Achieving Cultural Proficiency

Our community continues to evolve and the members of the community are shaping the ways in which we, as a school district, must respond to the needs of our students and families. Cultural proficiency is a way of being that allows individuals and organizations to interact effectively with people who differ from them. In a culturally proficient organization, the culture of the organization promotes inclusiveness and institutionalizes processes for learning about and for responding appropriately to differences. Cultural proficiency is an inside-out approach that focuses first on those of us who are insiders to the organization, teachers and leaders, encouraging us to reflect on our own individual understandings and values.

Check out the Cultural Proficiency Continuum article below to self-assess where you believe you are as an individual and as a school. This issue is packed with many other articles of interest as well. We appreciate all that you do on behalf of our students each and every day!

FCS Welcomes International Families
The Transition Services Office, located at the Almon C. Hill Center, 136 Elm Street, Cumming, Georgia, was established to assist non-English speaking students and their families at the time of enrollment in Forsyth County Schools. In addition to registration assistance, the Transition Services Office provides support for school readiness and family literacy. The Reading Foundation course is provided on Friday mornings October through February of each academic year. Parent participants in the Reading Foundation receive computer training, an in-depth overview of Forsyth County Schools instructional programs, student support services, and opportunities for parental engagement. Life Skills Literacy classes and learning materials are provided to adult English language learners throughout the school year. A district-wide Parent-Teacher Resource Room provides educational resources for students and adults to support learning at home. Strategic community partners include Tyson Foods, Sawnee Woman’s Club, United Way of Forsyth County, Forsyth YMCA, and Ninth District Opportunity Head Start.

Above Photo: Our family literacy initiatives through the Transition Services Office have enjoyed a great launch this fall. Persons in the attached photo are participating in Life Skills Literacy or the Reading Foundation classes with Norma Malone and Gladys Sasso-Alvarez each week.

Cultural Proficiency Continuum

Innovate 2 Educate - New Blog for Teachers and Leaders

Check out the new blog post titled Accountability - the Wicked Witch of Education.

Blog Excerpts:
Standards, pacing, assessments, oh my! Accountability is the wicked witch of education in that it has bullied its way into the walls of our institutions of learning and threatened to take away the joy of teaching. While I am not foolish enough to think that accountability will go away, I am advocating for . . .

Click HERE to access the entire post. Read - Comment - Share.

. . . Listen to your students - ask them how they learn best as well as what engages them. Then, put on those ruby slippers, close your eyes, and say, “There’s nothing like engagement! There’s nothing like engagement!”
FCS is a caring school community that is committed to doing whatever it takes on behalf of students. From time to time our actions are worthy of reflection. How we respond to differences matters. Differences among our students are reflected in not only their ethnicity, but also their socio-economic status and even a student’s ability to access content based on learning needs.

Culturally proficient educators can confidently deliver programs and services, knowing that faculty, staff, parents and students genuinely want and can readily receive them without having their cultural connections denied, offended, or threatened. Culturally proficient organizations can also be sure that their community perceives them as a positive, contributing force that substantively enhances the community’s image and the organization’s position in it.

Assess: Where do you see yourself, as an educator, and your school, as a community of learners, falling along the continuum?

**The Cultural Proficiency Continuum**

These six points indicate unique ways of seeing and responding to difference:

- **Cultural destructiveness:** *See the difference, stomp it out:* The elimination of other people’s cultures
- **Cultural incapacity:** *See the difference, make it wrong:* Belief in the superiority of one’s culture and behavior that disempowers another’s culture
- **Cultural blindness:** *See the difference, act like you don’t:* Acting as if the cultural differences you see do not matter or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures
- **Cultural pre-competence:** *See the difference, respond inadequately:* Awareness of the limitations of one’s skills or an organization’s practices when interacting with other cultural groups
- **Cultural competence:** *See the difference, understand the difference that difference makes:* Interacting with other cultural groups using the five essential elements of cultural proficiency as the standard for individual behavior and organizational practices
- **Cultural proficiency:** *See the differences and respond effectively in a variety of environments:* Esteeming culture; knowing how to learn
about individual and organizational culture; interacting effectively in a variety of cultural environments.

Reflect: If you believe there is work to be done to move along the continuum, what can you do as a Teacher Leader to foster conversations, behaviors, and actions that promote a more inclusive and responsive learning environment for our students?

How we develop as an organization to respond to the growing differences in our community is a reflection of our integrity as educators. Achieving cultural proficiency is a collective responsibility and each of us can contribute to the work on behalf of our students.

Adapted from: Cultural Proficiency by Randall B. Lindsey, Kikanza Nuri Robins, and Raymond D. Terrell (Corwin Press, 1999, 2003), and Culturally Proficient Instruction by Kikanza Nuri Robins, Randall B. Lindsey, Delores B. Lindsey, and Raymond D. Terrell (Corwin Press, 2001)

Another Inconvenient Truth: Race and Ethnicity Matter

Race and ethnicity affect how students respond to instruction and their opportunities to learn

In a recent article published in Educational Leadership, November 2010 issue titled Closing Opportunity Gaps, the authors challenge teachers to examine some nonproductive beliefs about teaching and learning. These beliefs often undermine students' opportunities to learn but are sustain because they seem sensible and well-meaning.

- To be fair to all students, one should be color-blind and ignore racial differences. To acknowledge that focusing on students' race or ethnicity affects how one should teach is to acknowledge that racial and ethnic discrimination has been, and continues to be, a significant influence on what and how students learn. This is not a comforting thought in a nation whose public stance is one of equity and fairness for all. Indeed, it is quite common to hear educators say that they are color-blind, as though this were a positive value. Although color-blindness is a good thing when it means that people do not discriminate on the basis of race, it can have negative consequences when educators refuse to see their students' racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences. Instead, teachers need to respect and build on differences to foster student learning.

- One can build student self-esteem by reducing academic rigor. This particularly harmful belief leads to lowered expectations and, inevitably, to lower academic outcomes. Compelling evidence shows that when teachers hold high expectations for students who have been marginalized by their schooling experiences, student learning is enhanced, as long as...
high expectations are linked to greater resources and support (Ferguson, 2004). Without appropriate support in place, the often-stated “all students can learn” is an empty slogan.

- **Teaching should be adapted to students' learning styles.** A simplistic understanding of learning styles often leads to stereotypes about students from particular backgrounds, as though all students from a shared background learn in exactly the same way. Not only do students learn in different ways, but also students of color are often more dependent on school for learning how to learn than are more economically advantaged students who may have had more varied learning opportunities. Although differentiating instruction is important, ultimately teachers' misuse of the term *learning styles* may limit the cognitive development of students from disadvantaged groups.

- **Students must have good basic skills before teachers can engage them in more complex learning activities.** This belief belies the reality that even the youngest students can learn complex material while at the same time developing basic skills. For example, in her thought-provoking book about her work with 1st and 2nd graders from culturally diverse backgrounds, Mary Cowhey (2006) shows that while the students were learning to read, write, add, and subtract, they were also having conversations about philosophy, learning about the civil rights movement, and even engaging in a successful voter registration drive, activities that not only are cognitively demanding but that also make the curriculum more pluralistic and engaging.

Numerous researchers have investigated the kind of teaching that makes a difference, particularly for students whose culture, race, and language differ from the majority (Garcia, 1999; Gay, 2010; Haberman, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Michie, 2009; Nieto, 2003). The following practices illustrate the interdependence of good instructional practice and of caring and trustful relationships among students and teachers:

- Respecting and being interested in students' experiences and cultural backgrounds.
- Supporting higher-order learning (for example, engaging students in complex problem solving while developing basic skills).
- Building on students' prior knowledge, values, and experiences.
- Avoiding stereotyping of students.
- Using ability grouping flexibly and sparingly.
- Adapting instruction to students' semantics, accents, dialects, and language ability.
- Applying rules relating to behavior fairly and sensitively.
- Facilitating learning of challenging material by knowing how to deal with *stereotype threat*, that is, some students' beliefs that cultural myths about racial differences in abilities may be valid.
- Engaging families directly in their children's learning.

**Good for All**

Often, schools marginalize special efforts to meet the needs of students of racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds, treating them as actions that take time away from the central tasks of improving academic achievement.

But there is no zero-sum game here. Indeed, it is ironic that policies and practices that are particularly responsive to the needs of students of color are likely to be the best things we could do to enhance the learning of all students.

To access this complete article, click [HERE](#).

Authors: Willis D. Hawley and Sonia Nieto, *Educational Leadership*, November 2010, Vol 68 no 3 - [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org)

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**Professional Learning and Resources**

**Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS) Update:**

Visit the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards web page: [www.gadoe.org/CCGPS](http://www.gadoe.org/CCGPS) for the latest updates.

The CCGPS implementation timeline is as follows:

**Get Ready:** 2010-2011*:
Administrator Communication and Precision Review

**Get Set:** 2011-2012*:
Teacher Communication and Bridging the Gap (sharing changes in grade level standards and what is needed for transition years)

**Go:** 2012-2013:
Year One Implementation / Transition to CCGPS

2013-2014: Year Two Implementation / Field Test
2014-2015: Year Three Implementation / Common Assessment

*Reminder: No curricular changes should be implemented until assessments are modified to reflect the new standards.

**Mathematics Updates:**

**Precision Review:** Over 400 Math teachers have contributed to the CCGPS precision review. The GADOE Math team is accepting recommendations and feedback via Learning Village through December 2010. In January, the precision review committees at each grade level will convene to analyze all feedback collected and make decisions regarding the CCGPS K-12 Mathematics curriculum. Administrators will be provided information sessions Spring 2011 and school year 2011-2012 will be devoted to resource development and teacher information sessions.

**Math GHSGT Preparation:** The GPS version of the Math GHSGT will be

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**Literacy Design Collaborative**

A Gates Foundation Project

When it comes to students being proficient in reading and writing, all too often, we place the accountability on our ELA teachers. We (content specific teachers) all claim to be stakeholders when it comes to being responsible for a quality education for our children, but we are somehow blocked from going beyond the walls of content when it comes to applying writing/literacy strategies. Can't the learning of content be enhanced, and more importantly, maintained in our long term memory when using writing in our content specific classrooms? Writing is no longer just the ELA teachers' responsibility.

With students nationwide not being able to articulate their knowledge through
administered for the first time in March 2011. Preparation tools, including content descriptions and student guides with practice tests are provided HERE.

**English Language Arts:**
Teachers are invited to participate in one of two webinars at which time they will receive DRAFTS of alignment documents detailing how CCGPS aligns with current GPS. Teachers will have the opportunity to choose one of the two sessions as both are identical. Feedback will be requested and accepted through the end of December. During January, precision review committees will review all feedback, analyze information, and make decisions regarding the resulting CCGPS ELA Curriculum.

**Webinar for ELA CCGPS:**
November 30 @ 3:30 pm for K-12 ELA Teachers  
December 2 @ 3:30 for K-12 ELA Teachers

**Online Project Express course for ELA** is currently being developed and will be published January 2011.

**Science Updates:**
Science will be the AYP second indicator for all elementary and middle schools starting 2011-2012 school year. The measurement for adequate progress has not been defined. The current second indicator for FCS K-8 schools is attendance. This change was mandated by the GADOE and signifies a change in practice from districts being able to choose their second indicator. Graduation rate will remain the second indicator in grades 9-12. We will keep you posted!

**Georgia Coalition of STEM Teachers:** GADOE is looking for teachers interested in incorporating STEM initiatives in the classroom to join a sharing/discussion group. The group will work as a forum to share great instructional programs or activities that engage students in STEM. If you are interested, contact Juan-Carlos Aguilar, jaguilar@doe.k12.ga.us or 404-657-9072.

**Presidential Awards for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching (PAEMST)** This year’s nominations open November 1, 2010 and the deadline is May 1, 2011 for teachers in grades 7-12.

**Social Studies:** Check out the extensive list of professional opportunities from GCEE by visiting http://www.gcee.org/

**GHSGT Prep for Science and Social Studies (Online ExPreSS)** - This FREE online instructional resources via georgiastandards.org is available now for students preparing for, or needing remediation for, the GHSGT in Sci or SS. While this is a student-paced online course, teachers of Science and Social Studies find great success with integrating these resources into classroom instruction. Consider also making this known through your ANGEL courses. Science and Social Studies instructional plans along with Math online tutorials for the GPS version, administered for the first time March 2011 can be accessed by clicking HERE.

Teachers can access the Online Express program by clicking https://registration.gavirtualschool.org/registration/p/3/express.aspx. Use the generic code 7080557275 and 2/9/1994 and your school email address to access the site.
10 Essential Strategies for Teaching Boys Effectively

A number of schools have closed gender gaps, raised student performance, and made adequate yearly progress within a year of instituting the Teaching Boys Effectively Logic Model. Among the practical strategies in which their teachers have been trained and coached, these 10 constitute both a research and performance baseline for success.

1. Teachers increase the use of graphics, pictures, and storyboards in literacy-related classes and assignments.
2. Classroom methodology includes project-based education in which the teacher facilitates hands-on, kinesthetic learning.
3. Teachers provide competitive learning opportunities, even while holding to cooperative learning frameworks.
4. Classroom curricula include skills training in time, homework, and classroom management.
5. Approximately 50 percent of reading and writing choices in a classroom are left up to the students themselves.
6. Teachers move around their classrooms as they teach.
7. Students are allowed to move around as needed in classrooms, and they are taught how to practice self-discipline in their movement.
8. Male mentoring systems permeate the school culture, including use of parent-mentors, male teachers, vertical mentoring (e.g., high school students mentoring elementary students), and male peer mentoring.
9. Teachers use boys-only (and girls-only) group work and discussion groups in core classes such as language arts, math, science, and technology.
10. Teachers and counselors provide skill building for sensitive boys (approximately 20 percent of males fall somewhere on the “sensitive boy” spectrum), and special education classes are taught by teachers trained in how to teach boys specifically.

For more information, click HERE. Published in ASCD Express.