C H A P T E R 4

The Cultural Proficiency Framework

The Cultural Proficiency authors implore school leaders to engage *long-range* transformative initiatives that institute periodic/annual benchmarks focused on continuous improvement for narrowing and closing achievement gaps. Policymakers at local, state, and national levels must ensure long-term equitable funding and access to broadband technology as fundamental for low-income communities and necessary for all students to be ready for college and career choices (Gjaja, Puckett, & Ryder, 2014; Polis & Gibson, 2014).

CULTURALLY PROFICIENT LEADERSHIP

Leadership in the context of our diverse population and our history of systemic inequity must hold equity, access, and inclusion as core values to guide each and every employee of the school and school district. As you proceed in this chapter, you will learn that the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency represent equity, access, and inclusion as central values. For transformative efforts to have long-term impact across student demographic groups, the Cultural Proficiency Framework needs to be embedded into conceptions of school leadership that effectively benefits all students.

Being a culturally proficient educator is to understand the concepts of entitlement and privilege and their relationship to systems of oppression. Racism and other forms of oppression exist only because the dominant group benefits from historical and continued practices that served an often-homogeneous white middle-class clientele. This is not a zero-sum

game where if one side gains, another has to lose. Culturally proficient educational leaders shift their thinking to being intentional in understanding both the negative consequences of oppression and the manner in which people have benefited from those same systems. Culturally proficient leaders allocate human and fiscal resources to equitably benefit all students.

As discussed in earlier chapters, reforming and transforming efforts in schools can be viewed as progressing along a spectrum of educational progress. Reform efforts initiated along with desegregation efforts most usually involved selecting more relevant curricular materials and learning and applying new approaches to instruction. Those initial efforts at change have progressed into transformational efforts designed to effectively educate historically marginalized students through confronting power at two levels—the personal authority of the individual educator and the institutional authority of school as a system. Culturally proficient educators embrace their personal power and their schools' institutional authority to address organizational barriers and use their power to transform policies and practices. Weick (1979) contends that organization is a myth and that *most "things" in organizations are actually relationships tied together in systematic fashion* (p. 88). In other words, we invent social organizations through our interactions with one another. The extreme polarities of Cultural Destructiveness and Cultural Proficiency are similarly invented ways of organizing our social interactions, which, once again, is a choice we are to make.

Leadership requires a mindset embracing change as a process to be managed. Shields (2010) describes leadership as a succession of three ever-deepening change processes—transactional, transformational, and transformative. Our schools need and benefit from each type of leadership. Whereas transactional leadership involves reciprocal actions that keep the day-to-day functions of school intact and transformational leadership focuses on organizational effectiveness, it is transformative leadership that values the concepts of equity and access. Equity and access are embraced as moral responsibility in serving the academic and social needs of our diverse communities. Culturally proficient education functions as a moral framework for educational leaders. Culturally proficient leaders ensure that educators' professional learning is focused on the moral imperative of equitable access and outcomes. Culturally Proficient Professional Learning and Culturally Proficient Leadership entail three sides of our moral authority and responsibility:

- Recognizing the dynamics of entitlement and privilege,
- Recognizing that our schools contribute to disparities in achievement, and
- Believing that educators can make choices that positively affect student success (Lindsey et al., 2013).

Cultural Proficiency fosters an inside-out approach to leadership and leaders' commitment to personal and organizational change. Committing to examining our individual values, assumptions, and behaviors naturally extends to a commitment to collaborate with colleagues to examine our school and district policies and practices. Culturally proficient leaders define education in a democracy to be inclusive. Leaders effective in diverse environments necessarily focus on inequity and equity, regardless of who is benefiting from the current policies and practices. **Culturally proficient leaders focus on learning how to serve the academic and social needs of all demographic groups of students, rather than how to change and assimilate members of target groups.** Culturally proficient educational leaders expect challenges from prominent people in the school, the school district, and the community. They operate by remaining centered on the moral value in our work as educators.

Lesson Learned #4: All demographic groups of students are capable of high academic achievement and our educators are capable of educating all demographic groups of students.

Change and change processes are not new to educators. My frequent coauthor, best friend, and wife, Delores Lindsey, when leading professional development sessions with PreK–12 colleagues, often notes, "We in education are not averse to change. In fact, we can adopt a new curriculum, a new bell schedule, or a new tardy system in short order." She continues, "Just give us the What? and How? and we will do it tomorrow." "What" and "how" questions almost always indicate technical changes where we work with current accessible information to solve a problem or dilemma. Then, Delores completes her line of reasoning by noting, "However, our responses to Why? questions guide our schools and us into adaptive changes." Adaptive changes involve changing values, beliefs, and behaviors. Adaptive changes require us to examine our deepest-held assumptions.

Focusing on technical changes gives rise to a pace and rate of change that is often rapid-fire responses to events. Technical responses to educating students from historically marginalized groups of students are responses of "How?" and "What?," and usually are behavior centered. Responses to "What?" and "How?" taken over time, however are slow and uneven. It is when educators are focused on responses to the "Why?" question that drives us beneath educator behavior and educational practice to uncover and understand our underlying assumptions.

It was at Cal State, Los Angeles, with the Regional Desegregation Center that Raymond, Kikanza, and I first noted that the technical

changes being implemented in schools often yielded minimal results in accelerating student learning. Too often the implemented changes focused on students and their cultures in ways that regarded them as deficits. This line of thinking appeared intent on remaking these poor unfortunate students fit into the mold of middle-class white kids. Once forced into that mold, students would (presumably) learn. Think about that for a moment. How could students learn when we in education might regard them, their parents/guardians, their cultures, or their neighborhoods as "deficits"? No amount of technical changes can overcome that hurdle. No new reading program. No bussing students to a different school. No language program that functions as speech correction. No amount of urban impact money (i.e., often referred to as "combat pay" to coax educators to work in urban schools). And, certainly not educators who approach students and their community as a missionary experience akin to saving souls could overcome this deficit thinking.

Deficit-focused efforts rarely made measurable, lasting positive impact on the schools or students. Our belief is best exemplified by paraphrasing Pedro Noguera: "There is nothing wrong with the kids!"

As a country and as a profession we continue to struggle in learning how to educate students who are from historically marginalized groups. Seemingly intractable challenges are still in front of us. Across the country are educators transcending technical approaches and embracing adaptive approaches to meeting the needs of these communities. Adaptive processes engage us in examining our behaviors, beliefs, and values regarding the students we have been enlisted to educate.

One such adaptive approach is the Cultural Proficiency Framework, which consists of four interrelated tools to guide educators in articulating inclusive values and behaviors in service of students from diverse communities. Similarly, schools and school districts use the tools within the Framework to guide the development of policies and practices that support students' equitable access to rigorous academic experiences and outcomes.

THE TOOLS OF CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

The Tools of Cultural Proficiency enable you to

- Describe Barriers to Cultural Proficiency you might have experienced or observed that impede cultural proficiency;
- Describe how the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency serve as core values for your personal, professional, and organizational values and behavior;
- Describe unhealthy and healthy values and behaviors and school policies and practices and plot them on the Cultural Proficiency Continuum; and

- Describe and use the five Essential Elements of Cultural Competence as standards for your personal and professional behavior and your school's formal policies and nonformal, prevalent practices.

THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AS A GUIDE

The Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices illustrates the manner in which students' cultures are embraced as assets and form the basis for core values to guide educational leaders. Recognizing and understanding the tension that exists for people and schools in terms of barriers vs. assets prepares you to better serve the students in your classroom, school, and district.

Table 4.1 presents the Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices and presents the interrelationships among the four Tools of Cultural Proficiency. The table is best read by starting at the bottom. It might be a bit counter-intuitive to read from the bottom up, so please regard reading in this fashion as a cultural awareness experience. Another consideration is to envision the Framework as metaphor for a structure or building. Most buildings with which I am familiar began with constructing the foundation. With this foundation, you will see two contrasting pillars, one negative and one positive.

BARRIERS VS. CULTURAL ASSETS: THE TENSION FOR CHANGE

The Barriers to Cultural Proficiency and the Guiding Principles (i.e., core values) of Cultural Proficiency are, respectively, the negative and positive pillars of the Framework. As you follow the arrows upward you will note that the Barriers inform the negative side of the Continuum—cultural destructiveness, cultural incapacity, and cultural blindness. At the same time, the Guiding Principles serve to inform the positive side of the Continuum—cultural precompetence, cultural competence, and cultural proficiency. Recognizing and acknowledging the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency is a very important first step to understanding how to overcome resistance to change that resides within us and within our schools. It does not mean that we are bad people. My experience is that when educators probe to understand their embedded assumptions they are almost always able to make positive shifts in working with students and in ensuring school policies and systemic practices are inclusive.

Table 4.1   The Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices

The Five Essential Elements of Cultural Competence

Serve as standards for personal, professional values and behaviors 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 healthy and unhealthy practices as represented by different worldviews:

Unhealthy Practices:

- Cultural destructiveness
- Cultural incapacity
- Cultural blindness

Differing Worldviews

Healthy Practices:

- 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 Unhealthy and Healthy.

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.
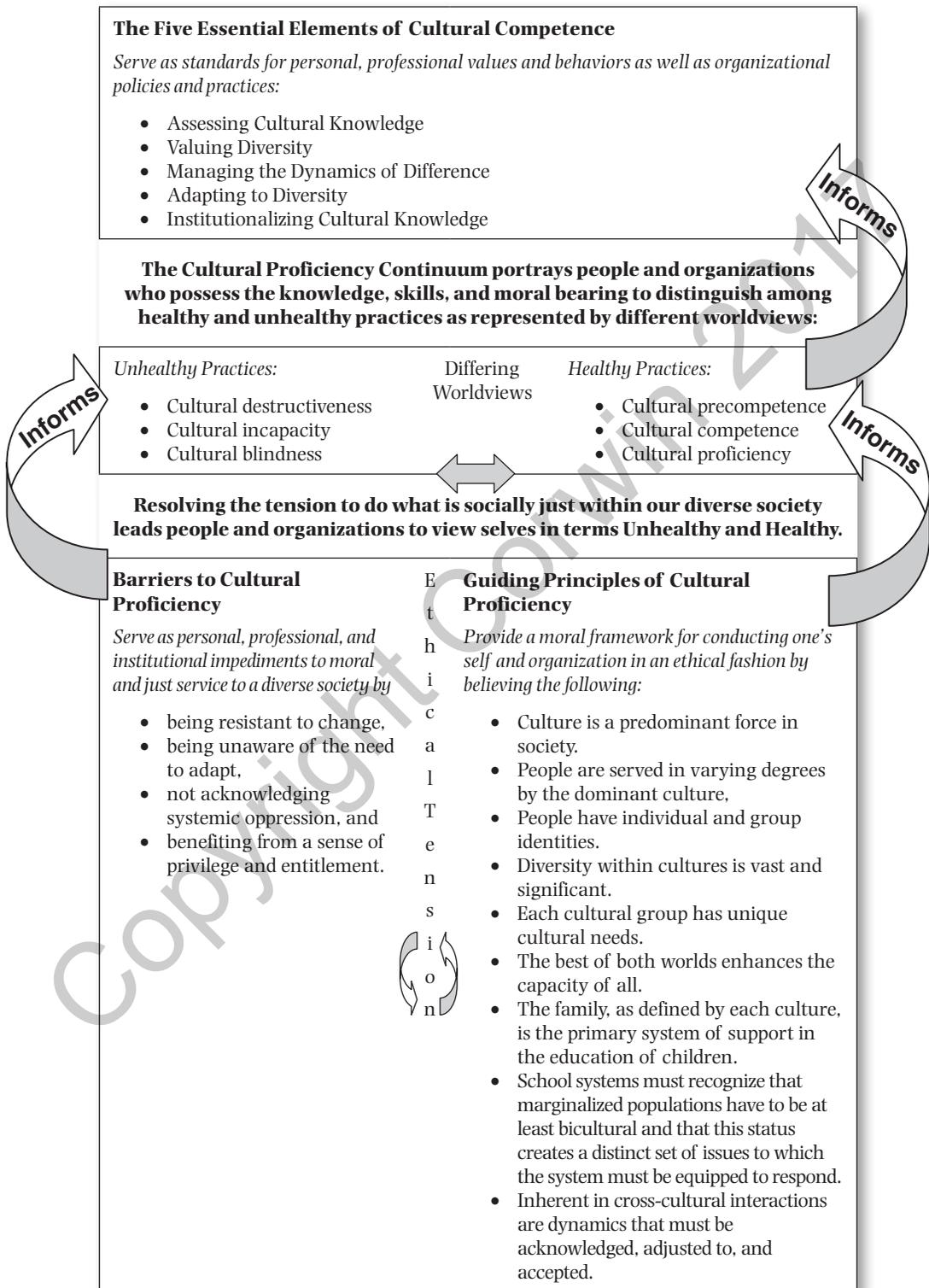
Table 4.1 lists Barriers to Culturally Proficient attitudes, behaviors, and policies and practices that affect our daily lives and impact educational leaders' decisions (Cross, 1989; Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2009):

- Being resistant to change,
- Being unaware of the need to adapt,
- Not acknowledging systemic oppression, and
- Benefiting from a sense of privilege and entitlement.

Note the line between the Barriers and the Guiding Principles. That very thin line separates Cultural Blindness and Cultural Precompetence and represents a paradigmatic shifting point where educators have clearly delineated choices:

- In Barriers, to the left of the line, educators are influenced by social forces that give rise to systemic forms of oppression and believe either in cultural deficit theory applied to marginalized communities or, every bit as damaging, accrue often-unacknowledged or -unrecognized benefits from the weight of systemic oppression experienced by marginalized communities. Or,
- To the right of the line, educators mindfully embrace their capacity to successfully educate all students by embracing students' racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, sexual orientation and gender identity, special needs, or faith communities as assets on which to build curriculum and instruction.

Educators' and schools' core values informed by the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency counter the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency. Expressly inclusive core values guide our personal and professional work in ways that marginalized students can be academically and socially successful in schools' programs. Culture is woven into the very fabric of the Guiding Principles and is reflected in our behaviors, policies, and practices. School and school districts' core values must be deeply held beliefs and values. Core values cannot, must not, be lightly considered and must be evident in our everyday practice. The Guiding Principles inform our actions that are Cultural Precompetence, Cultural Competence, and Cultural Proficiency. The Guiding Principles as shown on Table 4.1 are these:

- 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 unique 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.

TRANSFORMING THE CULTURE OF SCHOOL

Too often the culture most resistant to examining prevalent practices is the organizational culture of school. School improvement initiatives often focus on "change, or needs to be changed" recommendations. Organizational and school culture research indicates schools as organizations have a culture of their own and need leaders who understand and manage that culture in positive ways (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Fullan, 2003; Schein, 1992, 2010; Wagner et al., 2006).

Experienced and new educators alike acknowledge that change is not easy. Surfacing forces that either block (Barriers) or facilitate (Guiding Principles) student achievement is basic to deep change. Embedding the educational needs of marginalized students into learning and mastering new practices can lead to resistance and responses that range from comments such as, "Most students were doing well so why do we have to change to meet the needs of these students?"

While it might be true that change is not easy, change is inevitable and natural. When properly understood and implemented, change initiatives can focus on the educational needs of traditionally underserved students and, also, benefit all learners in our schools. Culturally proficient practices inclusively focus on struggling learners as well as high-achieving students. Culturally proficient educators create classrooms and school-wide conditions to support all learners achieving at levels higher than before.

All educators must be able to recognize and acknowledge personal and institutional barriers to creating conditions for teaching and learning while advocating for practices that benefit all students, schools, and districts. The Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices is a mental model for managing change that can be used to understand and tell our stories in ways that can inform your continued journey to increased effectiveness as an educator (Dilts, 1990, 1994; Lindsey et al., 2009; Senge, 2000).

The Conceptual Framework's four tools equip school leaders with processes for working with colleagues to develop inclusive values and behaviors in their practice and as school communities to develop inclusive policies and practices for their schools and school districts. In Chapter 5

you have the opportunity to begin/continue your "inside-out" process of examining assumptions about cultures different from yours. The chapter covers the tool, Overcoming Barriers to Cultural Proficiency, with particular focus on Resistance to Change.

GOING DEEPER

In thinking about change for you and for your school or school district, what might be some of the barriers that you see? What core values are in place in your school or school district that are inclusive of all students achieving at high levels? Please use the space below to record your thinking.

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DIALOGIC ACTIVITY

Engage your colleagues in sharing responses to the question above. Once you have shared your responses, what might be some next steps? Please record responses in the space below.

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