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# Preface

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.*

—Marianne Williamson, p. 190

**E**stablishing a moral compass is at the heart of current educational efforts to educate each child to achieve academic rigorous standards. This moral position springs from the knowledge that prior efforts in public education provided educational rigor for a few and sorted out the rest into a predetermined lower societal class. Moreover, schools overtly participated in establishing and maintaining a tradition of societal elitism and poverty along the lines of race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and ableism. Ableism, in this text, will be used to mean a “discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities” (Hehir, 2002). As the authors, we understand and acknowledge that educators are the products of our societal context, hence shaped by the education they received. We further understand that without critical self-reflection on the values and beliefs that define our morality, teachers and school leaders are inclined to continue in unquestioning fashion the educational traditions they received.

In this book, we approach cultural proficiency as a moral framework that helps educators respond in ways that educate each child to achieve high academic standards. The path of cultural proficiency is an *inside-out* approach that professes a transformation of values and beliefs that affect the actions of all members of the school community—administrators, counselors, teachers, students, parents, psychologists, custodians, technicians, secretaries, office managers, and so on. The cultural proficiency

journey is an examination of what comes *prior* to our outward behaviors—the principles that guide our actions. Traveling this path requires a mindset and a way of being that esteems the culture of others as you esteem your own culture, while positively engaging, adapting, and responding to each new situation.

In Part I of this book, we describe the framework for understanding cultural proficiency as moral discourse and action. First, we introduce you to Oakland Hills as a setting for case analysis throughout the book. Although a fictional school district, it represents a composite of school systems with which we have worked throughout North America. Second, there is a review of the four tools of cultural proficiency into a conceptual framework that demonstrates the tools as interrelated components. Also in this section, you will find models for discussing morality and the implications for schools.

- Thomas Sergiovanni's (1992) insights on motivation and morality are reviewed as a way of understanding how educators are inspired toward action.
- Jurgen Habermas' (1990) perspective on moral reasoning gives us critical insight into the concept of lifeworld as a backdrop for how we come to understand the world around us.
- Habermas' perspective helps explain why two parties can view an identical event and walk away with two different versions of what transpired. This is particularly important as we venture into proficient dispositions for cross-cultural communications.
- Chris Argyris' (1990) discussion of the Ladder of Inference as presented by Peter Senge (1999) provides a powerful illustration of how a series of inferential steps shape our eventual actions.
- Finally, we discuss Brenda CampbellJones' (2002) model of moral action when performing intentional acts toward social justice.

Part II of this book presents cases for you to apply your understanding of cultural proficiency as a framework for moral action. Each case has thought-provoking dilemmas for critical self-reflection and group discussions. We invite your active participation in probing and understanding the dilemmas presented in each case. The cases are designed to aid your colleagues and you in surfacing personally held assumptions. The dilemmas are to provide an opportunity for your colleagues and you to raise awareness of the role assumptions play in shaping beliefs. Bringing our deeply held *beliefs* (principles) to the surface is fundamental to understanding the actions we take. We encourage you to test your beliefs in light

of how well these principles guide you in educating every child and family you serve.

As a staff, we encourage you to read these cases and participate in dialogue using the prompts that accompany each case. The cases can stimulate constructive, culturally proficient ideas and actions for use in your own school setting. Through informed ethical conversations, your colleagues and you cocreate the culturally responsive and responsible reality that serves you and the children in your schools (Gill Monroe, 2006; Lindsey, Roberts, & CampbellJones 2005; Maturana & Varela 1992).

## A REWARDINGLY DIFFICULT PROCESS

Read the passage from “Proud Flesh,” taken from the article *America for All Americans* and record your response in the spaces provided on the next page.

During my teenage years, I had the wonderful experience of raising horses. Along with the joy of playing with these beautiful animals came the responsibility of caring for them. On occasion, they would develop infectious sores around the hooves of their feet. To prevent a condition of lameness within the animals, the veterinarian would cut deeply in the wound and heavily medicate the area to halt any spreading of infection. Within a short period, a thin layer of tissue known as “proud flesh” would develop over the top of the lacerated area giving the appearance of rapid healing. However, the contrary was the case. This layer acted as a lid providing the perfect caldron for disease to grow and fester, ensuring permanent injury. It was my job to peel away the fleshy layer after it developed and keep the wound clean and properly medicated. Upon removing the flesh, pus would spill from the wound, producing the most awful odor. However, no matter how offensive the smell to my senses, this procedure was necessary to ensure that the wound healed from the inside, preventing a condition of permanent lameness within the animal. As in the case of the injured horses, sometimes we need to dig deeply into wounds that have been covered perhaps too quickly. We need to clean them well no matter how offensive they may initially appear to our senses. We must peel away the “proud flesh” and allow healing to occur from the inside or suffer permanent lameness for the remainder of our years. (Noli & Jones, 1996, pp. 7–22)

What does the “proud flesh” metaphor mean to you? In what ways does it apply to your school? What is your reaction to the metaphor of proud flesh?

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Do you think the metaphor is an appropriate picture of the difficulty of the moral work facing educators when it comes to teaching each child to achieve high standards? Why? Why not?

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You may have a queasy, unsettled feeling after reading the “Proud Flesh” passage. If so, you are not alone. The thought of digging deeply into an infected wound creates a painful picture. Yet, it is exactly the process necessary for healing that leads to a healthy school environment. Schools have a tradition saturated with unhealthy propagation of systematic oppression and entitlement (Bennett, Jr., 1987; Brown, 1972; Kozol, 1991; Woodson, 1933). Educators will have to dig deeply into the moral underpinnings that maintain these systemic barriers and purposefully and painfully remove them in order to move forward. Cultural Proficiency is a set of tools designed to move one from unhealthy to healthy values, behaviors, policies, and practices. The shift engendered in the move from unhealthy to healthy actions has deep moral bases for educators. We are pleased to be on this journey with you.