

4-STAGE PROCESS CHANGES INDIVIDUALS AND ENTIRE SCHOOLS

In this time of changing school demographics and widening achievement gaps, developing cultural proficiency is an essential step for teachers. But what is the process for leading teachers through this transformative journey?

Below, we review the first two stages of a four-stage process for developing culturally proficient educators; these first stages are described in detail in the Winter 2008 issue of *JSD*. We'll move on to stages 3 and 4 and conclude with a discussion on building capacity within the school.

THE FIRST STAGES:

Raising the issue and assessing readiness

Developing cultural proficiency in a school or district requires a staff developer who has the cultural lens, skills, conviction, and time to support the work. In stage 1, raising awareness, educators examine a variety of school data to recognize how a lack of cultural understanding impacts more than student test scores. Teachers participate in a systematic examination of data, such as discipline referrals, special education placements, advanced academic programs, course failures, retention rates, parent participation, and college acceptance rates, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Through this process, they see that the achievement gap is not created by diverse students and their families, as many erroneously believe, but by a system that serves some student groups better than others. For many teachers, this critical insight is the motivator for change and grounds for developing cultural proficiency.

In stage 2, facilitators use cultural simulations to assess teacher readiness to engage in further professional development. These diagnostic activities help facilitators distinguish between teachers who acknowledge cultural variation and demonstrate an interest in further exploration and those who do not. Once facilitators make these distinctions, they can begin differentiated professional develop-

ment. While one group moves to stages 3 and 4 of this journey, another continues to engage in schoolwide stage 1 and 2 activities to further develop their readiness for more intensive cultural proficiency learning experiences.

STAGE 3:

Increasing knowledge of cultural variation and surfacing deficit beliefs

In stage 3, teachers expand their cultural knowledge and examine their personal beliefs. During this stage, facilitators use a variety of activities such as book studies, film analysis, cultural simulations, and community events to guide teachers in learning about their own cultural identity and its influence on teaching. In this stage, teachers learn that culture encompasses much more than foods, traditions, and holidays and includes the values, norms, beliefs, role definitions, and worldviews of a society. Additionally, teachers learn about the cultural backgrounds of their students and families and how these identities shape their behavior and interactions at home.

In learning about themselves and their students, teachers examine schooling as a process of cultural transmission. This leads to deeper understanding of the concept of the achievement gap. They learn, for example, that students who value independence, individual identity, and competition tend to do better in school as a group than students who value interdependence, group identity, and group success. The former set of values are not only entrenched but promoted in our educational system. Furthermore, they learn that these hidden aspects of culture are responsible for many of the culture clashes in schools that result in serious consequences for culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students, including disproportionate representation in special education, underrepresentation in gifted education, overreferral to discipline, and high retention and dropout rates.

A learning community of up to 40 teachers can work together at this stage in a large group, or facilitators may create small study groups where the groups independently complete assigned readings and explore and discuss their learning in greater depth. The entire group then can gather to debrief insights from across the small groups and engage



In each issue of *JSD*, Sarah W. Nelson, above, and Patricia L. Guerra write about the importance of and strategies for developing cultural awareness in teachers and schools. The columns are available at www.nsd.org.



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in other cultural activities. The readings and activities serve as a mechanism for examining and discussing classroom practices and surfacing deficit beliefs. Since the goal at this stage is to create an environment of trust and safety in order for teachers to talk freely without fear of judgment or blame, the discussion should focus on the practices of teachers described in the readings rather than on the practice of those participating in the professional development. Moreover, facilitators must take care in how they challenge individual teachers who express deficit beliefs. They should guide the discussion to address stereotypes or negative assumptions using lessons and examples from the readings and insights gained from participation in the cultural simulations.

STAGE 4:

Challenging and reframing deficit beliefs

Once a group has developed an environment of trust and safety as well as a base level of cultural knowledge, participants are ready to move to stage 4 learning experiences. The goals of this stage are to explore teachers' personal practice and to challenge and reframe their deficit thinking. To get started, re-examine school data gathered in stage 1. In the first stage, the data were disaggregated by student ethnicity and socioeconomic status. In stage 4, the group will examine the same data that are further disaggregated by teacher and program for the purpose of revealing patterns of inequity within individual classrooms, departments, and grade levels. Additionally, teachers may conduct surveys or interviews with students and parents about their school experiences to uncover inequitable practices around interactions and relationship-building. In conjunction with the data analysis, teachers should read books or articles and view films and documentaries that illustrate how personal beliefs affect behavior and professional practice to clearly understand how the relationship between these two factors results in differential treatment of some groups of students and their parents in school. See a list of relevant films on this page.

These provocative activities focused on individual teacher practice ignite discussion. As teachers reflect on new or unsettling ideas, they often experience cognitive dissonance. As teachers struggle to internally reconcile practices they thought were color-blind and equitable, their deficit beliefs surface. At times, they will feel discomfort and even voice guilt over discovering that, in some cases, they have actually "harmed" kids. This is where the skills of a good facilitator are necessary. Each time teachers express deficit beliefs, facilitators need to use a cultural lens to deconstruct and reframe the beliefs. At the same time, facilitators need to reassure teachers that they are well-intended educators who were culturally unaware, like

Use these films to discuss cultural perspectives. The director or filmmaker's name is listed in parentheses.

- "The Eye of the Storm" (Jane Elliott, 1970)
- "Blue Eyed" (Jane Elliott, 1996)
- "A Class Divided" (Jane Elliott, 1985)
- "The Angry Eye" (Jane Elliott, 2001)
- "The Stolen Eye" (Jane Elliott, 2003)
- "The Color of Fear" (Lee Mun Wah, 1994)
- "The Color of Fear 2: Walking Each Other Home" (Lee Mun Wah, 1997)
- "Stolen Ground" (Lee Mun Wah, 1993)
- "Cold Water" (Noriko Ogami, 1987)
- "Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary" (Laura Simon, 1997)
- "All I See Is What I Know" (Zach Webb, 2000)

so many of the rest of us who started this journey.

BUILDING CAPACITY

Meanwhile, facilitators are continuing to work with the other educators who were not ready for stage 3 and 4 learning experiences. At this point, a few of the teachers who are participating in the in-depth learning may have developed sufficient cultural understanding to co-facilitate some of the stage 1 and 2 work with the rest of the faculty. As peers work with teachers at different levels of readiness, they can share their own struggles and epiphanies, which will help to reduce apprehension and raise interest school-wide. For those teachers who believe cultural proficiency is another fad, these sessions will serve as an indication that cultural proficiency is a skill all teachers will have an opportunity to acquire as the professional development cycle continues.

To build capacity among faculty, facilitators must not only provide learning experiences, but also strategically use the cultural knowledge and skills that participants develop. For example, as teachers begin to demonstrate cultural proficiency, they can take on key roles in decision-making bodies. They will be able to identify inequities within school policies and practices that may have earlier gone unnoticed. Discipline policies, curriculum and instructional materials, assessment and referral procedures for special and gifted education, parent involvement programs, and teacher hiring practices are just a few of the areas this group of teachers could examine for bias. When educators discover inequitable policies, procedures, and practices, they can work with others in the school to transform these components using culturally responsive practices. In this way, the four-stage professional development process changes not only the practice of individual teachers, but also leads to a more culturally proficient school. ■