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CHAPTER 3

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THE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP RUBRIC

Lessons From the Field

“A child in India grows up with the idea that you have to make choices that will create a better future. In fact, your whole life is a continuum of choices, so the more conscious you are, the greater your life will be.”

Deepak Chopra

In the ten years since we wrote our first book, the world has changed in significant ways, and education has responded with its concomitant spate of legislation, reforms, resource allocation, and reallocation. A global pandemic challenged states and school districts to suspend or scrap policies and practices that had taken years to research and implement. Schooling, as we knew it, was turned upside down. Unfortunately, one thing did not change and may have gotten worse: disproportional educational gaps persist. During the pandemic, we let some students slip through the cracks even further. Many students who once benefited from being in the safe, stable, predictable environments of classrooms and schools—receiving two meals a day under the watchful eye of caring adults—were left to fend for themselves, often at home alone or watching siblings, with little if any access to nutritious meals. Staying on track with online learning was difficult, if not impossible. Unless we step forward to take radical steps to help these students catch up, educationally and socially, they will be permanently left behind.

In the context of historical, political, and cultural upheaval reflected in movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo, many people have finally come to realize how inequity in society and its institutions affects some people more than others. Those people seem ready to engage in action for social justice. Yet others have come to define themselves by confronting any progress made for social justice and aiming to stop or reverse it. The safeguards of our Constitution are at risk. There can be no liberty in the absence of justice, and since social injustice begins with educational inequity, this is the time for educational leaders to take concerted action to expose and identify the root causes of inequity in schools, to narrow and close educational gaps, or in time to provide the leadership to confront the power structures that stem from them.

To delve deeper into the issues discussed above, this chapter is designed to connect our professional experiences with two of the tools of Cultural Proficiency, to demystify the tools and accelerate your use of them. One of the tools we introduced earlier was the Cultural Proficiency Continuum, which we defined as a model for change that provides specific descriptions of unhealthy and healthy values, behaviors, practices, and policies of individuals and organizations on the way to Cultural Proficiency. Table 3.1 presents a specific kind of Cultural Proficiency continuum: one that will help us examine beliefs, values, and actions of educational leaders. We call it the Cultural Proficiency Leadership Rubric. We also refer to this tool as just the Cultural Proficiency Rubric. A *continuum* helps us examine practice as a progression of values over time or from one state to another. A *rubric* helps us assess our performance or progress against some standard. In this regard, the rubric does two things: it helps us assess where we are and where we want to go on our Cultural Proficiency journey, and it helps us know how complex or difficult the work will be. This specific Cultural Proficiency Leadership Rubric uses two tools in an interrelated fashion to help you start your work. The two tools are the continuum itself, with six vertical columns or levels of culturally proficient behaviors, and the five essential elements, which you will recall as the five standards of practice that further help us and others understand how to think and act as we make progress along the continuum.

The examples offered in the cells are just that, and any number of other examples might be equally good to illuminate the continuum. In fact, we invite our readers to identify situations, policies, or behaviors that might fit into various cells of the Cultural Proficiency Leadership Rubric. This is work that can be started on your own or with a small group of committed colleagues with whom you feel comfortable sharing thoughts and observations about findings that might be troubling or controversial.

TABLE 3.1 THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY LEADERSHIP RUBRIC

ASSESSING CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE	CULTURAL DESTRUCTIVENESS	CULTURAL INCAPACITY	CULTURAL BLINDNESS	CULTURAL PRECOMPETENCE	CULTURAL COMPETENCE	CULTURAL PROFICIENCY
The extent to which the leader uses personal experience to develop, maintain, and provoke a moral imperative (passion, knowledge, wisdom, diligence, and courage) for making positive changes that benefit underserved stakeholders in schools and in the community	Leaders rely on a narrow definition of “American culture” to develop and justify policies and procedures and resource allocation to those they believe are more entitled or capable than others to receive those resources, while denying or restricting resources to those deemed “unworthy” or incapable of achieving success in America.	Leaders tolerate diversity in schools but believe that the perspectives and attributes of the dominant culture are superior to those of other cultures. This belief justifies policies and practices that maintain the status quo and benefit those who reflect the attributes of the <i>dominant</i> culture, while limiting the leaders’ motivation and resolve to make changes to benefit underserved stakeholders.	Leaders demonstrate managerial competence by supporting and being supported by agency policies and practices that promote a culture of continuous improvement for all students regardless of their cultural backgrounds and experiences. Evidence of effectiveness is limited to single measures such as agency-sanctioned standardized test scores, which reinforce the belief that “some students just do better than others.”	Leaders are compassionate, caring, diligent professionals whose backgrounds compel a narrow focus on serving a particular cultural group, often the same culture as the leaders’. Such a focus may limit the leaders’ cultural capacity to advocate for all underserved students and reinforces a belief that minority leaders are more capable of developing relationships with and addressing the needs of minority stakeholders.	Leaders are compassionate, diligent, and skilled professionals whose experiences have led to a profound understanding of long-term, systemic educational inequity. This understanding compels a relentless, fervent professional and personal commitment to challenge and break down barriers to educational access, opportunity, and success and close gaps for historically underserved stakeholders.	Leaders are compassionate, diligent, and transformational professionals who understand that inequities in school are a microcosm of inequities in society. Such understanding compels a relentless commitment to educating all stakeholders about educational and social injustice while also breaking down barriers to success for historically underserved stakeholders.

REFLECTION: THE CULTURAL PROFICIENCY LEADERSHIP RUBRIC

These activities can be conducted by individuals or, for maximum effectiveness, by a group of colleagues.

- Turn your attention to the first essential element: assessing cultural knowledge.
- Study the operational definitions of assessing cultural knowledge in the first two cells of the first vertical column. These two cells define the “essence” of assessing cultural knowledge.
- Next, read the examples for assessing cultural knowledge, beginning with *cultural destructiveness* and going through *Cultural Proficiency*. You will have read twelve illustrations along the continuum—six illustrations for each of the two sub-points of this essential element.



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- What do you notice as you read from left to right? What questions and reactions do you have? If conducting the activity with colleagues, compare and discuss your observations and reactions.

- How does completing this activity help you understand how to use the rubric to diagnose and formatively develop your values and behaviors and your school's/organization's policies and practices? What next steps might you take?



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