Cultural Proficiency
Definitions

Culture: The system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning. As understood in sociology, a **subculture** is a set of people with a distinct set of behavior and beliefs that differentiate them from a larger culture as a whole of which they are a part. The subculture may be distinctive because of the age of its members, or by their race, ethnicity, class and/or gender, and the qualities that determine a subculture as distinct may be aesthetic, religious, political, and sexual or a combination of these factors.

Cultural proficiency: Cultural Proficiency in education is the level of knowledge-based skills and understanding that are required to successfully teach and interact with students and to work effectively with colleagues from a variety of cultures by holding all forms of cultural difference in high esteem; a continuing self-assessment of one's values, beliefs and biases grounded in cultural humility; an ongoing vigilance toward the dynamics of diversity, differences and power; and the expansion of knowledge of cultural practices that recognize cultural bridges as going both ways. Culturally proficient services require that both the individual and the institution be culturally proficient.

Five essential elements contribute to an institution's ability to become more culturally proficient which include:
1. Valuing diversity.
2. Having the capacity for cultural <u>self-assessment.</u>
3. Managing the dynamics of difference.
4. Having institutionalized cultural knowledge.
5. Having developed adaptations to service/curriculum delivery reflecting an understanding of cultural diversity.

These five elements should be manifested at every level of an organization including policymaking, administration, and practice. (Cross, etal. 1989)

Diversity: The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance, inclusiveness and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing and valuing our individual differences. These differences include among other things race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, and religious beliefs. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and

moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual. A diverse educational community recognizes and values the educational benefits that flow from employee populations that are varied by race, gender, disability status, belief, age, national origin, cultural background, life experience and other enriching characteristics.

Diversity is having the following four components:

1. <u>Diversity demographics.</u> The belief that the workforce and student population should be diverse by race, gender, disability status, sexual orientation, national origin, cultural background, life experience and other enriching characteristics.
2. <u>Diversity climate:</u> That the campus climate should be welcoming, respectful and inclusive of our diverse student and employee populations. That the district and campuses value and promote all four components of diversity.
3. <u>Diversity equity.</u> That the district does not discriminate in hiring and other activities.
4. <u>Diversity skills.</u> Employees should have the skills and knowledge that would enable them to work and interact effectively in a diverse environment.

Cultural Proficiency Continuum

This continuum represents the various levels of cultural proficiency, from the least proficient to most proficient

Cultural destructiveness: The elimination of other people's cultures. (Genocide to Majority-conformity approach) *See the difference, stomp it out.*

Cultural incapacity: Belief in the superiority of one's own culture and behavior that disempowers another's culture. (Ethnocentrism, acts of discrimination, internalized inferiority) *See the difference, make it wrong.*

Cultural blindness: Acting as if the cultural differences one sees do not matter or not recognizing that there are differences among and between cultures. "I don't see color I only see another human being." *See the difference, act like you don't.*

Cultural pre-competence: Awareness of the limitations of one's skills or an organization's practices when interacting with other cultural groups. *See the difference, respond inadequately.*

Cultural competence: Interacting with other cultural groups using the five essential elements of cultural proficiency as the standard for individual behavior

and school practices. *See the difference; understand the difference that differences makes.*

Cultural proficiency: Knowing how to learn about individual and organizational culture; interacting effectively in a variety of cultural environments. Proficient use of the five elements of cultural proficiency and the ability to successfully adapt teaching and service in response to cultural diversity at individual and institutional levels. *See the difference and respond effectively and affirming.*

Based in part on *Cultural Proficiency, a Manual for School Leaders 2nd Ed.* Lindsey, Robins, and Terrel, 2003

Five Essential Elements for Cultural Proficiency

1. **Value Diversity**
   Celebrate and encourage the presence of a variety of people in all activities. Recognize difference as diversity rather than as inappropriate responses to the environment. Accept that each culture finds some values and behaviors more important than others do.

   Valuing diversity means accepting and respecting differences. People come from very different backgrounds, and their customs, thoughts, ways of communicating, values, traditions, and institutions vary accordingly. Understanding diversity is not only limited to race and gender. The choices that individuals make are powerfully affected by culture.   Cultural experiences influence choices that range from recreational activities to subjects of study. It is important to understand that "different" does not mean "wrong" in cross-cultural interactions. Diversity between cultures must be recognized, but also the diversity within them. Valuing diversity means adopting a pluralistic approach as opp0osed, for example, a majority-conformity philosophy.

2. **Capacity for cultural self-assessment.**
   Awareness of your own culture and the effect it may have on people whose backgrounds are different from yours. Understanding how the culture of your organization affects those whose culture is different. Learning to recognize your own biases. Identification and acceptance of the reality of privilege and entitlement are critical and most often the most difficult aspect

to address. The assessment must be done both at the individual and institutional level.

3. **Managing the dynamics of difference, being conscious of the power dynamics inherent when cultures interact.**
This requires we understand the dynamics that occur when individuals from different cultures interact and how power and privilege impact these interactions. It requires a contextual understanding of the social and institutional dynamics that result in the inequitable distribution of power and privilege in society. Recognizing that conflict is a normal and natural part of life. Developing skills to manage conflict in a positive way.

It requires understanding how stereotypes develop and are perpetuated and how prejudice is developed. Understanding these dynamics then allows us to begin to be able to manage them. We can begin to avoid conflict that often occurs when different cultures interact, and we can begin to remove barriers and develop strategies for success.

4. **Adaptations to service delivery, curriculum instruction that reflect an understanding of cultural diversity.**
Cultural proficiency is a life long learning process. Cultural practices can be adapted to develop new tools for more culturally effective teaching, curriculum development and workplace norms. It includes changing the way things are done to acknowledge the differences that are present in staff and community and recognizing that there are different learning styles.

Develop skills for cross-cultural communication. Institutionalize cultural interventions for conflicts and con fusion sometimes caused by the dynamics of difference. Develop instruction/curriculum that teaches students to understand events, situations and concepts from the perspectives of a range of cultural ethnic, gender, disability, religious, racial and other groups. Develop practices that remove barriers created by inequitable past and current practices.

5. **Institutionalizing cultural knowledge and resources**
Integrate into your systems for staff development and education information and skills that enable all to interact effectively in a variety of cross cultural situations. Teach origins of stereotypes and prejudices. Develop institutional policies and practices that are informed by the guiding principles of cultural proficiency. Program materials should reflect positive images of all people, and be valid for use with each group. Incorporate cultural knowledge into the mainstream of the organization. All employees must be evaluated on their ability to integrate cultural proficiency in everything they do. Create opportunities for diverse groups to learn about one another and to engage in ways that honor who they are and challenge them to be more.

Based in part on *Cultural Proficiency, a Manual for School Leaders.* Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell, 1998.

Cultural Proficiency in Educational Institutions

Cultural Proficiency must exist at both the individual and institutional level. It is a system requiring the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, values and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the effectiveness and quality of services, thereby producing better outcomes (Davis & Donald, 1977)

It is important to understand cultural proficiency is never fully realized, achieved, or completed; rather cultural proficiency is an ongoing learning process. In addition to the general definition about cultural proficiency in an educational institution may include the following.

1. Faculty
For faculty, cultural proficiency also includes having knowledge of the cultures, perspectives and experiences of the diverse students they teach; and the ability to effectively integrate this knowledge into instructional and student service activities. This knowledge may impact course content, course offerings, classroom environment, and teaching style or affect counseling technique or library resource selections. Cultural proficiency for faculty also includes the ability to use this knowledge to interact effectively with other district employees of diverse cultures.

2. Classified Staff
For classified staff, cultural proficiency also includes the ability to support, assist and interact with diverse students and to work successfully with colleagues from diverse cultures. This knowledge may impact student access, services to students, and the creation of a welcoming and respectful environment.

3. Administrators
Administrators should be able to integrate cultural proficiency into all aspects of leadership, development of policies and procedures, administration, evaluations, curriculum development, hiring, communication, professional interactions, supervision and service delivery. This should be accomplished while systematically involving key stakeholders.

4. District

For districts, cultural proficiency means having a defined set of values and principles, goals, demonstrated behaviors, attitudes, policies, procedures, and institutional structures that enable all employees to work and teach effectively in a culturally proficient manner. District policies and practices must also provide the resources, support and advocacy for cultural proficiency efforts.

Culturally Proficient Instruction

Culturally Proficient Instruction should at a minimum include the following:

a) Content integration (integrating multicultural content into instruction).

   Level 1: The Contributions Approach
   Focuses on heroes, holidays, and discrete cultural elements.

   Level 2: The Ethnic Additive Approach
   Content, concepts, themes, and perspectives are added to the curriculum without changing its structure.

   Level 3: The Transformational Approach
   The structure of the curriculum is changed to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspectives of diverse ethnic and cultural groups.

   Level 4: The Decision Making and Social Action Approach
   Students make decisions on important social issues and take action to solve them.

b) Equity pedagogy (multi-cultural teaching methods)

c) Knowledge construction (How knowledge is created and culturally influenced).

d) Prejudice reduction

Based on Banks, J.A. (1988). *Multiethnic Education: Theory and Practice. 2nd ed.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.