve equitable educational outcomes?
3. Identify the needed actions you are already addressing, and rate your efforts on a scale of 1–10, with 1 meaning very little success and 10 meaning great success.
4. What else must be addressed for historically underserved students of color to experience a level playing field in their school communities?



THE CULTURALLY COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP (CCL) PARADIGM

Figure 7a illustrates the components of CCL, each of which is discussed after identification of the paradigm's purpose and values. Examples are provided of how all stakeholder groups can individually and collaboratively practice CCL.

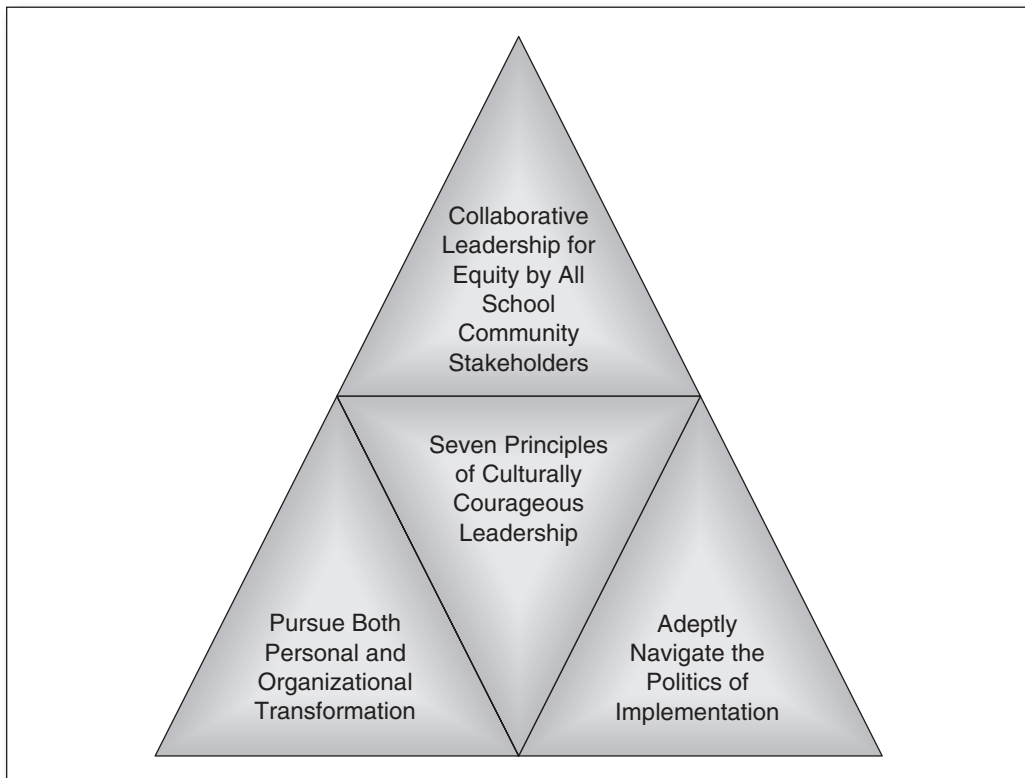
Purpose

To facilitate transformational thinking and leadership by those attempting to achieve equitable educational outcomes by all student groups

Values

- Schools have a responsibility to promote social justice.
- All students, especially those who have been historically underserved, have an equal right to cultural democracy.
- Elimination of cultural hegemony is a high priority.

Figure 7a The Culturally Courageous Leadership Paradigm



FIRST COMPONENT OF CCL: COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP BY ALL SCHOOL COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

A major distinction of the CCL paradigm is inclusiveness. Persons from all major stakeholder groups in school communities must collaboratively provide leadership for equitable educational outcomes to be achieved. These groups include students, parents, and community members, as well as support staff in schools, none of whom are usually thought of as part of the leadership team for helping bring about transformational change. The community member stakeholder group must include local or regional university faculty in teacher and administrator preparation programs who are desired as resources to schools in their area(s) of expertise.

Other more traditional stakeholder groups who must be part of the collaborative leadership team for equity are teachers, board members, and district and school site administrators. Although teachers and school site administrators by nature of their job assignments have more responsibility for the direct work with students, they cannot do it alone. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) remind us that collaboration should mean creating the vision together, not complying with what the principal says, and this may result in initial conflict, but that should be confronted and worked through because conflict is part of the collaborative process. Contrived collaboration can be worse than none at all.

The two groups who are not seen by most others or by themselves as necessary players on the leadership team for equity are students and community members, including university faculty as already described. Parents and students have token roles in many districts and schools, such as being members of advisory groups, school site councils, and governance teams. They are usually not involved at the operational level. However, students' belief in their ability to perform at high levels and their ideas about how to improve the ways they are taught are of critical importance. Likewise, parents, guardians, and community persons must be helped to increase their awareness, skills, and effectiveness in supporting and nurturing students so they make their best effort. All stakeholders must see themselves as "leaders for equity."

Culturally courageous leaders manifest the courage to challenge any beliefs or actions getting in the way of equitable educational outcomes. Beliefs and actions based on those beliefs are ingredients of any culture. So culturally courageous leaders are committed to changing cultural factors at a personal and organizational level that impede social justice for all.

Collaboration on providing leadership to equity efforts by persons in all of the groups mentioned is a rare occurrence. But the time has come for such leadership to become more widely practiced. Sabotage of equity efforts may be wittingly or unwittingly initiated by those in various stakeholder groups because they aren't totally

committed to the success of all students. Boards of education and administrators need to be held accountable by all other stakeholder groups for giving high priority to achieving equitable outcomes. Regardless of how well a school is moving toward or has achieved equitable outcomes, their success is not likely to be sustained without ongoing board of education support.

Collaboration by all school community stakeholders includes the following characteristics:

- Persons work together with a high degree of trust and without any disrespectful hierarchical status dynamics among them. They build upon the strengths of each other.
- Complex tasks are completed by subgroups, with differentiated tasks assigned to each person based on their unique frame of reference and skills.
- All participants are democratically engaged in problem identification, problem analysis, priority setting, planning, monitoring, and evaluation activities.
- An ongoing norm of consensus building and culturally responsive interests-based negotiation are used as part of the decision-making and problem-solving process. Interests-based negotiation, a term more commonly used in teacher/school district contract negotiations, includes the presentation by each side of their priority needs when trying to agree upon contract language. Culturally responsive interests-based negotiation related to equity would include the presentation by each stakeholder group of their priority needs when considering equity goals, equity practices, and expected equity outcomes.

The work of the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt) strongly supports the training of diverse school community stakeholder groups to enhance their capacity in collaboratively creating equitable schools (2005). In addition, the text edited by Krovetz and Arriaza is an excellent resource for helping strengthen teacher leadership in collaboratively fostering equitable schools (2006).

An example of collaborative culturally courageous leadership will hopefully help the reader visualize and more easily understand what is meant by the term.

VIGNETTE 7-1: COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS TO ADDRESS TEACHER DISCIPLINARY REFERRALS

In a middle school populated by a very culturally, socioeconomically, and linguistically diverse student population, there were a growing number of student–student conflicts and teacher discipline referrals for what is called “willful defiance.” Teachers were upset because the school administration was not implementing the kind of consequences they wanted for discipline referrals or responding in what they thought was a timely fashion to student–student conflicts within race and cross-racial groups.

The school administration was hesitant to impose a heavy hand on those students referred to the office by teachers for several reasons. An overwhelming majority of the students referred were African American, even though they constituted less than a third of the student population. For the most part, the teachers referring these students taught the classes where there was the greatest achievement gap between racially diverse groups of students. The district administration had already increased oversight of whether middle school sites were using a double standard in discipline practices, as alleged by some African American parents who had been complaining to their school board members. Board members wanted the complaints to stop and wanted the school sites to do a better job of addressing the underlying causes of disciplinary infractions, whatever they were.

When school disciplinary practices were discussed in a meeting of middle school principals with their immediate supervisor (a district office assistant superintendent), the principal of the school described above shared the challenges she faced related to discipline. Other principals described similar situations.

The assistant superintendent facilitated a problem-solving discussion on what kind of systemic intervention should be attempted. This was followed by his convening a study group that included some middle school principals, all assistant principals in middle schools, some counselor and parent representatives, and a business leader in the community who conducted training on neurolinguistic programming (NLP). This program focuses on the relationship between brain functioning and verbal/nonverbal communication behaviors. A study of NLP can help diagnose and reduce misunderstandings in communication and interpersonal conflict.

At this meeting, a selection process was developed for identifying student leaders at each school, who would, upon parent approval, be invited with their parents to meet with representatives of the study group to discuss the discipline problems. At the meeting with a very diverse group of student leaders, all students were very forthcoming in sharing their opinions about why there were so many student fights and why there were so many disciplinary referrals of African American students to the office.

After the meeting, 90% of the students (with parent permission) who had attended indicated an interest in becoming part of a new student leadership group at their school. The student group would have some responsibility for collaborating with adults at their school to work on reducing the conflicts and referrals, after receiving training by the community consultant described above. It was decided that follow-up support for the students so engaged would also be provided on a regular basis.

The assistant superintendent and principals collaboratively decided on how to fund this new program. A presentation was made to the board of education on the proposed program, and the board was requested to name a board member who would be their liaison to the program and attend future meetings when available.

The program was implemented and remained in effect for the next 3 years while the assistant superintendent remained in the district. The program was evaluated after its second year and found to have a significant impact on reducing student-student conflicts and disciplinary referrals at each school. All students involved in such incidents

were first referred to a student "conflict mediator" for resolution of the problems and only then referred to an assistant principal if necessary.

Seventy-five percent of all referrals to the student mediators were resolved at their level without any necessity for direct involvement of school administrators. The program was expanded to the high school level after its first year, with the same results. Most teachers were pleased with having student mediators, but some still complained that students were not receiving sufficient consequences for their actions, especially for "willful defiance."

Concurrently, professional development was provided for all teachers in each school on "education that is multicultural" and equity pedagogy. Data on the NLP program, including data on resolution of the referrals to student mediators, were used as part of the training. Some teachers resented having to participate in the training. Nevertheless, although it was implemented in various ways depending on the school, involvement was not optional.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

FN7-1 (SEE FACILITATOR NOTES IN APPENDIX 1)

1. In your work setting, what are the major constraints working against meaningful sustained collaboration for equity by all school community stakeholders?
2. What is your experience in collaborating on achieving equity with at least two stakeholder groups other than your own?
3. What are some small victories or major defeats you have experienced when collaborating with any other stakeholder groups to achieve equity?
4. On reflection, what would you do differently in prior efforts to achieve equity reform/transformation?

REVIEW OF CHAPTER 7

- Seven major issues (introduced in Section I) related to cultural democracy and equitable educational outcomes are presented as actions that need to be taken by all stakeholders collaboratively practicing culturally courageous leadership.
- The characteristics of collaboration by all school community stakeholders, including culturally responsive interests based negotiation, were described.
- A vignette describing an example of collaborative culturally courageous leadership was presented as an example of how it might look.

