

Foreword to the Second Edition

Rob Larson is the Federal Liaison and Director of the State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP) for the Oregon Department of Education. We asked him to write this foreword, not as an official representative of his department, but as our colleague and friend. Consequently, we are legally obligated to state the obvious: the opinions that follow are Rob's alone.

In the context of declining resources, increasing accountability, and the rapidly changing faces of our students, the American education system is called upon to address a vast array of complex challenges. As we struggle to meet these demands school leaders and teachers are seeking a renewed sense of instructional leadership—one that demands success for every student.

The second edition of *Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach* helps educators understand that profound and productive engagement with all learners is fundamental to successful teaching and learning. Based on a pedagogy of social justice and inclusiveness, the culturally proficient educator instructs in a manner that builds understanding of the teacher's and the learner's world that engenders a value for diversity. This creates hope.

Access, standards-based teaching, assessment of learning, high-quality teaching, and accountability are all vital preconditions to improving learning systems. But each of these elements seems insufficient without a sharp focus on the cultural context and skill demonstrated in culturally competent practice. It is no longer good enough to portray high average scores—to mask a glaring fact that our system is not working for many of our students. A significant change is needed, one that embraces social justice and equity and also one in which leadership makes clear that a culture of low expectations for some students is unacceptable.

The Oregon Department of Education's *State Action for Education Leadership Project*, a statewide initiative to support education leadership development, is currently addressing culturally proficient practice in the context of instructional leadership. Across Oregon, state agency partners, association stakeholder groups, public and private colleges and universities, and schools and districts are enhancing our collective practice to become a more culturally proficient education system. From state policy to classroom practice, Oregon is taking bold steps to hold ourselves accountable for every student.

Our collective question stems from a need to know how we can best redesign instructional leadership to demonstrate culturally proficient practice across the system. Our theory of action is simply that we must foster culturally proficient teachers and leaders who are able to guide our educational system and workforce. To that end, coherent policy and support for proven practices are needed to accomplish two goals: 1) successfully teach *all* students with whom we have not been successful, and 2) provide favorable district and state policy scaffolding to support those who teach. This deeply important commitment is grounded in system accountability and represents an urgent moral imperative.

In *Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach*, the authors gently invite the reader to question assumptions and perspectives that underlie contextual features of the educative experience. Authentic stories guide teachers through a professional journey into reflective practice, while practical ideas suggest possible learning futures. Thoughtfully, readers are guided to replace well-intentioned, but culturally naïve practice with strategies that demonstrate skill and increasing proficiency. While the process of becoming more culturally proficient is never done, it is my personal and professional judgment that collaborative work in cultural competence and proficiency has helped to move our state system in ways not seen before. For this reason, there is hope.

—Rob Larson
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