

Preface

Becoming a teacher has been a lifelong dream for you. Now, whether you are starting your first, fifth, or fifteenth year of teaching, you are focused on becoming the best teacher you can be. You want to be successful and feel satisfaction having achieved efficacy with all students and their families. However, your journey to improving your efficacy is always unfolding ahead of you. The path through your career is accompanied with surprises, challenges, discoveries, and rewards that never cease to amaze you. At this time, you may be concerned primarily about teaching a lesson effectively and efficiently while keeping everyone on task. Yet, simultaneously, you are focused on creating a warm and welcoming sense of place where students experience curiosity and express their own creativity.

Schools and classrooms continue to change. The changes include who is coming to school, what is being taught, how it is being taught, and how learning is both conveyed and assessed. Although you have built upon your past memories of when you started your teaching career, you quickly realized that contemporary schools and classrooms involve new and different complexities for which you have no or limited background or experiences. These sensations happen to all teachers, and this book will help you bridge from your past, fortify you for the present, and prepare you for the future.

To fulfill all of your dreams along your travels as a teacher, you are navigating cultural competence. Cultural competence encompasses teaching and learning about all people, places, things, and events; these experiences are both like and unlike the ones that are known, understood, accepted, and promoted with dignity and respect.

Through cultural competence, teachers provide guidance for achieving proficiency in all endeavors, encouragement for demonstrating proficiencies through individual forms of expression, and assurance for maintaining positive regard for all individuals and groups. In schools and classrooms, cultural competence entails the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and expressions (or what we know, do, believe, and respect) about ourselves, others, and all members of society; these are demonstrated through our thoughts, words, actions, and interactions.

In other words, cultural competence involves the content, practices, and contexts for achieving success and sensing satisfaction for that which is significant, as well as sustaining success and satisfaction throughout one's schooling. You want your students to enjoy school and to learn. Hopefully, you also want to enjoy school and learn along with your students. Navigating cultural competence equips you with the tools to share the journey with your students so all students will be academically accomplished, individually rewarded, and socially accepted during their school years—and throughout their lives.

Historically, schools and classrooms across the United States have not always been safe environments where all students were motivated to attend and achieve. Not all schools and classrooms taught about or practiced (1) democratic principles, (2) educational equity, (3) human rights, and (4) social justice ensuring that each of these goals was granted to each student. Shamefully, some contemporary schools and teachers still continue to be challenged, if not reluctant, and even resistant in fulfilling these goals.

As a classroom teacher, you must fulfill each of these four goals; this text explains the rationale and provides the strategies to achieve efficacy. When you practice cultural competence, your teaching and the learning in your classroom will be successful; everyone—including you—will achieve a sense of satisfaction. You and your students will know what is significant and will be able to sustain individual success and satisfaction.

This text should assure you that you will become one of the best teachers possible. As you read each chapter, reflect upon your past and review the items in the suitcase that you have brought with you. Some of those suitcases are packed with excellent practices; some of those suitcases contain practices that you are encouraged to modify or leave behind.

In your suitcase, you will find three categories of practices with positive and negative influences:

1. The generational perpetuation of practice (Gallavan, 2007): In your journey as a teacher, you may replicate the messages and methods that your own teachers exhibited. Be aware that you may be perpetuating practices that need to be modified or stopped. This trend applies particularly to new teachers who are prepared and then start their careers in the same geographic regions where they were raised. If this pattern applies to you, you are strongly encouraged to read about and preferably visit many other schools and classrooms across the United States.
2. The apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975): Although you learned from your mentors and colleagues, it is time for you to

xii • Navigating Cultural Competence in Grades 6–12

recognize and distinguish the practices that are helpful from the practices that are harmful. Choose carefully; it is easy to follow a leader who is not the best one for you to follow. Teachers tend to establish the foundations of their practices early with little or no change in their careers.

3. The poverty of practice (Black & Wiliam, 1998): Not only must you distinguish the practices that contribute to your efficacy from the practices that detract from your efficacy, you must realize that some desired practices just don't exist in today's schools and classrooms. This is called the poverty of practice. You are encouraged to enroll in graduate courses at a university, travel near and far, and visit schools to talk with teachers who are achieving cultural competence. In addition, you can read books, search the Internet, and form a study group with teachers like yourself. The resources are endless. If you want to improve the strong positive influences generated through the generational perpetuation of practice and apprenticeship of observation, you will need to nourish the poverty of your practice.

AUDIENCE

This book is written for classroom teachers at all stages of their careers. It is particularly useful as a text for a study group, for professional development, or for mentoring new teachers and interns. Cultural competence is not a new idea and most teachers have studied multicultural education in various ways. However, the time has come for all teachers to become culturally competent and commit to ensuring that their students also become culturally competent.

This book equips you with the Gallavan cultural competence compass so you can navigate your career, guaranteeing success and satisfaction for you, your students, their families, and school administrators. You want your students (and yourself) to enjoy your classroom every day. This book will help you follow that dream.