
Introduction

IS THIS THE RIGHT BOOK FOR YOU?

Because you picked up and opened this book, you are probably interested in educational equity. There is certainly no shortage of titles addressing this topic, so is this the right book for you at this time? This book is for you if you fit one or more of these descriptors.

- Are you committed to making democracy possible by ensuring its promise is kept for all our society's social groups, especially those who historically have been underserved and marginalized?
- Are you dedicated to eliminating disparities in educational outcomes that are predictable according to student demographic groups?
- Are you a champion of inclusion who understands the educational and societal benefits of tapping into the power of the diversity present in a classroom, organization, or community?
- Are you interested in understanding what must happen in order to transform schools, organizations, and communities so that they are places liberated from systemic oppression and its vestiges?
- Are you dedicated to equity and inclusion, yet new to the Cultural Proficiency approach?
- Are you experienced with the Cultural Proficiency approach and committed to your own learning, growth, and development as a highly effective leader of the work?
- Are you a school staff member, teacher, or administrator who wants your team, department, school, or community to become fully committed to inclusion and equity?
- Are you a content specialist (math, literacy, etc.) who works with adults and aspires to increase the effectiveness of your professional development services?
- Are you a leader of professional learning aspiring to develop as a group facilitator, to work more effectively across differences with adults, and/or to ensure you address inclusion and equity in all of your work?

This book is for you if you value humanity, fairness, inclusion, and the role our schools play within our diverse democracy. Everything else is secondary: job, positions, roles, experience with Cultural Proficiency, and so on. Most important is that you care

about making a positive difference and so are willing to do the work to examine yourself and your professional practices in order to do a better job of supporting socially just schools.

WHY IS THIS BOOK NEEDED?

In 1999 Randall B. Lindsey, Kikanza Nuri-Robins, & Raymond D. Terrell wrote *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders*. In that book, they adapted the theories of Terry Cross (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989) from the field of mental health with the intent of supporting educational leaders seeking equity through systemic change. The authors' premise was that schools and school districts that integrated the Cultural Proficiency Framework with their core organizational values would reap significant positive outcomes for all students and their families, especially those historically underserved or marginalized. This was seminal work; the book detailed the Four Tools of Cultural Proficiency in the greatest depth of any resource in print.

Delores B. Lindsey joined the group for the subsequent project, *Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach* (2001). This book expanded the audience by offering support to educators in the classroom. Applying Cultural Proficiency to classroom instruction was the first in what soon became a series of app books, all centered around the original manual. Each of the titles in the series has a distinct and focused application of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency. Each provides a lens through which educators can examine and improve a specific area of practice—counseling or coaching, for instance, or our response to English language learners, students in poverty, or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) communities.

Although different from the set of apps, this book, too, is an application of Cultural Proficiency. As such, it applies the Cultural Proficiency Framework to professional learning—the art of group facilitation, to be precise. The book invites current or aspiring leaders of professional learning to reflect on their craft and critically examine what they do, why they do it, and how they can do it better, in a way that leads more directly to equitable and inclusive outcomes.

But this book is not an isolated application. Because of its unique focus on culturally proficient professional learning, this text can help schools and educators transform themselves and put into action the content and processes contained in all the other books. In this sense, this book can serve as a companion to *Cultural Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders* (2009), and/or any of the other apps. The manual provides the framework (the concept) and professional development activities, and the apps provide illustrations of practice. This book details a process (journey) within which groups can use content from other sources (e.g., activities from the manual) to move from awareness to commitment to action.

In fact, this book can serve as a companion text for any book in any content area within our field of education. For instance, it would support a math or literacy coach in facilitating professional learning in a culturally proficient manner, regardless of what text (or lack thereof) they chose to use with a group. What exactly does it mean to facilitate professional learning in a culturally proficient manner? Chapter 10 paints a clear picture, but for now this brief explanation will have to suffice. First, this book helps facilitators of

professional learning ensure effective cross-cultural interaction, inclusion, and equity for educators and adult learners. Second, it provides support for ensuring adult learners constructively consider issues that emerge from diversity in everything they do, thus leading to inclusive and equitable outcomes for students.

HOW IS THIS BOOK ORGANIZED?

The organization of this book supports your customized reading, learning, and utilitarian preferences and needs. The progression follows that of Simon Sinek's Golden Circle (2009): Why? How? What?

1. Part I focuses on Why: Assuming we value excellence with equity in education, why do we need Cultural Proficiency and culturally proficient facilitators?
2. Part II focuses on How: How can we use Cultural Proficiency as content (framework) and process (journey) to actualize excellence with equity in education?
3. Part III focuses on What: What do facilitators do in order to work with groups in a culturally proficient manner?

These three parts can be helpful for future reference. Need help articulating the purposiveness of Cultural Proficiency? Refer to part I. Are you facilitating a group's journey and need a facilitator map? Refer to part II. Looking for on-the-ground techniques as you develop as a culturally proficient facilitator of professional learning? Flip to part III.

Regardless of your needs for future reference material, your initial read of this book should be from start to finish. By doing so, you will experience the content as it builds. Additionally, you will experience a fictional story arc that spans all three parts. The story narrative is from the point of view of Jack McManus, a math curriculum specialist who starts his Cultural Proficiency journey as a disgruntled seminar participant but who eventually becomes a highly skilled facilitator for inclusion and equity. Jack is a white male, relatively youthful and tall (six foot). Although much of Jack's character and experiences are drawn from my own (including his outward appearance and several seminar scenarios that I've experienced), Jack is not me. He's not completely anyone. Jack's character, thoughts, and actions are a composite—a mosaic—of me, of facilitators and colleagues, of people I've observed in workshops, and of seminar participants with whom I've interacted as their group's facilitator.

WHY INCLUDE A FICTIONALIZED NARRATIVE THROUGHOUT?

The presence of an ongoing narrative throughout this book may seem—at first—unconventional for this genre. However, after closer analysis, it makes complete sense. Storytelling and personal narratives are powerful methods of teaching and learning. They possess the unique power of adding nuanced and subjective perspectives to generally accepted ideas, and therefore have the power to challenge the status quo. When at their best,

the stories shared are born from first-hand experiences—from the perspective of the storyteller. That power fuels the journey to excellence with equity. Telling, listening to, and trusting each other's stories and lived experiences is central to the process. Thus, the presence of a story within this nonfiction book is symbolic and reflective of the heart of this work: the work of social justice.

As a reader and as an advocate for inclusion and equity, you might agree with the power of storytelling but wonder why the author would choose to fictionalize the story instead of keep the facts and details exactly as they happened in real life. Here is my rationale. The fictionalized story of Jack McManus has several benefits over a pure memoir of John Krownapple. First, it adds an element of interest and novelty to a genre that can become saturated with theory. To that end, using techniques of fiction offers greater freedom as a writer—more flexibility to shape Jack's experiences to complement concepts, theories, and research for andragogical purposes in a way that a memoir could not. Finally, tools of fiction provide a structure for enjoying and feeling satisfied with the read. This is why Jack's story has a full arc that spans from the start of chapter 1 to the end of chapter 16.

Still, I draw Jack's experience and general progression from that of my own. As such, his perspective is also that of a white man in the United States. That is important. As a reader and advocate for inclusion and equity, you might also wonder why the author would choose to tell a story that centers around diversity and social justice from this perspective. First, it is the perspective with which I am familiar—since I am white and male—and to which I can lend an authentic voice. In this context, writing a story from the point of view of a character with a race/ethnicity other than white seems inauthentic.

Also, making the fictional Jack white and male is symbolic and representative of the power dynamic implicit with Cultural Proficiency. Since (as colleague and friend Brenda CampbellJones reminds us) white landowning men of economic means were the only group that never had to be amended into the United States Constitution, that is the group that has long served as the unstated norm that visibly represents a legacy of power and privilege within our society. Jack's symbolic role challenges the reader to recognize and use their own power and privilege for purposes of social justice. For instance, in schools, administrators and teachers are custodians of the power conferred on them through their positions, regardless of their race or gender. Cultural Proficiency provides pragmatic support for what we can do with that power to redress unfair policies and practices that marginalize and disenfranchise groups of people. By relating to Jack's internal process, the reader receives support for facilitating their own growth into a culturally proficient facilitator.

WHY THE “INCORRECT” USE OF PRONOUNS?

The book frequently employs the word *they* as a singular pronoun. This is purposeful and done with a purpose. In this form, the pronoun provides a gender-neutral alternative to using *he* or *she* or even *he or she*. This choice of language is a reflection of my recent growth in understanding gender fluidity and challenging assumptions of gender as binary.

On first glance sentences using the singular form of *they* may cause you as the reader to pause. Sentences may sound grammatically incorrect. That's because this usage is, indeed, grammatically incorrect when using traditional rules. However, while writing this book it became apparent to me that the evolution of our consciousness has outpaced the evolution of our rules of language. Making this decision to use more-inclusive language was a reminder that the work of Cultural Proficiency is ethical in nature. It is a small reminder that following the letter of the law is not the same as doing what is right and socially just.

The choice between convention and using a gender-neutral pronoun is an example of predictable dilemmas we encounter on the Cultural Proficiency journey. Another example is illustrated in the chapter 14 vignette. In that scene, the characters experience a moment of awareness when presented with the notion that use of the term *cultural blindness* as a negative descriptor is ableist. In that moment, the dilemma presents itself: stick with convention and tradition or engage and adapt by aligning behavior with values of inclusion and equity. Although the vignette is fictionalized, it is based on my own experience and describes the dilemma my colleagues and I have faced with the use of this language.

In offering these examples, my intention is to highlight the inevitable conflict each of us will experience at one time or another when engaging in this work. Working through both of these dilemmas was predicated on my awareness of the language usage being an issue of exclusion, inequity, or cultural incapacity in the first place. In both situations, there was a time when I was completely unaware of this. And that time was not so very long ago. By no stretch of the imagination do I claim to have arrived. Because Cultural Proficiency is a journey, I anticipate the opportunity to work through many more dilemmas and contradictions in my future!

HOW CAN YOU USE THIS BOOK?

The formatting of this book encourages periodic reflection by providing questions and space for you to respond in writing. It also encourages group learning. Every chapter contains at least one dialogic activity. These activities serve at least two purposes. First, they support small or large groups within which individuals are studying this book and learning together. The activities use protocols that structure dialogue in ways that promote increased understanding. Second, they provide examples of facilitative techniques that—if new to you—can enhance your repertoire as you develop into a culturally proficient facilitator. To further support your development, chapter 10 contains a facilitation rubric. The rubric serves as a reflective as well as a goal-setting tool. Additionally, part III contains vignettes that accompany the rubric and illustrate a plethora of “What would you do?” situations from the perspective of an aspiring culturally proficient facilitator. The situations in each of the vignettes center on one of the five Essential Elements of Cultural Competence. Finally, chapter 16 provides an opportunity for you to craft your own professional learning plan to guide your next steps as a culturally proficient facilitator.