

Chapter 8

Building Culturally– Competent School Practices in Rural and Small Cities: Recommendations for Practice

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides in-depth discussion of concepts and principles related to the development of cultural competence in school districts located in rural areas and smaller cities that have and are becoming racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse. The authors offer practical steps that help support the development of cultural competence among pre-service teachers, educators, and administrators. This framework can be implemented to create district-level professional development courses that can be used to renew teacher licenses. Additionally, suggestions of how to best address the discipline among culturally diverse students, and how to build authentic relationships with students, parents and the community are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In our increasingly global and diverse world, the ability to work with people from varied cultural backgrounds or whose lived experiences are different from our own has become an essential skill. This is particularly true for teachers and school administrators who work in ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse educational spaces. Although urban areas such as Chicago and New York typically come to mind when thinking about diverse enrollments, school districts that have served predominantly White

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student populations are now serving larger populations of New Americans, students of color, and English language learners (ELL). In fact, school districts in towns and rural areas are experiencing enrollment shifts due to the relocation of people from a variety of countries around the globe.

Many teachers in rural communities have already recognized the changing faces of rural school students and the diversity of cultures present in their classrooms. Over the past five years, larger populations of refugees were resettled in rural and small cities across the United States to bolster the aging workforce and replace dwindling populations (Bose & Grigri, 2017). These demographic shifts are concerning because school districts in rural areas and smaller cities may not be prepared to serve diverse student enrollments.

This chapter provides in-depth coverage of concepts and principles related to the development of cultural competence in school districts located in rural areas and smaller cities that are experiencing enrollment shifts due to the arrival of racially and ethnically diverse populations. This chapter will inform the practices of pre-service teachers, current teachers, and administrators by providing a framework that supports the development of cultural competence. The integration of diverse student populations is a concern since how administrators and educators respond to demographic shifts in their districts will have substantial and lifelong implications for students.

BACKGROUND

Cultural competence intersects several related concepts, including “multicultural competence, intercultural competence, cultural sensitivity, intercultural sensitivity, cultural safety, cultural awareness, cultural intelligence, cultural humility, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural practice, global competence, and global citizenship” (Dorsett, Larmar, & Clark, 2019, p. 566). Each of these concepts underscores different aspects of cultural competence, including an individual’s values, attitude, personal beliefs, social identity, knowledge and comprehension, and skills (Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2006; Dorsett, Larmar, & Clark, 2019; Fantini, 2009; Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, 2015; Garran & Rozas, 2013; Jackson, 2015). Throughout this chapter, the term cultural competence reflects an equitable and reciprocal approach to learning and working with students from diverse cultures, ethnic groups or who speak multiple languages.

The National Education Association (2008) describes cultural competence in education as the knowledge and skills needed to effectively serve students from diverse cultures. They identify four components of cultural competency that build upon one another, all of which apply to educators, schools and the entire school system: valuing diversity, being culturally self-aware, understanding the dynamics of cultural interactions, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge and adapting to diversity (NEA, 2008). Valuing diversity entails accepting and respecting cultural values, traditions, backgrounds and customs, and ways of communication (NEA, 2008). Being culturally self-aware refers to an educator’s understanding of how their own life experiences, interests, knowledge, background, beliefs and values that shape their own self-concept and how they fit into their workplace, their community, society as a whole, and, ultimately, their teaching practice (NEA, 2008). Understanding the dynamics of cultural interactions references the historical cultural experiences and intercultural relations that have occurred in a local community, all of which can affect interactions among cultures (NEA, 2008). Finally, institutionalizing cultural knowledge and adapting to diversity occurs when schools design educational services informed by students’ cultures to better serve diverse populations (NEA, 2008).

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