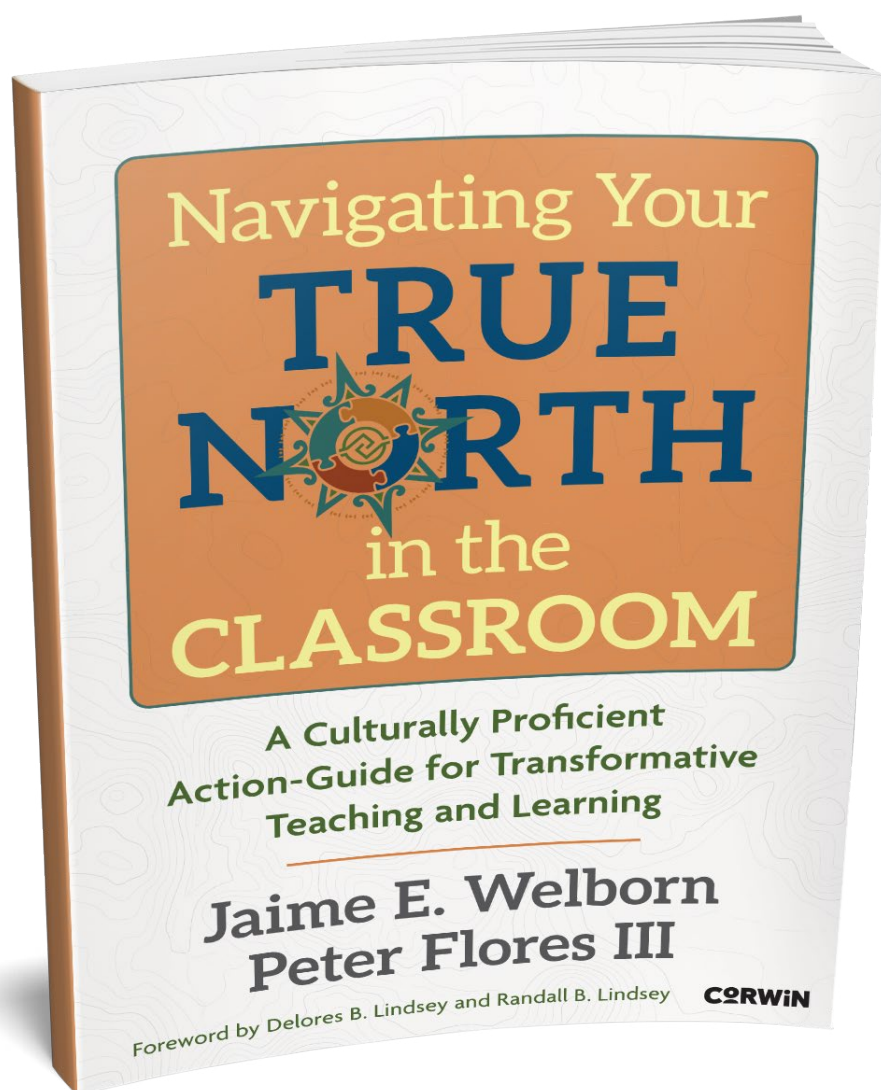


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PREFACE

Education stands at a critical waypoint—where the routes and maps we have relied upon fade and new horizons call for transformative change.

This book begins with a deep appreciation for teachers who continue to demonstrate extraordinary commitment to their True North, providing a high-quality education by anchoring their work in equity, access, and justice. These are the teachers who continue to demonstrate courage daily in their classroom practice and, as a result, have avoided drift or the danger of losing focus or slipping back into inequitable practices. We appreciate all teachers who continue to foster inclusive and responsive learning environments to create a hope-filled future for all students.

Across today's diverse and complex educational landscape, teachers are required to navigate barriers and chart courses through unpredictable conditions and competing priorities. Classrooms are shaped by shifting currents, such as political and social pressures, generational differences in student needs, new assessment and accountability measures, and budgetary priorities that impact efforts to address inequitable outcomes, all of which have contributed to teacher burnout or, even more concerning, teachers leaving education. Today's classroom teachers require specific navigational aids that support a compass framework for praxis.

Starting with Cultural Proficiency as our latitude and longitude will guide each of us toward our True North. This Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practice (R. B. Lindsey et al., 2019) serves as an invisible magnetic pull, helping us map diverse perspectives and contexts. This is essential for challenging our existing knowledge frameworks, mindsets, policies, and practices. In turn, it invites waypoints and course corrections for adjusting our classroom practices when inequities or obstacles arise.

Building a mindset that begins with an inside-out, critical consciousness approach of Cultural Proficiency and leans into one's core values can inform culturally proficient practice and behavior. Praxis occurs when teachers, through Freire's (1970) fourfold process of *critical awareness*, *critical reflection*, and *critical analysis*, recognize and understand what they say and do and how they respond to diversity truly matters. With intent and perseverance for *critical action*, this book is a call to foster impactful, transformative change in the classroom (Shields, 2025).

A working knowledge of the Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practice (Cross et al., 1989; R. B. Lindsey et al., 2019; Welborn et al., 2022), as evidenced by the application of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency, provides a compass framework for understanding the complexities and importance of managing cross-cultural interactions and meaningful relationships. Culturally proficient practice allows relationships to flourish for the purpose they exist, providing a high-quality education that enables *all* students to thrive in the classroom and beyond. Equally important is that this *critical reflection* approach will help teachers recognize the environmental and systemic factors that exist, which can impact their ability to reach their full teaching potential. These processes are the waypoints that mark the progress of transformative change.

Navigating Your True North in the Classroom serves as a comprehensive, action-oriented, and practical guide for teachers to foster a transformative mindset and implement strategies that provide each learner with the environment they need to thrive. It is meant to support teachers with classroom complexities, not critique them. This begins with a critical and reflective approach to examining our conscious and unconscious biases and existing knowledge frameworks that may lead to deficit thinking and cultural misunderstandings associated with embracing diversity (Chiu et al., 2017).

Before delving into the rationale for this book, it is essential to consider the integration of the following goals we, the authors, have set for you as you apply your learning from this action-oriented guide to your mindset and practice. You will:

- view Cultural Proficiency as a shared journey to improve our practice for educating students by widening our lens to build a transformative mindset;
- experience Cultural Proficiency as personal and professional work, focusing on cultural awareness and understanding its impact to your own identity, core values, and related efforts as educators so that each student thrives; and
- learn and apply the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to your *curriculum, instruction, and assessment; classroom management, discipline, and restorative practice; and communication and family–community engagement* practices for increasing equity, access, and inclusion in your classrooms.

As a result, a transformative mindset and commitment to culturally proficient practice, through a process of critical and reflective practice, can help navigate and mitigate the complexities of charted and uncharted waters of the diverse educational landscape. This work focuses on reducing and eliminating disproportionate outcomes based on student ability, race, language, behavior, and academic placement to narrow and close access and educational outcome gaps. Creating anchorage—safe spaces of belonging, restorative practices, and school-community-centric classrooms where relationships are built through cultural competence that authentically develops mutual trust and support—is necessary for student success. With the right navigational aids, tools, and collective support, teachers can continue to do what they do best: inspire and empower every learner.

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Imagine students and families from every cultural background, identity, and learning dynamic walking into your room during Back-to-School Night. You later receive messages, comments, and even a note from the principal about students and families feeling welcomed, valued, seen, and heard. It's the utopia of complete belonging: feeling at home; feeling safe to be exactly who they are each and every time they walk into your classroom. Students feel valued and understood; they feel psychologically safe to be their authentic selves and are encouraged to take academic risks that help develop their social and emotional intelligence, leading to overall success and well-being. Additionally, parents and guardians leave feeling they are important stakeholders and willing and engaged partners in their child's educational experience.

Imagine having the efficacy, mindset, and tools to create that teaching and learning environment where students thrive academically, physically, socially, and emotionally. This invites and creates a paradigm shift from “All students can learn” to “All teachers can teach” to, finally, “Teachers who love teaching teach children to love learning.” You see your students and parents’ cultural uniqueness and understand its importance to parents, being the primary system of support in their child’s education. You say and do things that demonstrate through words, deeds, and actions that you embrace and value their diversity. You are confident and capable of managing the dynamics of difference when they arise, and you effortlessly adapt to meet the needs of all your students, as often as necessary. Most notably, based on your positive outcomes, personal growth, and the gains you have achieved, you continuously strive to institutionalize that cultural knowledge as a key component for the success of your school and students.

That destination is not a fantasy but a very real and attainable outcome, starting by embarking on a personal journey that begins right here and now: a journey that will fuel your passion as an educator and help you further develop the knowledge and skills of culturally proficient educational practice and create a transformative mindset that allows you to tap into your reason for *why* you became a teacher. This will be a lifelong, continually evolving, journey, not a onetime, quick-fix, silver-bullet, or one-stop shop. Though this guidebook can be used in sections to address different components of your daily work, we purposefully did not provide you with a prescriptive list of random or token acts of equity that will lead to an absolute endpoint or final state of being informed by years of educational experiences, introspection, and reflection meant to fuel your personal and professional growth, and we believe this book is just what teachers need. As educators, we recognize this approach to be consistent with our mantra of being lifelong learners.

Why This Guide?

One of the most challenging aspects of serving as a classroom teacher is the universal truth that all students and families are different. This is the truest definition of diversity. Even students of similar backgrounds, who share cultural identities such as race/ethnicity, language, social class, gender, and ability, enter learning environments with various experiences, interests, learning styles, strengths, and challenges. While it is often said that we are more similar than we are different, we must be comfortable with the fact that we are also different. This is how we begin to reshape our lens of seeing diversity not as a problem to be solved but instead as something that can optimize learning. Teachers, students, and their families are part of an ecosystem where relationships matter. Individuals’ mindsets and core values manifest attitudes and behavior. Without the skill and ability to manage the dynamics of difference, this consequently impacts others in that ecosystem, possibly negatively, especially for those who do not belong to the dominant culture.

Navigating a Complex Educational Landscape

One compelling reason this book is timely is that, in the wake of the global pandemic, as well as national, state, and local political pressures and changes to national and state educational regulations and codes, teaching has become more challenging. The teacher shortage is growing, and burnout rates are at an all-time high (Gallup, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2022; Patrick & DiNapoli, 2024; Pressley et al., 2024). Exacerbated by a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic and a divisive national

situation, social and political pressures have prompted many to blame teachers, harshly criticizing their every move. Board of Education protests, book bans, and censorship of topics related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and, most notably, any real or assumed connection to Critical Race Theory or Ethnic Studies have forced some educators to consider retiring early, changing careers, and even walking out midyear. Navigating today's complex and rapidly changing educational landscape has created moral and ethical dilemmas for many educators, whose commitment to the profession is deeply rooted in serving an increasingly diverse student population.

These complex issues have exacerbated the educational gaps in some cases, further marginalizing those schools serving high percentages of immigrants (documented and undocumented), students of color, multilingual learners, and/or low-income families. While one of the primary goals of an education system in a democratic society is to "level the playing field," many schools, in fact, continue to perpetuate inequitable student outcomes because of persistent oppressive policies and practices that marginalize students of diverse cultural groups (Banks & Banks, 1995; Freire, 1970; Hammond, 2014; G. R. Howard, 2006; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008; Sullivan & Flores, 2023; Welborn et al., 2022). Classroom teachers face countless decisions each day to address the realities and social and emotional needs of students who, due to unforeseen disruptions to traditional educational services and shifting educational policies shaped by meritocratic and neoliberal perspectives, continue to fall further behind.

Addressing Equity and Access Gaps

Today, the need for classroom teachers to inspire, teach, and lead, equipped with tools to address equity and access gaps for students, is critical. As federal, state, district, and site leaders face challenges navigating controversial initiatives focused on meeting the needs of those who have been historically underserved and marginalized, teachers are on the front lines doing their best to curate safe and inclusive environments so that every student has the opportunity to succeed beyond traditional schooling. With the educational landscape growing increasingly complex and diverse, teachers urgently need resources such as *Navigating Your True North in the Classroom* as part of a compass framework to navigate these challenges effectively and foster an environment where every student can thrive because their teachers have developed the skills to adapt and respond in ways that meet the moment and beyond.

As noted, some students of color, multilingual learners, students with learning and physical needs, LGBTQ+ students, and students from low-income backgrounds have historically encountered systemic barriers that can impact their social, emotional, academic, and behavioral success. The systems (intentional or unintentional) often manifest from the values, behaviors, and aspirations of groups and individuals who emanate privilege and power (Apple & Beane, 1995; L. Darling-Hammond, 1995; R. B. Lindsey et al., 2019; Sarason, 1990), thus leaving many schools with low-performing results, racial inequities, and sanctions from the federal and state departments of education.

Deficit-based paradigms, laden with barriers, such as cultural blind spots and colorblind discourse that continue to perpetuate systemic oppression, the corollaries of privilege and entitlement, resistance to change, and an unawareness of the need to adapt, detour educators from the reality of access and equity for all (R. B. Lindsey et al., 2010; Love, 2019). One of the most notable outcomes of this detour is the accumulation of educational debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006). As teachers cultivate culturally proficient educational practice in their classrooms to develop strong

relationships, the promotion of inclusion and belonging as a result of cultural awareness is more important than ever for disrupting the status quo, which continues to fall short relative to student outcomes. There is no better time to repay this educational debt. This resource serves as a guide to support that repayment.

Building Strong Relationships and Promoting Inclusion and Belonging

Teachers possess the innate and unique ability to transform students' lives by creating and fostering environments that enhance students' academic success, social and emotional well-being, and preparedness for the diverse and global world in which students currently live and will contribute to in the future. Doing so with a culturally proficient mindset and lens honors individual students' intersectionalities of cultural diversity and provides a foundation for deep relationship-building and the overall promotion of inclusion and belonging in the classroom. Building relationships and trust is a critical factor in student achievement and school reform efforts among administration, staff, students, and families (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Fisher & Frey, 2019; T. C. Howard, 2024; Milner, 2013; Pierson, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Relationships are important to emphasize because for students to succeed, teachers must provide academic, social, and emotional support.

Additionally, research has shown that positive relationships between teachers and students enhance classroom management, thus reducing the number of behavioral instances (Lei et al., 2016; Marzano et al., 2003; Wubbels et al., 2015). As classrooms become increasingly diverse, led by a majority-White female teaching force, creating inclusive classrooms and a welcoming environment where every student feels a sense of belonging creates anchorage for safe spaces of belonging and restorative practices. This is paramount for addressing inequities and other educational gaps. Part of building positive, inclusive environments includes fostering climates of belonging through cultures of dignity (Cobb & Krownapple, 2019). The introduction of dignity as a key to what classroom teachers do every day influences the quality of relationships. Drawing upon the dispositions required to move toward dignity, including listening, empathy, openness, and patience, the core values such as empathy, open-mindedness, and thoughtful communication of a culturally competent educator (Welborn, 2026) reinforce the importance of relationships in creating inclusive classrooms, where students maintain their dignity and feel they belong. This action-oriented guide provides opportunities for reflective practice in which educators rely on empathy, open-mindedness, and thoughtful communication to transform teacher mindsets and classroom practices.

Transforming Mindsets and Practices

Transforming mindsets and knowledge frameworks and practices is essential for cultivating Cultural Proficiency in the classroom. Similar to Dweck's (2006) growth mindset theory, the reflection, dialogue, and action process of Cultural Proficiency allows educators to move from a deficit-based perspective to an asset-based mindset, evidenced by changes in behaviors and educational practices (Welborn et al., 2022). A mind that is "fixed" is one that is informed by unawareness of the need to adapt or resistance to change, that consciously or unconsciously maintains the status quo, and that protects the dominant learning culture. Fixed mindsets perpetuate practices that intentionally or unintentionally disadvantage students, often further pushing those who have been historically underserved to the margins. This book provides educators with the tools to critically

examine their own beliefs grounded in knowledge frameworks and practices and how they impact their students, encouraging a shift toward more equitable and inclusive approaches to teaching. By engaging in self-inquiry, critical reflection, and professional dialogue, teachers can deepen their understanding of Cultural Proficiency and its impact positive on student success.

Enhancing Student Success

Given the rationale, the purpose of this timely, practical, action-oriented resource is to chart a new course for classroom teachers that will support them in managing the daily challenges of the dynamics of cultural difference, build their mindset around a value for cultural diversity, challenge their paradigms with assessments of cultural knowledge, and inform adaptations to their behaviors and practices in the classroom to enhance student well-being and success. This addition to the literature on serving all students with a moral imperative toward equity, access, and success is designed to provide teachers with the opportunity to use the educational experience of a myriad of educators who contributed navigational aids of vignettes, methods of inquiry, new knowledge frameworks, and practical application to build a transformative mindset and a culturally proficient classroom and learning experience where each student thrives. Readers will engage in self-inquiry, reflection, and dialogue through professional conversations, deepening their understanding of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency. Most importantly, they will encounter an action-oriented path forward to meet the needs of all groups of students in their classrooms.

Why Teachers?

At the time we were writing this manuscript, nearly five years post-pandemic, teachers are still finding themselves in the middle of social and political complexities as they step in front of our nation's youth and their parents/guardians day after day. The reality is that what we say and do every day has an impact on students' lives, their academic achievement, their social and emotional development, and ultimately their and our future. We, the authors, believe there is no higher calling or vocation than that of a classroom teacher. We wrote this book specifically to help you build a mindset for serving all students at high levels; as a result, it informs your classroom behaviors and practices. So why is this book for teachers? We begin by exploring important reasons this book is for you.

Diversity is a fact. Equity is a choice. Inclusion is an action. Belonging is an outcome.

—Arthur Chan

Diversity is an undeniable fact. Each year, classroom teachers face increasingly diverse student groups. The intersection of teacher and student cultural backgrounds and identities makes each student's learning experience unique, increasing the complexity of managing the dynamics of difference in a classroom. Presently and in the future, it is expected that student demographics will continue to diversify, while teacher diversity will struggle to keep pace. This guide provides teachers with tools to assess their cultural knowledge and determine how cultural components interact in a given situation. Whether it is race, ethnicity, language, social class, gender, nationality, immigration status, sexual orientation, religion, or politics, teachers are continuously engaged with students and their families around dynamic issues brought into the classroom. With technology and the advent

of social media, schools can no longer confine their educational experiences within their fence lines. The culture of teachers and students shapes relationships and influences the classroom learning culture and climate.

A guidebook such as this one provides teachers with vignettes and inquiry-based strategies and activities to navigate a variety of student issues, communication challenges, and complex relationships arising from emerging cultural diversity. Teachers on the front lines who face these challenges every day deserve a flip-to guide to help them assess cultural knowledge, demonstrate their valuing of their students' and families' diversity, and ultimately manage the dynamics of difference to adapt to the complex cultural backgrounds of students.

Inclusion is an action, and belonging is an outcome. The second primary reason this book focuses on teachers is that they have a direct impact on students' experiences. Every single thing teachers do and say impacts students and their families, positively or negatively. Teachers often feel unprepared to meet the demands of 25–125 students per day. Whether intentional or unintentional, behaviors that negatively impact students ultimately can “close the door,” deny access to education, cause students to lose interest, and, as a result, perpetuate inequitable outcomes.

Equity is a choice. Equity is our True North. We believe teachers are genuinely caring; they entered the profession because they love seeing children learn. However, the complexities of meeting the expectations of the state and district, under challenging leadership styles, including the demands of our own family lives, can influence our values and behaviors, in turn impacting students and their outcomes. A guide, with inventories, self-assessments, and vignettes, can help provide immediate support for recognizing the impact one has on their current group of students. Pierson (2013) said it best: “Kids don’t learn from people they don’t like.” Oftentimes, students thrive from those they do. Teachers are on the front lines. They have a multitude of decisions and course corrections to make daily. This book is for teachers because, collectively, the positive impact we can make on education is substantial. Cultural competence prepares teachers to avoid cultural blind spots, resulting in the development of healthy, productive relationships with their students and families for the purpose they exist. **Equity is a choice.** Equity is our True North.

Another reason we wrote this book for teachers is that it seeks to fill a knowledge gap and provide ongoing support for educators who have completed educator preparation programs. It serves as a port of call—to build community and partnerships to sustain us on the journey. During those programs, teachers typically took basic courses on diversity, including cultural sensitivity, foundations of education, English language learners, multiculturalism, ethnic studies, or education of the exceptional child. As educators progress through their tenure and further their careers, they must have an easy-to-use go-to guide to continue their reflection, knowledge-building, and growth around the impact of culture and diversity, including how these factors are impacting the results they achieve in their classrooms. This guide encourages teachers to assess their cultural knowledge through reflection on their own culture and that of their current group of students, fostering understanding and empathy that positively impact behaviors for productive cross-cultural interactions. It provides tools for reflection, leading dialogue with others, and pursuing actions that will open doors for their students.

Furthermore, educators traditionally are lifelong learners pursuing excellence in their craft. We invite teachers to use this guide as a resource to advance their own learning, confront their

own bias and cultural blind spots, steadily enhance their skills, and refine their teaching practices to be culturally competent, responsive, and relevant for all learners in the areas of instruction and assessment, classroom management, and communication and engagement with families.

Finally, we wrote this book for teachers because we recognize the importance of empowering them as practitioners to be change agents for all students and to redesign intentional strategies for systemic change of an educational framework that has remained largely unchanged. If we genuinely believe that all students can achieve at high levels, we must be willing to examine our own values and practices to adapt to the diversity of our students and their abilities. Since 1966, our federal government has tracked demographic disparities across race, ability, and social class. Teachers, as frontline educators who chart education's course each day, have the most significant impact on disrupting inequities and eliminating disparities to improve equitable outcomes. We must equip our teachers with the knowledge, tools, and skills to navigate these complex situations so they can continue educating all students at high levels.

We, the authors and contributors, drawing on our collective K–12 experience as teachers, school leaders, and educational consultants in rural, suburban, and urban K–12 contexts across the United States, as well as teaching in graduate-level principal and superintendent preparation programs, have used this framework to navigate conflict, lead systems change, strengthen relationships, and build community-centered schools and classrooms for over twenty years. Since 2011, we have partnered with thousands of educators to apply the Tools of Cultural Proficiency within their daily practice, across faculty meetings, professional learning sessions, professional learning communities (PLCs), and leadership team settings. They have provided us with valuable feedback, validating both the intent and the outcomes of using the Cultural Proficiency Framework to enhance teaching and learning.

Educators consistently describe their work using the Cultural Proficiency Framework as practical, reflective, and action-oriented. We often hear the same questions/statements at the conclusion of our training and consulting work:

- “How can we get everyone in the district to take this training?”
- “Why are there only 30 of us from the whole organization in the room?”
- “I wish more schools would invest in this.”

Over the years, educators have emphasized their value for real-world examples, storytelling, collaborative dialogue, and self-assessment and action-based strategies that they can implement in their classrooms. Feedback, such as the following quote, also includes statements that support the development of self-awareness, psychological safety, and trust while engaging in the work of Cultural Proficiency: “None of the language used was confrontational or accusatory. You created a space for everyone to verbally and nonverbally be vulnerable.” A beacon of light in this work is that it is meant not to indict, but to invite conversation that will “open doors” for all students.

At the same time, educators' feedback has provided key lessons for strengthening future implementation of Cultural Proficiency. Participants identified the importance of additional time for reflection within consistent groups, a clearer and more accessible way to manage the academic language of the framework, deeper opportunities to examine personal biases, opportunities for collaboration among peers in similar contexts, and strategies to sustain the work beyond initial

training. Some educators also note the challenge of ensuring that culturally proficient practice is both a personal journey of reflection, dialogue, and action and one that must be supported within the school system to be sustainable beyond the initial training. As facilitators of this work, we rely on feedback, demonstrating a value for diverse perspectives and critiques of Cultural Proficiency, because they help us find our True North with cultural knowledge and skills to adapt, so that we may support educators like you with praxis for managing the common cross-cultural interactions you face in today's classrooms. We consider the feedback gathered from educators the impetus for our design of this book, *Navigating Your True North in the Classroom*. Providing teachers with a guide to build a transformative mindset and practices anchored in Cultural Proficiency is the cornerstone and important waypoint of an evolving educational system that provides opportunities for all.

Cultural Proficiency Is Caring for All in a Manner That Does No Harm

When we reference cultural competence, we are not referring to a surface understanding of culture, such as heroes, holidays, food, or music. Nor is cultural competence limited to our understanding of race, ethnicity, or gender. Cultural competence is an intersectional practice exemplified by what scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) describe as an understanding of how multiple identities shape one's lived experience.

In the Compass Framework, this means widening our lens so we do not navigate by a single marker. Teachers and students enter the school or organizational culture with intersecting identities shaped by generational difference, language, socioeconomic status, ability, religion, family structure, immigration and nationality journeys, bicultural experiences, sexual orientation, neurodiversity, and other lived realities.

As educators, our aim is to navigate our relationships with this fuller map of reference points in mind, creating a high-quality educational culture. We recognize that every colleague's and learner's path is shaped by more than one waypoint on the compass. This encourages curiosity and an openness to seeing each other as whole, multidimensional human beings whose lived experiences cannot be reduced to a single category, experience, or perspective . . . *caring for all in a manner that does no harm*.

USING THIS GUIDE

Organization and Content

Navigating Your True North in the Classroom emphasizes the importance of identity, core values, mindset, and transformative educational approaches to embrace all dynamics of diversity in the classroom and enhance practice in three key areas: (1) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (2) classroom management, discipline, and restorative practice; and (3) communication and family–community engagement. Research has shown that influences within these three areas of classroom practice positively affect student outcomes (Hattie, 2015). Table P.1 includes some of the influences and effect sizes from Hattie's (2009, 2011, 2015) research. While effect sizes of 1.00 or more indicate a significant impact of interventions on student achievement, Hattie (2009) identified a “hinge point” of 0.40 as the point at which to judge the success of influences on student achievement.

Table P.1 • Hattie’s Ranking of Effect Sizes in Relation to *Navigating Your True North in the Classroom*

Influence on Student Achievement	Effect Size	Chapter Alignment
Collective Teacher Efficacy	1.54	Chapter 3
Self-Reported Grades	1.44	Chapter 7
Response to Intervention	1.07	Chapter 5
Formative Evaluation	0.90	Chapter 6
Classroom Discussion	0.82	Chapters 5, 10, and 13
Classroom Behavior	0.80	Chapters 8 and 9
Feedback	0.74	Chapter 7
Teacher–Student Relationships	0.72	Chapter 12
Teaching Strategies	0.62	Chapter 4
Professional Learning	0.62	Chapters 1, 2, and 3
Service Learning	0.58	Chapter 15
Communication Strategies	0.43	Chapters 10 and 13
Social Skills Programs	0.40	Chapter 11

Source: Adapted from data in Hattie (2009, 2011, 2015). Available online at <https://visible-learning.org/nvd3/visualize/hattie-ranking-interactive-2009-2011-2015.html>

While we used these effect sizes to identify and justify three key areas of teaching practice for this book, we wish to emphasize our belief that a random to-do checklist for each category alone cannot capture the depth required in each critical area for equitable outcomes. Considering the diversity of your current students is essential to informing your cultural responsiveness and the impact you will have in your classroom. Educators, namely teachers, are invited on this journey to explore factors within these three categories, strengthen what they already do well, build capacity through teacher efficacy, and transform their mindsets and practices by applying the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to ensure their current students are flourishing.

The book is divided into four parts, as demonstrated in Table P.2, but is not meant to be read cover to cover—it’s more of a flip-to guide for transforming practice and opening the doors for the reader’s current students. As a result of the design and intended use of this book, readers may notice some repetition across Chapters 4–15; this is intentional, as each chapter is designed to stand on its own and support targeted, interest- and needs-based engagement. The repetition is designed to build capacity for sustaining this work beyond the text.

Quick Start: We encourage you to engage with Chapters 1–3, then move directly into chapters in Part II, III, or IV based on your interests and needs.

Table P.2 • Outline of Parts and Chapters

Part Title	Contains These Chapters
Part I: Inside-Out Approach	• Chapter 1 • Chapter 2 • Chapter 3
Part II: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	• Chapter 4 • Chapter 5 • Chapter 6 • Chapter 7
Part III: Classroom Management, Discipline, and Restorative Practice	• Chapter 8 • Chapter 9 • Chapter 10 • Chapter 11
Part IV: Communication and Family–Community Engagement	• Chapter 12 • Chapter 13 • Chapter 14 • Chapter 15

Part I: Inside-Out Approach sets the context for readers to focus on examining their mindset, knowledge frameworks, beliefs, core values, and current classroom behaviors and practices. Learning strategies and the Reflection, Dialogue, and Action (RDA) Process are used to support readers in developing an understanding of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency and applying them to their current practice. Part I includes three brief, foundational chapters focused on the inside-out approach to transformative mindsets and culturally proficient practice.

Part II: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment moves the journey from conceptual to applicable in Chapters 4–7 with the focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices. Readers will engage in a self-assessment, make connections with the vignettes, and flip to one or more of the following chapters for support: “Culturally Competent Curriculum” (Chapter 4), “Culturally Differentiated Instruction” (Chapter 5), “Fair and Equitable Assessment” (Chapter 5), and “Feedback and Grading” (Chapter 7). Each chapter of Part II includes inquiry-based strategies for mindset development, application of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency, and guides for developing practical actions in the classroom with the Essential Elements.

Part III: Classroom Management, Discipline, and Restorative Practice continues the journey of transforming mindsets and practices in Chapters 8–11, much like Part II; however, the focus is on classroom management, discipline, and restorative practice. Readers will engage in a self-assessment, make connections with the vignettes, and flip to one or more of the following chapters for targeted support and development: “Proactive Classroom Management” (Chapter 8), “Behavioral Interventions” (Chapter 9), “Conflict Resolution and Restorative Practice”

(Chapter 10), and “Social and Emotional Learning and Student Well-Being” (Chapter 11). Each chapter of Part III includes inquiry-based strategies for mindset development, application of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency, and guides for developing practical classroom actions with the Essential Elements.

Part IV: Communication and Family–Community Engagement continues the journey of praxis in Chapters 12–15, much like Parts II and III; however, the focus is on communication and family–community engagement. Readers will engage in a self-assessment, make connections with the vignettes, and flip to one or more of the following chapters for support and development: “Relationships With Students and Their Families” (Chapter 12), “Effective Cross-Cultural Communication” (Chapter 13), “Family–Community Engagement and Projects” (Chapter 14), and “Collaborative Professional Partnerships” (Chapter 15). Each chapter of Part IV includes inquiry-based strategies for mindset development, application of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency, and guides for developing practical actions in the classroom with the Essential Elements.

Taking the Next Step

In using this guide, you will have the opportunity to take the next step in your personal and professional journey through three interconnected roles: (1) *self*, an individual human in your personal life; (2) *practitioner*, a teacher or educator in the class; and (3) *facilitator*, an advocate for applying the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to different aspects others in your school organization could benefit from.

Self—This guide provides next steps for you to continue the journey of Cultural Proficiency in your personal life. Building this mindset and connecting it to your personal life provides quick access to being able to apply it to your daily decision-making as a classroom teacher. We hope you experience the benefit of applying this outside of your profession as an added bonus to this book. Daily reflections are offered as a way for the readers to reflect on their own culture and life experiences. Cultural competency challenges are offered as ways to learn new cultural facts and engage with others from different cultural backgrounds.

Practitioner—As you engage with the features of this book, such as the vignettes and the RDA Process, you will be able to apply your knowledge and skills in using the Tools of Cultural Proficiency to your classroom practice immediately. Keep in mind that we acknowledge and emphasize the importance of continued work on building your mindset while applying these tools to your practice so you avoid random or performative acts of equity or tokenism. Self-assessments, inventories, and rubrics are offered as a way to determine your level of Cultural Proficiency as it relates to educational practices. Vignettes offer specific examples of classroom practices. The RDA Process allows readers to engage in the mindset-building around the educational practices. A lesson plan template and 30–60–90 day plan also provide you, as a practitioner, with resources for continuing your growth.

Facilitator—Many do not pick up a book thinking, “I am going to facilitate this work with my colleagues.” However, we want to encourage you to consider your role as a facilitator as you read and take away new skills and knowledge from this, building a mindset and understanding around Cultural Proficiency. No matter if it is you sharing with your immediate colleagues in PLC meetings or presenting to a group at the district or county level, we provide learning strategies, additional resources, templates, and tips for facilitating this work as you navigate through the chapters of the guide. Readers can access the PLC resources in the book to learn culturally proficient learning

strategies and the RDA Process, which can be used with colleagues to learn together and deepen others' knowledge and skills in building culturally proficient educational practices.

OUR INVITATION: USING THE GUIDE FEATURES

We wanted to bring a new resource to you related to Cultural Proficiency that can be used to deepen and advance your cultural competence knowledge and skills necessary to lead personal growth and improvement and transform classrooms. Classrooms with teachers who lead with cultural competence disproportionately lift up those students from all cultural backgrounds so that they thrive in our classrooms more than they have historically. To do so, we bring many concepts, theories, and “moving parts” to you in this guidebook. We want it to be interactive for you, to be easy to navigate, and to prompt the same level of passion, commitment, and excitement about the moral purpose of education and helping *all* students thrive as it does for us, as the authors. In this section, we provide a conceptual framework for you to use that incorporates and details all features in this book and the ways in which you can employ them in your journey.

Centering Mind and Practice—This section is present in each chapter and provides you with the topic of the chapter. It is used as a tool for leaders to center their mind and practice before starting, continuing, or embarking on the journey. This section guides educators with an introduction to combine cultural awareness, practical application, and professional growth in building knowledge and skills necessary to increase cultural competency of a specific area of teaching and learning inside classroom environments.

Compass Framework for Praxis and Transformative Change—The Compass Framework for Praxis and Transformative Change provides educators with a vivid metaphor for direction, purpose, and call to action. At the center of our compass is a symbol centering culture in the shape of a handshake, representing our shared humanity. Descriptions of navigation-inspired terms weave together the theory, concepts, tools, tenets, and frameworks of R. B. Lindsey et al.'s (2019) Cultural Proficiency Framework, Freire's (1970) Fourfold Critical *Conscientização* (awareness), and Shields's (2025) Model of Transformative Leadership Theory.

Key Concept—This section functions much like a review of literature. Concept briefing provides a concise overview of key concepts and principles related to cultural proficiency and transformative teaching. It includes summaries, definitions, and explanations of important ideas and frameworks that teachers need to understand and apply. This feature serves as a quick reference or introduction to the main concepts discussed in the guidebook, helping educators grasp essential theories and practices. Concept briefing ensures that teachers have a clear understanding of the foundational ideas that underpin the guidebook's recommendations and strategies.

Action Steps—This section includes concrete, strategic activities or plans that teachers can implement to achieve specific goals related to Cultural Proficiency and equity in their classrooms. The steps outline a series of deliberate actions educators should take to address identified needs or areas for improvement, using the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency as waypoints for course corrections. Action steps may include developing new or transformative teaching strategies, creating culturally responsive and relevant lesson plans, engaging with families, or participating in professional development. By following these steps, teachers can systematically work toward creating a more equitable and inclusive learning environment.

Cultural Proficiency Framework—This feature of the book helps to centralize the concept of Cultural Proficiency. While all books on Cultural Proficiency integrate this feature into the text, this book organizes the framework as a compass framework for navigating classroom practices in any setting. The intent is that classroom teachers can apply the Cultural Proficiency Framework, specifically the four tools with the fourfold process of praxis and tenets of transformative leadership, in an organized way using the resources and the examples, templates, tables, and illustrations. The use of this feature helps you apply and critically analyze the complex diversity of your students in the context of this work.

Culturally Proficient Learning Strategies—We present culturally proficient learning strategies for teachers to use in self-reflection, working in PLC teams or grade-/subject-level departments, or leading professional learning. These sections include planning, implementing, and reflecting on learning relevant to each educational topic. The RDA Process, applied with a critical lens, acts as a compass rose to enhance the development of culturally competent strategies and action steps.

Inquiry-Based Approach and RDA Process—Inquiry-based investigations and dialogic and reflective activities guide you to analyze and surface your own assumptions; to know your values, as well as the core values of the organization relative to equity issues, surface formative data, and summative relevant data; and to create change within your own practices and policies through learned lessons and action planning. The RDA Process is used throughout the book to promote reflection, dialogue, and action toward transformative change at the individual and organizational levels.

Culturally Proficient Lesson Plan—The Culturally Proficient Lesson Plan is a template that allows teachers to develop lessons focused on culturally competent practice. Teachers begin by reflecting with a critical lens on what they want students to learn and how they will measure their learning. The uniqueness of this lesson plan template is in the chapters that align teachers' planning through the action-oriented Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. It concludes with an opportunity for reflection regarding impact.

Mindset—This feature of the guidebook allows teachers to develop cultural competence in education by cultivating a growth mindset that appreciates culture, values diversity, reflects on personal identity, and embraces core values including empathy, open-mindedness, and communication.

Practical Classroom Application—Classroom application involves translating theoretical concepts and strategies into practical, actionable steps in the classroom setting. This feature provides teachers with specific methods and techniques for implementing culturally proficient and transformative practices in their daily teaching. It includes examples, case studies, and practical advice on applying concepts such as culturally proficient differentiated instruction, equity-minded practices, and culturally responsive curriculum in real classroom scenarios. The goal is to bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that educators can effectively apply what they've learned.

Praxis—This section is grounded in Freire's (1970) concept of critical awareness or *conscientization*, followed by critical reflection, critical analysis, and activism or critical action against the injustices of which one has become aware (Shields, 2018).

Self-Assessment Inventory—The Self-Assessment Inventory is a tool designed to help teachers evaluate their own practices, attitudes, and competencies related to Cultural Proficiency and equity. This inventory includes a series of questions or prompts that guide educators through a process of self-reflection and evaluation. By completing the inventory, teachers can identify

their strengths and areas for improvement in terms of culturally responsive teaching, classroom management, and inclusive practices. This process supports ongoing professional development and helps educators set goals for enhancing their practice.

30–60–90 Culturally Proficient Teaching Plan—The 30–60–90 Culturally Proficient Teaching Plan is a template that allows classroom teachers to plan, implement, and evaluate changes in mindset and practice related to each topic area covered in this book. The specific goal is to develop a culturally proficient mindset and enhance culturally competent practices and behaviors. It includes three parts divided over a 90-day period, approximately half of a school year. The first 30 days are focused on initial awareness, analysis, and self-assessment. Within 60 days, teachers will have had the opportunity to implement culturally competent strategies and practices, and the final 30 days of the transformative plan include self-assessment and evaluation of progress to sustain change that is equitable for all students.

Vignettes—This feature is used in each chapter to help you step into situations that require critical awareness and reflection as you journey toward Cultural Proficiency. While the collective vignettes may not cover all situations of diversity or complex cross-cultural interactions you encounter, the vignette storylines illustrate how they connect to practical application in your day-to-day work to increase equity and access in the classroom.