

theme

EXPLORE THE STANDARDS
FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

OUTCOMES

Delores and Randall Lindsey approach the Outcomes standard through the lens of their cultural proficiency work to highlight the equity focus embedded in the standard. In their full essay in *Reach the Highest Standard in Professional Learning: Outcomes*, they write, “Cultural proficiency is an approach to equity



and access for all learners.

... Our assumption, built on sound practice, is equitable professional learning experiences aligned with professional learning standards and student performance goals support equitable learning outcomes for educators and their students.” They also explore the idea of



“inside-out change” for individuals and systems and its importance in achieving equity of access and outcomes (Lindsey, Lindsey, Hord, & von Frank, 2016).

This excerpt dives into their cultural proficiency tools and framework and their connection to the Outcomes standard.

BUILD CULTURAL PROFICIENCY TO ENSURE EQUITY

By Delores B. Lindsey and Randall B. Lindsey

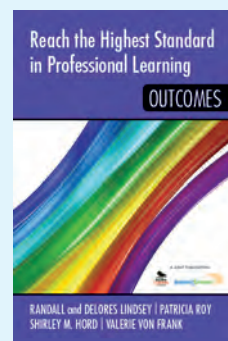
Cultural proficiency is about serving the needs of all students, with a laser-like focus on historically underserved students. When education is offered in a culturally proficient manner, historically underserved students gain access to educational opportunities intended to result in high academic achievement. When education is delivered in a culturally proficient manner, all students understand and value their own culture and the cultures of those around them. In the same vein, when educational experiences are delivered in a culturally proficient manner, all educators, legislators, board members, and local business community members understand and value the culture of those around them in ways they have rarely experienced or appreciated.

Culturally proficient professional learning focuses on the learner outcomes described in Learning Forward’s Outcomes standard. Professional learning aligned with educator effectiveness and focused on student performance takes into consideration the student’s culture, learning style, and academic need. Clearly stated outcomes with a system for monitoring and benchmarking ensure equitable student results.

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To understand the Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices on p. 52, begin reading at the bottom of the table and follow the arrows to the top. Observe that markedly contrasting sets of values guide behavior. Take particular note of the manner in which barriers are unhealthy while guiding principles as core values inform healthy practices. Recognizing and understanding the tension that exists for people and schools in terms of barriers versus assets

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students **aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.**



ABOUT THE BOOK

Lindsey, D.B., Lindsey, R.B., Hord, S.M., & von Frank, V. (2016). *Reach the highest standard in professional learning: Outcomes.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. Excerpted with permission.

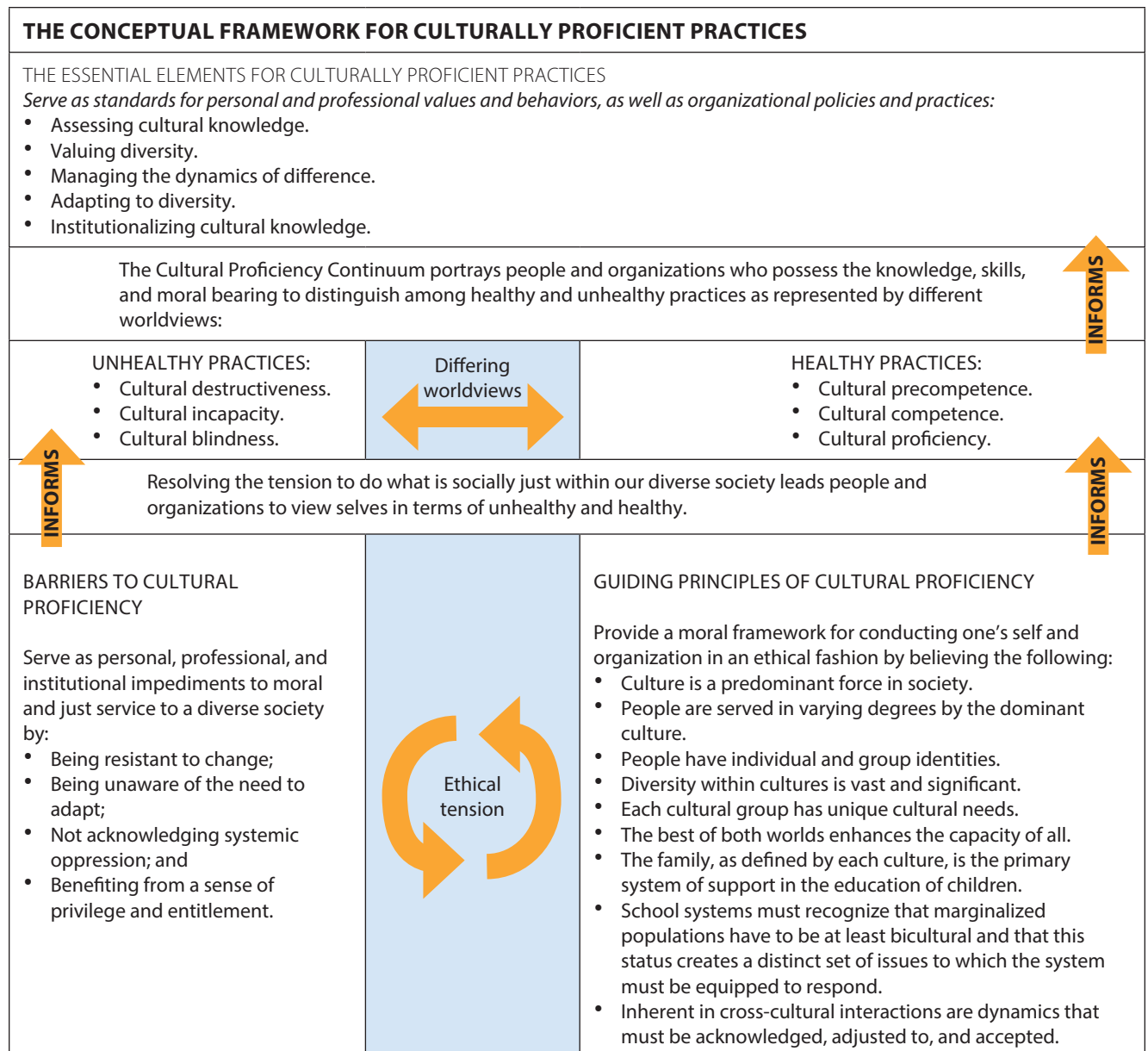
is a good first step in this journey of continuous improvement. Acknowledging barriers that exist for students and being able to see their cultures as asset-based prepares educators for serving the diversity of students in their classroom, school, and district. Take time to read each layer of the table and note how the arrows indicate relationships and patterns of influence.

BARRIERS VERSUS CULTURAL ASSETS

The barriers to cultural proficiency and the guiding principles of cultural proficiency are the invisible guiding hands of

the framework. Barriers inform the harmful aspects of the continuum — cultural destructiveness, incapacity, and blindness — while the guiding principles function as core values to guide the constructive aspects of the continuum — precompetence, competence, and proficiency.

Recognizing and acknowledging the barriers to cultural proficiency is basic to overcoming resistance to change within ourselves and our schools. The barriers to culturally proficient attitudes, behaviors, policies, and practices are systemic forces that affect our daily lives and impact professional learning by



SOURCE: Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2009.

embracing deficit conceptions of students and their cultures (Cross, 1989; Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 1999, 2003, 2009). Forces that serve as systemic barriers include:

- Being resistant to change and believing that, since the current system works for most students, there must be a deficiency with those who can't keep up.
- Being unaware of the need to adapt and expecting that it is those who are not currently successful who are failing to adapt.
- Not acknowledging systemic oppression by either being oblivious to forces, such as racism or sexism, or dismissing them as artifacts of bygone eras.

- Benefiting from a sense of privilege and entitlement that current policies and practices foster and either not being able to see that some communities are served poorly or summarily ignoring discrepant results in the school.

On the Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices above, note the line between the barriers and the guiding principles. That gulf between cultural blindness and cultural precompetence represents the paradigmatic shifting point where educators have clear choices.

On the left, educators are victims of social forces and embrace a cultural deficit approach to marginalized and historically underserved communities, or, every bit as damaging, they re-

THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY CONTINUUM: DEPICTING UNHEALTHY AND HEALTHY PRACTICES					
Cultural DESTRUCTIVENESS	Cultural INCAPACITY	Cultural BLINDNESS	Cultural PRECOMPETENCE	Cultural COMPETENCE	Cultural PROFICIENCY
COMPLIANCE-BASED TOLERANCE FOR DIVERSITY			TRANSFORMATION FOR EQUITY		
<p>Cultural destructiveness:</p> <p>Seeking to eliminate references to the culture of “others” in all aspects of the school and in relationship with their communities.</p>	<p>Cultural incapacity:</p> <p>Trivializing “other” communities and seeking to make them appear to be wrong.</p>	<p>Cultural blindness:</p> <p>Pretending not to see or acknowledge the status and culture of marginalized communities and choosing to ignore the experiences of such groups within the school and community.</p>	<p>Cultural precompetence:</p> <p>Increasingly aware of what you and the school don’t know about working with marginalized communities. It is at this key level of development that you and the school can move in a positive, constructive direction, or you can vacillate, stop, and possibly regress.</p>	<p>Cultural competence:</p> <p>Manifesting your personal values and behaviors and the school’s policies and practices in a manner that is inclusive with marginalized cultures and communities that are new or different from you and the school.</p>	<p>Cultural proficiency:</p> <p>Advocating for lifelong learning in order to be increasingly effective in serving the educational needs of the cultural groups served by the school. Holding the vision that you and the school are instruments for creating a socially just democracy.</p>

SOURCE: Adapted from Terrell & Lindsey, 2009.

guard racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, and heterosexism as societal issues too ingrained for schools to overcome. In contrast, on the right, educators choose to believe in their capacity to effectively educate all students, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, special needs, or faith communities.

The guiding principles of cultural proficiency are core values that regard students’ cultures as assets. The guiding principles help identify and overcome both overt barriers that serve to marginalize students as well as the unrecognized and unintentional barriers that serve to limit students’ access and eventual academic success. The issue of intentionality is very important. To students, their families, and members of their community, overt and unintentional barriers feel the same whether they are intentional or unintentional on the part of educators and the school.

Culture embraced as asset serves to make the guiding principles inclusive. In order to be effective and manifest an inclusive approach to culture, your core values and the school’s core values must be deeply held beliefs and values fully vetted by you and members of your learning community. They cannot and must not be lightly agreed to in nodding assent, then carelessly disregarded.

Note that the guiding principles are brief, direct, and uncomplicated statements. As you continue your cultural profi-

ciency journey, you may choose to use these guiding principles as your core values. It is important to have core values that serve as the moral center of your work and your school’s work because it is our core values that shape our actions. The guiding principles inform our actions through the stages of cultural pre-competence, cultural competence, and cultural proficiency. The alignment of what we profess to value with our actions becomes our outcomes measurement. Members of the community can only assess what we do, not what we say.

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE

In considering issues of diversity, equity, and access, the organizational culture must be the focus of professional learning. Researchers have studied organizational and school cultures extensively and concur that schools need leaders who understand and manage that culture in a constructive manner (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Fullan, 2003; Schein, 1992, 2010; Wagner et al., 2006). Experienced and new educators agree that change is not easy. Implementing new practices in schools is often difficult and made even more challenging when addressing the educational needs of historically underserved or marginalized students.

No Child Left Behind and similar state-level initiatives have contributed to a slowly evolving national context of responding to the educational needs of marginalized communities in ways not previously confronted. While it may be true that change is

not easy, we know also that change in our increasingly diverse society is inevitable and natural.

Formal and nonformal school leaders 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 we use to understand and tell our stories in ways that may inform as you continue your journey to increased effectiveness as an educator (Dilts, 1990, 1994; Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2009; Senge et al., 2000).

CULTURES AS ASSETS

With this basic grounding in acknowledging barriers and using core values informed by the guiding principles, we are now prepared to get to the doing. The Cultural Proficiency Continuum (see p. 53) and the Essential Elements for Culturally Proficient Practices (see below) are the most visible tools of cultural proficiency and are represented by what we do, not by what we say we do. The essential elements are standards for personal and professional behavior as well as for organizational policies and practices. The guiding principles are core values that inform and guide the essential elements. When culture is embraced as an asset, professional learning goals can be crafted for ourselves as educators and for the communities we serve.

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum on p. 53 aligns the six phases of cultural proficiency to illustrate that the effects of the barriers are in contrast to the effects of the guiding principles. The cultural destructiveness, incapacity, and blindness phases are composed of harmful behaviors that explicitly or implicitly foster actions that limit the academic and social success of historically marginalized students or the effective exclusion of historically marginalized colleagues and community mem-

DELORES B. LINDSEY, a retired associate professor, uses the lens of cultural proficiency to help education leaders examine their organization’s policies and practices as well as their individual beliefs and values about cross-cultural communication.

RANDALL B. LINDSEY is an emeritus professor at California State University, Los Angeles, and an education consultant on issues related to equity and access. He works with colleagues to design and implement programs for and with schools and community-based organizations to provide access and achievement.

bers. In marked contrast, the culturally precompetent, competent, and proficient phases are inclusive and support policies and practices for students, educators, parents, and community members by esteeming their cultures.

The Essential Elements for Culturally Proficient Practices are carefully crafted standards borne out of a deeply held value for culture in all its manifestations. Engaging in effective professional learning experiences that honor and recognize diverse communities combined with the view that students’ cultures are assets on which to build a relationship better equips educators to meet the academic and social needs of historically marginalized students.

Valuing culture and diversity through commitment to the essential elements prepares educators to manage change effectively.

COMMITMENT TO IMPROVEMENT

A school or district’s change initiative is often the primary indicator of success or failure in reaching student performance goals. A variety of factors reflect the level of commitment: edu-

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS FOR CULTURALLY PROFICIENT PRACTICES

1. **Assessing cultural knowledge:** Becoming aware of and knowing the diverse communities within your school. Knowing how educators and the school as a whole react to marginalized communities. Learning how to be effective in serving these communities. Leading and learning about the school and its grade levels and departments as cultural entities in responding to the educational needs of the underserved communities.

2. **Valuing diversity:** Creating informal and formal decision-making groups inclusive of parents/guardians and community members whose viewpoints and experiences are different from yours and the dominant group at the school, which will enrich conversations, decision making, and problem solving.

3. **Managing the dynamics of difference:** Modeling problem-solving and conflict resolution strategies as a natural and normal process within the culture of the schools and the diverse contexts of the communities of your school.

4. **Adapting to diversity:** Learning about underserved cultural groups different from your own and the ability to use others’ experiences and backgrounds in all school settings.

5. **Institutionalizing cultural knowledge:** Making learning about underserved cultural groups and their experiences and perspectives an integral part of the school’s professional development.

SOURCE: Adapted from Terrell & Lindsey, 2009.

NESTED LEVELS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE



SOURCE: Adapted from Lindsey, Martinez, & Lindsey, 2007.

cators' public pronouncements, the allocation of resources (i.e. time, people, money, and materials) assigned to the initiative, the widely held belief that the initiative can produce desired results, the overall efforts to sustain growth over time, and the ability of teachers and leaders to identify change initiatives as part of "the way we do things around here."

Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman expanded the work of Gregory Bateson and Robert Dilts by developing a model of intervention based on the nested levels of learning (Garmston & Wellman, 1999). The Nested Levels of Organization Change above is a model of behavioral and organizational change that supports consideration and implementation change efforts, such as those in the college- and career-readiness standards.

The nested levels indicate that behavioral and observable changes most significantly occur when all levels are addressed. Change that occurs at one level impacts behaviors below that level (i.e. allocation of resources, decision making, problem solving, professional development, assessment, curriculum, and

instruction decisions). Change processes that reside only at the lower levels have little impact or influence on the levels above, limiting the chances or opportunities for large-scale changes (Lindsey, Kearney, Estrada, Terrell, & Lindsey, 2015).

School improvement efforts focused at the two lowest levels — providing or improving facilities, purchasing materials of instruction, and implementing new academic programs as mandated by local, state, or federal agencies — are common in schools and districts. Such interventions represented as change or improvement processes are often employed as the answer to problems such as disproportional suspensions and expulsions of specified cultural groups of students. The same answer is often applied to the cultural characteristics of students in advanced placement or honors classes.

Although these lower-level interventions are important and necessary, they should be employed only after considering whether they are the most effective. Beginning at the lower levels of the change process often becomes "fill-in-the-blank"

responses to problems, issues, or needs. Schools or districts often see new programs or interventions as the solution to disproportionality or underrepresentation even before analyzing student data or student needs and posing questions that challenge operating assumptions.

Implementation decisions for school change initiatives should be based on student achievement and participation data, involving educators in collaboratively selecting intervention programs, developing instructional techniques, and designing assessment strategies that reflect student needs. Educators have to be engaged in collaborative conversations and data dialogues as part of their districtwide reform efforts to support all students, parents, and community members.

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