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# A Case Study to Determine Characteristics for a Successful, Diverse School District

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A Case Study to Determine Characteristics for a  
Successful, Diverse School District

A Case Study to Determine Characteristics for a  
Successful, Diverse School District

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Education Leadership

by

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## **Abstract**

In a rapidly changing society, education must make adjustments and keep learning focused on the needs of students by providing increased opportunities for success. Classrooms are filled with students of different cultural backgrounds which makes education a challenge to every building leader and teacher. The challenges are how to design instruction and implement it to meet the academic and social needs of all learners. Understanding different lifestyles, languages, word context, body language, traditions, and dress present opportunities for educators to expand their cultural knowledge and create learning objectives for students which ultimately affect student achievement in the educational environment.

The focus of this study was to determine the characteristics of a successful, diverse school and the training needed for staff to support students and the district. To give educational stakeholders more insight into what characteristics are need to create a culturally proficient environment that creates learning opportunities for children, data was collected, analyzed and coded. The coding revealed eight axial codes and from there four main theories emerged: (a) leadership, (2) instructional model, (3) environment that supports diversity and, (4) parent and community involvement.

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation process has been one of my most challenging endeavors in education. I know the journey would not have been completed without the encouragement of my family and friends who have stood with me the entire way. This dissertation work is dedicated to all of you.

I would like to thank my parents, husband, children, grandchildren, siblings and their families for their continuous support as I set out to work on my doctoral degree. Their words of encouragement and the occasional “aren’t you finished yet” and “why aren’t you finished yet” gave me the strength I needed to pursue this meaningful goal and see it to completion. I am so lucky for the family God has allowed me to be a part of, you are truly the greatest!

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

State and federal political officials have criticized American education for failing to meet students' academic needs for several years. One of the greatest shortcomings has been the inability of our public schools to provide equal access opportunities for an exceptional education to all students. It is the responsibility of American schools to educate all children regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, economic status, creed, nationality, educational level, or language background. However, Jim Crow Laws (Kennedy, 1959/1990), in place in the United States from 1880 to 1965 to separate African Americans from White Americans, are an example that educational opportunities have not always been equal for all groups of people. Many legislative inequalities have come from individuals who believe they are entitled to the best education, while others are not, based on their culture, geography, economic situation, or the status quo. Today in American classrooms there are teachers who do not believe inequalities exist or are indifferent to the cultural differences of their students, thus reinforcing inadequate educational opportunities.

### **Background of the Study**

It is important to this study to recognize the composition of the population in American schools. For the purpose of this study, the term *foreign born* refers to those individuals who were not United States citizens at birth. *Natives* (including White, Native and African-Americans) are those who were born in the United States, one of its territories, or were born abroad with at least one parent who is a United States citizen (Larson, 2004). In 2009 the American Community Survey (Grieco & Trevelyan, 2010) stated the foreign born population accounted for approximately 12.5% of the United States population representing 1 in 8 residents.

Of that 12.5%, 53.1% were born in Latin America, 27.7% were born in Asia, 12.7% were born in Europe, and the remaining 6.6% from other regions of the world. Immigrants from Mexico accounts for approximately 30% of the Latin American population and currently makes up the fastest growing minority population in the United States (Larson, 2004). African Americans comprise approximately 13% of the native population, while American Indians, including Alaska Natives, make up 1.5%. In the Midwest, where this study takes place, less than 8% of the population is foreign born with the exception of the state of Illinois of which 14% of the population is foreign born (Grieco, Acosta, de la Cruz, Gambino, Gryn, Larson, Trevelyan, and Walters, 2012).

According to Crissey (2009), foreign-born individuals age 25 and older were less likely to have graduated from high school than natives, with one-fifth of the foreign born having less than a ninth-grade education. Among the foreign born, the highest percentage of high school graduates are of Asian and European birth (87% and 84 % respectively), which mirrors closely the native high school graduation rate of 88%. In 2007 the U.S. Census Bureau provided educational attainment data that stated foreign-born Hispanics were the least likely to graduate with a high school diploma, recording only a 51% graduation rate. College graduation rates are recorded in the U.S. Census Bureau Population Report. In 2012, the graduations rates were: White, 60%, Foreign-born Asians 49%, Native American/Native Alaskan 39%, African Americans 18%, and Latinos 12% completing a 4-year degree (Aud, Hussar, Johnson, Roth, Manning, Wang, and Zhang, 2012).

The American Community Survey Brief by Johnson, Rios, Drewery, Ennis, and Kim (2010) reports 21% of citizens of the United States age five and older speak a language other than English in the home. This statistic shows an upward trend from 14% in 1990 and 11% in

1980. According to the 2010 ACSBR/09-19 (Grieco & Trevelyan, 2010), the Latino population makes up the largest group speaking a language other than English in the home. These statistics play an integral role in public education's quest to provide all students with the same opportunities to an adequate education.

Of equal importance to this study are the current economic characteristics for the United States. Between 2006 and 2007 the median incomes of non-Hispanic whites and African Americans increased while remaining statistically unchanged for Asians and Hispanics (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2008). In the 2013 Census report from Macartney, Bishaw, and Fontenot they found the poverty rate for American Indians and Alaska Native to be the highest at 27% with African-American household poverty 25.8% followed closely by Hispanic households with 23%. Asian households reported the highest median income followed by non-Hispanic whites for the same time period. In regard to gender the average income for women continues to be lower than that of men even though women comprise 52% of the American population.

Educators face a number of challenges when serving students in America's classrooms. The vast differences in cultures of the foreign born and the natives create numerous difficulties for educational leaders in communication, instruction, and assessment in an educational environment. At the same time, social challenges deeply rooted in American history also play a part in equal accessibility to education. For decades, it was unacceptable for African or Native Americans to receive the same educational opportunities offered to white Americans. Prior to 1950, segregation was considered the standard way of life in American society and education. African and Native Americans were not given the chance to succeed and were reduced to obtaining a sub-standard education, in sub-standard facilities, with sub-standard supplies,

materials, and curriculum (LaMorte, 2008; Loring, 2009). During this same time period women were also limited in equal opportunities in education and careers in the United States for similar reasons, however, in the next decade, women began to step into the economic role and educational opportunities began to slowly increase. It was not until much later that equal job, work, and education opportunities began to arise for African and Native American individuals.

Desegregation and the move toward equality was a gradual movement from the end of the Civil War but gained momentum in the 1950s through legislation passed by the United States Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* (Patterson, 2000). However, segregation still exists, not in law but in status quo beliefs, economics, available housing, available jobs, and so forth (Crawford & O'Neil, 2011). For American schools to provide an environment that adapts to different cultures, school leaders must deal proactively with individual and group differences and must incorporate the culture and views of all others into the classrooms. Educational leaders must be in tune with the characteristics of their populations and facilitate change within themselves, their colleagues, and their organizations to create a culturally proficient environment. Research indicates when building leaders understand and are aware of cultural differences, students perform better in the educational setting (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003) thus narrowing the learning gap for sub-group populations.

### **Statement of Problem**

Considering the cultural and ethnic diversity in America, there is a necessity to question the cultural proficiency of building leaders, in order to provide greater learning opportunities for public education students in America. Classrooms are filled with students of different cultural backgrounds which makes education a challenge to every building leader and teacher. The challenges are how to design instruction and implement it to meet the academic and social needs

of all learners. Understanding different lifestyles, languages, word context, body language, traditions, and dress present opportunities for educators to expand their cultural knowledge and create learning objectives for students which ultimately affect student achievement in the educational environment. If cultural proficiency is limited or non-existent, student achievement may not be obtainable for racial and ethnic subgroups, according to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). Educational and political leaders have been reactive in dealing with cultural proficiency by discussing the issue, but rarely are they proactive in their procedures to bring about an environment relevant to all students. Being culturally proficient is about being effective in cross cultural situations in American classrooms (Lindsey, Graham, Westphal, & Jew, 2008). As society becomes more global, students from different cultures bring with them to the classroom a vast array of knowledge beneficial to all students. However, many educational leaders and students do not understand the essential elements that create a culturally proficient educational environment conducive for all students. This research describes how organizational change in education can promote cultural proficiency in the classroom and thus improve academic achievement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine characteristics for a successful, diverse school and how that impacts learning opportunities for students in a suburban school in East Central Missouri (to be known in the study as School A) and determine what changes, if any, were needed to promote cultural proficiency in the district. The study also determined what training teachers had to support the learning opportunities, the students, and the school environment in School A. Given the current emphasis by state and national governments on NCLB and the

importance of meeting state standards for students, it is essential to study in depth what elements are needed to reach children of diverse backgrounds and how to help them reach educational proficiency according to the standards set by state and federal guidelines.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study could impact the standards of training for future building leaders. School districts led by culturally proficient school leaders promote educational opportunities for all students and move American classrooms toward equality by narrowing the learning gap. The study further identified the elements needed to promote culturally proficient leaders as well as identifying barriers, if any, that impede quality education. The unique talent of a leader is to understand the differences in students and to provide a framework to better serve diverse students. This study provided insight into how our best school building leaders honor the integrity and strengths each student brings to their school. Students will benefit from this study as building leaders become more aware of how to promote cultural proficiency in their classrooms, thus improving student's academic success.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions investigated how organizational leaders must change in order to promote cultural proficiency in America's classroom and narrow the learning gap. Historically, major social movements such as, but not limited to, the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887, *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 have made cultural competence an issue in America and have helped to shape the attitudes of today's educational leaders. These research questions were designed to form a premise that social justice leadership in diverse schools is more a frame of mind, disposition, and commitment than a set of strategies and

procedures. To achieve the purpose of this study the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the essential elements or attributes needed to develop the cultural competence of building leaders in order to lead a culturally proficient school?
2. What staff training or programs have building leaders implemented that directly address school personnel understanding of diversity and/or cultural proficiency?

**Research design.** Qualitative data for the study will be collected in one school district in east central Missouri. Administrators and teachers will be interviewed on the factors affecting school leaders' attitudes toward cultural competence and how well they believe their district is dealing with diverse populations. In the interview, school leaders and teachers will be asked if and what professional learning had been received in order to better prepare them for diverse populations, as well as what, if any, organizational changes have taken place to promote cultural proficiency in their organizations. Educational leaders will be interviewed to determine their opinions of what creates a culturally proficient classroom and if they, as individuals, have biased barriers that keep them from being culturally unbiased.

**Research setting.** The case study will take place in a suburban school district located in east central Missouri, School A, with a population of 13,162 citizens living within a three-square-mile radius (Missouri Census Data, 2010). According to the school district website, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education classifies this district as one of the most diverse per capita in the state. The diversity of the community and the school is partially demonstrated by a visual of a Lutheran Church, a Catholic Church, a Buddhist Temple and the St. Louis Arch as you look out the back door of the elementary building (FN/4). I was also told by the superintendent during our campus tour there was a mosque nearby as well (FN/4).

The school district serves a population of 1,614 students EC-12 grade in which 70% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch (Missouri Comprehensive Data System, 2013). Addressing the diversity, approximately 49% of the students are language minority with 20% of those students receiving English Language Learner services from the school district. This district includes a variety of student ethnic backgrounds which includes 69.9% white of which 36% are Bosnian, 12.8% are Asian, primarily Vietnamese, 12.8% African American, 2.8% are Hispanic, less than 1% are American Indian, and 3% are multi-racial. This information was provided by School A at the time of the on-site interview (DI/1).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cultural proficiency may be thought of as the ripple effect of one's intercultural sensitivity, as cultural proficiency is reflected in the way an organization treats its employees, its clients, and its community (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). Lindsey, Roberts, and Campbelljones (2005) have presented a framework for understanding cultural proficiency via the use of a continuum that provides a means of assessing how a school or district deals with cultural differences. This continuum located in Table 1.1 symbolizes the context for this study and exemplifies the needed components for culturally proficient school leadership that emerged from the research.



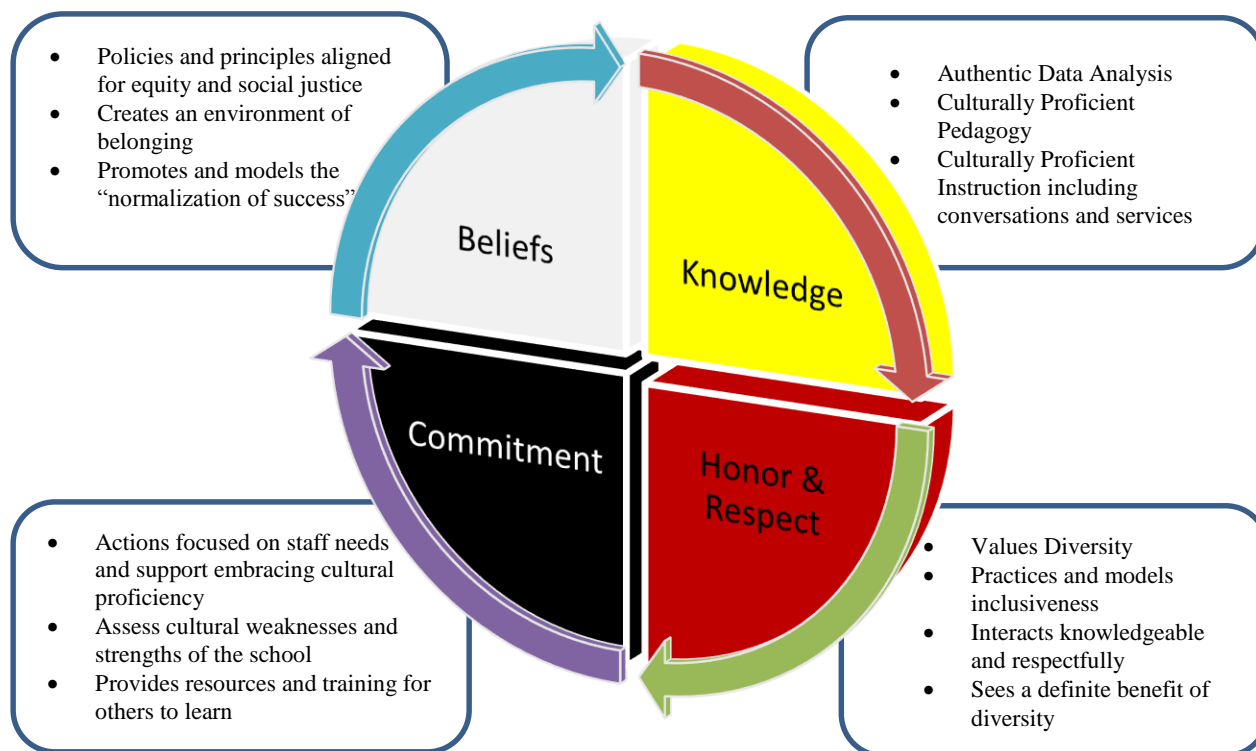
Table 1.1

*Cultural Proficiency Continuum*

Cultural Destructiveness (LOW)	Cultural Incapacity	Cultural Blindness (MEDIUM)	Cultural Precompetence	Cultural Competence	Cultural Proficiency (HIGH)
Behaviors that are disparaging, negating, or purging cultures that are different from their own.	Occurs when one elevates the superiority of his/her own cultural values and beliefs and suppresses cultures that are different from their own.	Act as if cultural differences do not exist and refuse to recognize differences.	Recognizes that lack of knowledge, experience, and understanding of other cultures limits his ability to effectively interact with them.	Interacting with other cultural groups in ways that recognize and value their differences, motivates one to assess his or her own skills, expand one's knowledge and resources causes the individual to adapt his behavior.	Honoring differences among cultures, seeing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among a variety of cultural groups.

(Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005, p. 54)

In conjunction with Table 1.1, Pfaller (2010) in her dissertation on studying a culturally proficient school also used a model she felt symbolized the context of a study of this nature. The basis for her study was a circle of continuous improvement and development that placed improvement in four primary quadrants of a circle: (a) knowledge, (b) beliefs, (c) commitment, and (d) honor and respect. All four areas are interdependent of each other holding equal weight and importance in order for a culturally proficient leader to be successful. The endless circle of growth and learning, as seen in Figure 1.1, along with the key components representative of culturally proficient leadership portrays a balanced format for this study.



*Figure 1.1* Model of continuous improvement and key components of cultural proficiency (Lindsey, Roberts, Campbelljones, 2005; Pfaller, 2010, p. 9)

The way an organization changes, or in some cases does not change, begins when building leaders place their own values on the group and models those same values. The ability to lead is complex in that the building principal must possess the ability to communicate ideas and vision while informing, facilitating, supporting, empowering, and, when necessary, confronting those who refuse to make the change in believing that all students should have equal opportunity to learn (Price, 2007). Using Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1 as guides, principals through formal and informal observations, policies, and discussion, can assess the cultural proficiency they possess as well as determining the cultural proficiency of staff. With this information, training can be provided for leaders and teachers that will be necessary to provide learning opportunities for all students.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The limitation of the case study included the site selection of School A located in suburban east central Missouri rather than multiple sites with similar demographics. The selection process included a school district that is recognized by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as one of the most diverse per capita in the state. The target population includes 70% or more economically disadvantaged, as well as 20% of the population receiving services to help them understand and speak the English language.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following operational definitions are listed and summarized below to provide an understanding of the terminology used in the study.

*Cultural proficiency*: the honoring of the differences among cultures, viewing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among a variety of cultural groups (Lindsey, et al., 2003)

*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (Jones, 2010): NCLB (formerly known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) is a set of laws that supports standards-based education and calls for disaggregation of student-performance data by student subgroups. The central focus of the act is to narrow the learning gap for students in certain disaggregated groups.

*East central Missouri*: geographic area of Missouri, which includes the city of St. Louis and surrounding suburban communities.

*Building or school leader*: superintendent, assistant superintendent, or building principal who are instructional leaders in the district.

*Highly-qualified teacher*: has obtained full state certification as a teacher or passed the state licensure examination that is valid, holds a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and has

demonstrated subject matter competency in a manner determined by the state and in compliance with Section 9101(23) of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (MO. DESE, 2012).

*Missouri comprehensive data system (MCDS):* system used by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for compiling data and then reporting out to school districts and the public.

*English Language Learner (ELL):* students whose first language is not English.

## **Summary**

For several years in the United States education has been criticized by federal and state political officials for failing to meet student needs. One of the greatest shortcomings is the inability of public schools to provide equal access opportunities for an exceptional education to all students. It is the responsibility of American schools to educate all children regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, economic status, creed, nationality, educational level, or language background.

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter One provides the introduction, background, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and significance of the study. In addition, the research questions that will be answered, the theoretical framework, limitation of the study, definition of terms, and conclusion are also provided. Chapter Two presents a review of literature which includes a theoretical framework, method of search, and search strategies. The literature review includes a historical look at causes of cultural bias, essential elements need to develop cultural competence, management of conflicts, culturally competent leaders, and their role in narrowing the learning gap. Chapter Three includes an overview of the methodology, research questions, researcher's role, data management, collection and analysis, trustworthiness, evidentiary inadequacies, and

summary. Chapter Four includes the presentation of the data including the audience, audit trail notations, presentation of axial codes, summary of axial codes, and summary of the chapter.

Chapter Five includes a summary of grounded theory, the rank order criteria in relation to the theoretical framework, discussion of the selective codes, interpretation of the data, recommendations to the field, and recommendations for further research.

## Chapter Two

### Review of the Literature

The purpose of this study was to determine characteristics for a successful, diverse school and how that impacts learning opportunities for students. This study will investigate the role of school leadership in understanding and modeling the characteristics needed and how their cultural competency can result in an effort to narrow the opportunity gap for students. The goal of a culturally proficient educational setting is that school leaders will be educated on how to change themselves and others in their organizations to create an environment where all staff and students interact effectively in diverse surroundings and begin to narrow the opportunity gap for diverse students (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). They continue to define cultural competence as the honoring of the differences among cultures and viewing diversity as a benefit among a variety of cultural groups.

The initial review of literature using the search terms multiculturalism, diversity, student diversity, cultural proficiency, cultural competence, classroom environments, secondary education, and other similar terms generated over 500 pieces of literature. That number was reduced to 125 journal articles when I worked with Elizabeth McKee from the University of Arkansas Library and began to focus on the more defined terms of cultural proficiency and school leadership and their importance in modeling cultural competence to narrow the learning gap. Mrs. McKee helped me to focus on reputable peer-reviewed journals that would contribute to my research. From these I selected the journals and articles that are found in the bibliography.

The search also returned books and articles that were related to the main researchers and publishers used in my research, Randall B. Lindsey and Raymond D. Terrell. As a superintendent of schools in southwest Missouri, I was fortunate to meet both of these gentlemen

in 2009 when they spoke to a select group of Missouri and Kansas superintendents in Kansas City, Missouri, at a conference sponsored by The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation in which I was a member. It was their presentation, along with the influx of Hmong population at the school where I was a superintendent that provided my deep interest in cultural proficiency. The use of their cultural proficiency continuum has provided a framework for my research and is directly related to many of the articles, books, and dissertations that my search returned.

Additionally, in my review, ProQuest retrieved nine dissertations related to culturally proficient leadership studies, with five of those directly related to culturally proficient school leadership or the theoretical framework used in the study. Of those five the following directly impacted my research. Dr. Renee Pfaller's dissertation (2010), a study that interviewed five district leaders, recommended additional research in reviewing obstacles and variables that impact culturally proficient leadership in schools. This recommendation directly relates to the purpose of my research study. She also suggested a study that included leaders who identify as white be interviewed as they were not interviewed in her study. The dissertation by LaNier (2006), included 30 participants and is based on the work of Randall B. Lindsey and Raymond D. Terrell. Although LaNier's research involved presidents of community colleges in California, her recommendation for further research in developing graduate and undergraduate courses completely aligns with my research questions. She goes on to recommend that organizations should develop a culturally proficient leadership module for the progressive development of current employees and that module should include co-cultural conflict mediation strategies. John Kiemele (2009) in his research on cultural proficiency interviewed 13 elementary principals and recommended further research in learning opportunities for building leaders that help them identify where elementary principals might be blind to practices in their own schools that cause

cultural bias. Similarly Camille Smith (2004) developed a survey instrument and used it to measure 11 principal's perceptions of effective culturally proficient school practices. Smith concluded in her research that accountability measures could be used to ensure that principals do engage in such practices. These researchers provided information which directed my study and helped me address the problem of leaders and their understanding of how their cultural competence can ultimately affect student achievement.

The literature review is organized in four sections: 1) the methodology for selecting and evaluating the research reviewed, 2) A conceptual framework that discusses the need for cultural proficiency in today's educational environment, 3) the review of literature pertaining to the historical significance of major social movements and the essential elements needed to develop cultural competence of leaders to narrow the learning gap and, 4) the summary and conclusions. It is sectioned in this manner to describe the framework for determining the need for the study followed by a view of how major social movements have created certain biases in our nation and how history has inhibited the learning opportunities for some groups of students. The review also discusses the essential elements needed to develop culturally competent building leaders relating directly to the problem statement discussed in Chapter One.

### **Method and Search Strategy**

The study provides insight into issues surrounding diversity in leadership, educational teaching, and learning. This literature includes but is not limited to race, culture, gender, sexuality, economic standing, learning abilities, physical health, and mental health and how those issues affect educational opportunities for students in all settings, but it focuses on urban settings. To give relevant background, historical literature related to specific social movements in history is also reviewed as well as statistical census data.



Peer-reviewed journals and organizations with well-established publications, such as professional organizations, are included. In addition, books and book chapters were reviewed that directly relate to the study of diversity, multiculturalism, and cultural proficiency in the classroom and in society in general. The literature includes reviews that provided theories, methodologies, principles, and, at times, opinions of the author.

I performed electronic searches of Educational Abstracts, Social Science Abstracts, and full text articles using ERIC and EBSCO. Using the search terms multiculturalism, diversity, student diversity, cultural proficiency, cultural competence, classroom environments, secondary education, and other similar terms, over 500 journal articles and other related articles were returned. That number was reduced to 125 when I began to focus on school administrators and their importance in modeling cultural competence to narrow the learning gap. ProQuest retrieved nine dissertations related to culturally proficient leadership studies, some of which will be used in this study. Statistical information came from the United States Census Bureau and other government sites.

A study or book is included if it is appropriate and relevant to the topic and the four questions provided for the literature review, if the study offered sufficient evidence to support its conclusions, if methodology is applied in a careful manner, and if findings are well supported. Studies which supported further research are deemed to meet the quality standard. I searched the University of Arkansas Library for books that were related to cultural proficiency, diversity, and multiculturalism and used my own personal library reviewing books relevant to cultural proficiency, its history, and background.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Sitting in classrooms in white, middle-class America are students who are not considered the “norm.” Students in these classrooms differ because of race, culture, gender, sexuality, economic standing, learning abilities, physical health, and mental health. Educational leaders discuss how to respond to issues that arise from working with diverse populations but rarely talk about how to deal with diversity in classrooms that help to promote tolerance and student success. Rather than being proactive, educators have been reactive in dealing with diverse populations, thus allowing segments of the student population to underachieve. American history is laced with examples of its population casting aside those who were not the norm of their communities and focusing only on the majority as happened with the Dawes Severalty Act in 1887, the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, and the establishment of the Jim Crow Laws in 1877.

Cultural proficiency in America’s classrooms is vital to the educational success of students. Some educational leaders strive to provide students with opportunities that will promote their success in a global economy by narrowing learning gaps among individuals. These opportunities, however, are sometimes impeded by others who see race, culture, gender, sexuality, economic standing, learning abilities, physical health, and mental health as characteristics that lower the learning abilities of certain individuals and therefore make some students’ educational experiences less successful and enjoyable.

The basis for this review originates from the studies on cultural diversity in education in the United States. The general premise of the review is derived from the work of Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell, (2003) in their manual for school leaders which outlines a method for proactively dealing with diverse situations in education. This method, according to Lindsey,

Robins, and Terrell (2003) promotes an inside-out approach that focuses first on those who are inside the school, such as building principals, encouraging them to reflect on their own individual understandings and values. As school leaders become champions for cultural proficiency, teachers in the classroom become more aware of their role in teaching to all students and narrowing the learning gap. Historically authors such as Sizer (1992) and Kozol (1991) have also discussed the approach of changing the attitudes of educational leaders in order to change teaching and learning in the classrooms. They too believe that all children can learn given the right environment, helping all students to be college and career ready.

A culturally-proficient environment can be defined as one that responds to both individual and group differences and when the policies and practices of a school and the values and behaviors of an individual enables the person or school to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment. The term *proficient* is defined as highly skilled or adept and can be interchanged with *competence*, being defined as properly qualified, capable, or adequate for a purpose (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 1996). Cultural proficiency is responding to diversity in the classroom that reveals a greater depth of knowledge, introspection, and sincere intent to make things equal. Changing the leaders first is the beginning of the process that leads to cultural proficiency, thus increasing the learning opportunities for students.

Studies by Lindsey, Robins, Terrill and other selected authors focusing on diversity and promoting multiculturalism in the classroom have revealed approaches to narrow the learning gap and make all students successful. These studies have given educators access to strategies that help alleviate cultural barriers in educational settings. As barriers are reduced, students will be more successful in education as well as in society and with social and workplace relationships.

## Literature Findings

**Historical social movements that made cultural competence an issue.** For several years the United States was called a “melting pot” as several ethnic groups settled on American soil to begin a new life. The melting pot is defined by Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2003) as “the assimilation of all cultures into one” (p. 12). United States history tells us that assimilation has not happened and America resembles more of a salad bowl, where the ingredients are different but you mix together to form something good. While this concept seems to be realistic, ethnic groups in the United States were not fully integrated in economics or education due to segregation by ideologies and custom. Historically the population of the United States has always been highly diversified, and educating students equally has been quite difficult. However, education, schools, school leaders, and school policies have changed over the past 50 years as diversity, equality, and multiculturalism came to the forefront during several important social movements.

***Segregation: Prior to 1950s.*** Prior to the 1950s, segregation in the United States was an accepted way of life and encompassed many cultures. In the 1800s, Native Americans were placed on reservations as European Americans began to move westward and confiscate their lands. The Federal government entered into treaties with different Native American tribes only to break those treaties when more land was needed. American Indians were remanded to reservations (Dawes Severalty Act 1887) segregating them from the rest of the population. According to section four of the Dawes Severalty Act (1887), those who were not remanded to reservations had to make application to the local land office prior to settling. Living on the reservation widened the gap between the Native Americans and other races in the United States, as they were excluded from the educational, political, and economic mainstream. Native

American youth were taught by white Americans who were not versed in Native American culture. Education for Native American children was based on the white man's perspective, culture, and values and the idea that through assimilation Native Americans could become productive members of the white society (Loring, 2009).

African Americans were also segregated in the United States prior to the 1950's. Legalized slavery of African Americans was an accepted practice until it was ended in 1865 at the close of the Civil War; legalized slavery had ended but segregation did not go away. Jim Crow laws which began in 1877 and were upheld by state and federal court systems, continued to legally separate the races in public places and dictated the different ways of treating individuals (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). These laws were specifically designed to separate, restrict, and oppress African Americans living in the South (Oluonye, 2004). This separate but equal treatment established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 legitimized Jim Crow etiquette and continued to affect the economic and educational opportunities of African American youth for close to six decades (LaMorte, 2008).

Chinese immigrants who came to the United States and labored to support westward expansion were also subjected to segregation. The number of Chinese allowed into the United States was limited with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (Lammers, 1988). This act was specifically designed to control and minimize immigration once the Chinese were no longer needed for railroad expansion throughout the western part of the United States. The Chinese already living in the United States were not treated as equals and ended up segregated in certain sections of cities and towns that were designated for anyone who was not of European decent. Even before this law was enacted, the Chinese had been subjected to a wide variety of racist laws, discriminatory employment practice, and inhumane treatment in jails, courts, and

communities (Lammers, 1988). Education, as with other minority groups, was less than adequate and many parents choose to educate in the home.

During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt initiated Executive Order 9066, which relocated approximately 112,000 people of Japanese ancestry living on the west coast to inland relocation camps in Arkansas, Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington (Patton, 1999). Two-thirds of those who were relocated were American citizens who lost their homes and businesses as a result of this internment. This legally sanctioned form of segregation, motivated by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, was upheld by the legislative and judicial system of the federal government to protect the homeland during times of war (Camicia, 2009). The treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II was to a great degree rooted in fear and the belief that Asians were incapable of being assimilated (Sundquist, 1988).

***Desegregation: 1950s.*** The 1954 *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* was a momentous event (Gay, 2004). This United States Supreme Court decision ended segregation in public facilities, including education, but failed to resolve the racial inequities in schools. The phrase found in the decision, “all deliberate speed” (p. 308), could be classified as an oxymoron and gave public schools a chance to drag their feet (LaMorte, 2008). LaMorte went on to quote Justice Frankfurter when he said, “nothing could be worse from my point of view than for this court to make an abstract declaration that segregation is bad and then have it evaded by trickery” (p. 308). Patterson (2000) describes the Supreme Court justices in the *Brown* case as social engineers because they expected the decision to strike a fatal blow against racial prejudice. However, the court’s failure to provide a time line for desegregation and their reluctance to establish guidelines for moving forward compounded the issues. Their idea was to bring African American and European American students together in the same schools to weaken racial

stereotypes and promote understanding among youth and their parents (Gay, 2004). Chief Justice Warren said separating the races would generate among African American students “a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone” (Gay, 2004). It was believed that if African American students attended and received the same educational curriculum as white Americans all would be well. As a result of the *Brown* decision, in the southern states many private academies began to spring up for European Americans, a segregated alternative to being educated with African Americans and other minority groups. The *Brown* decision put an end to de jure segregation, segregation by law, and gave way to de facto segregation, segregation by fact (economics and geography), which continues to be widespread even today. Crawford and O’Neill (2011) quote H.T. Edwards when he says, “the *Brown* decision precipitates positive changes but the goal of the case, a remedy for racial inequality in public education, remains elusive” (p. 521)

The *Brown* decision sparked a number of legal and social changes that laid the foundation for a broader civil rights consciousness movement in which other ethnic minorities, women, the elderly, the poor, the disabled, and gays demanded prohibition against discrimination and separation extend to them as well (Patterson, 2000). In education, this decision paved the way for school leaders to pursue educational equality on many fronts. Educational leaders today are still working to bring equality to education in classrooms across the United States.

***Integration 1960s-1970.*** The 1960s was a decade of turmoil that promoted social justice for all groups of people. The *Brown* decision started a movement that is yet to be finished. Neuborne (1996) says segregated groups found relief from oppression in American society by identifying with the *Brown* decision and realized there was an aspiration for equality embedded in the Constitution. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s laid the foundation for many groups

to speak out against segregation and for equal rights. Although the focus was on the tension between blacks and whites, in the western and southwestern United States, Latino and Native Americans were included in the desegregation programs (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). It became clear that race and culture were not the only two oppressed groups as gay rights, women's rights, rights of the disabled, and rights of the elderly came to the political stage. Educationally the Civil Rights movement meant to genuinely "integrate" educational programs, procedures, and practices with the ethnic, racial, cultural, and social diversity that characterizes U.S. society (Gay, 2004). Title IX of the Education Amendment in 1972 has been a powerful source of initiating school reforms because it states that no person shall be discriminated against on the basis of sex in any educational program receiving federal funds (Dindia & Jones, 2004). The push to desegregate had two consequences: 1) providing others with the same opportunities white children were receiving and 2) the expansion of entitlement programs like Title I leading too many non-white children being placed in programs for the culturally and economically disadvantaged (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003).

The 1970s gave way to the educational emphasis on multiculturalism and away from the idea of the melting pot. Parekh (1985) defined multiculturalism as an education in freedom from inherited biases and narrow feelings and sentiments as well as freedom to explore other cultures and perspectives and make choices in full awareness of the available and practical alternatives. The right to multicultural education means a positive promotion of the benefits of the multicultural way of living with its tenets of sharing, intercultural understanding, and equal access to the opportunity structure of society (Singh, 1995). Multiculturalism works so that the best interest of the child can be served in schools by exposing all children to multicultural curriculum, going beyond their own culture to explore the cultures of others.



***Diversity: 1980s.*** The era of the 1980s brought about the idea of diversity in that educational scholars and researchers such as James Banks, Geneva Gay, Carl Grant, and Sonia Nieto believed multicultural education was good for teaching and learning. Educational systems began training their employees in the awareness of differences in children and accepting those differences. The manner in which a student responds to teaching and learning is dependent upon a student's individual cultural experience, which could have specific impact on student achievement. Diversity was expanded to include not only race and culture but gender, sexual preference, disability, and age (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). Title IX of the Education Amendment in 1972 led to a redefinition of sex discrimination in the classroom and aimed at establishing sex equity in the United States (Dindia & Jones, 2004). Males and females were given equal opportunities to pursue training and career paths which traditionally had only been open to one sex. Many programs for the disabled and the elderly also began to appear during the 1980s as people began to challenge employment practices, stating that hiring should be non-discriminatory.

**Essential elements to develop cultural competence.** In order for educational leaders to become culturally proficient the literature review shows they must work toward possessing some essential elements: assess and value diversity, be able to manage conflict, adapt to diversity, and train for diversity (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). These elements focus on the individual and how they must change in order to understand and educate diverse groups of people and emphasizes the importance of questioning our own belief in this process (Hawley & Nieto, 2011).

***Assess and value diversity.*** Cultural diversity in United States' public schools is growing (Holloway, 2003). In a growing democracy everyone's distinctiveness and potential contribution

should count for something, should be honored, used, encouraged, and fostered (Tice, 1993). Kids have no choice where they are born or live, it is a matter of circumstance; however, students need to recognize their own culture as well as recognize the cultures of others around them (Hoerr, 2007). Whether a student's group identity stems from race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, or sexual orientation, that identity must be affirmed, and we must show respect for all groups students claim as their own (Hoerr, 2007). Understanding what culture consists of is essential. According to Tice (1993), culture is not a collection of artifacts but is a feature of relationships and how human beings fill the space between themselves and other people making them individuals. Tice goes on to say this space can be filled with basic respect, admiration, and playfulness; or it can be filled with disregard, suspicion, anxiety, and holding back. It is for the individual to choose how they fill this space, making this the major component of assessing one's culture.

Student leaders are powerful and vital to the process of assessing the culture, because they bring to the table understanding, tolerance, and/or barriers. Educational leaders must pay close attention to the messages and attitudes conveyed by student leaders toward others. Decency in the American tradition comprises fairness, generosity, and tolerance; everyone should get a fair shake (Sizer, 1992). Jensen and Snider (2013) believe that "teaching students to be life-long learners can define the difference between a life of mediocrity and one of success" (p. 18). They go on to say that learning for life is equal to acquiring the ability to grow intellectually. Sharing with others, learning, and applying what you have learned is an on-going process (Jensen & Snider, 2013). It is important for students to recognize and celebrate their own culture and experiences and then share that culture with others. Acceptance of diversity by

individuals and schools can be the determining factor in a young person's educational experience.

In that same context, adults within educational settings must understand their own culture, the culture of the school district, and the culture of the children and families in that district in order to provide a broad-based education for students. School leaders must be culturally proficient individuals themselves and must model, expect, and share those values with other individuals in the educational setting in order to build a culturally proficient school (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). When adults, such as school leaders and principals, take responsibility for their actions, you model that for students (Jensen & Snider, 2013). It is important to note that how teachers view the social and cultural environment at school affects their actions in the classroom (Mendez, 2006).

***Manage the conflicts caused by differences.*** Children need to feel valued for who they are both as individuals and as members of a particular group (Hoerr, 2007). School leaders who make an effort to connect with all students will make teaching and learning more beneficial to everyone involved. When students believe adults in the school care about them as individuals, have high expectations for their education, and provide the support essential to their success, they thrive. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The hard fact is that if you are the child of low-income parents, the chances are greater that you will receive limited and often careless attention from adults in your school (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Economic status of students is a major contributor to why some students succeed and others do not. Twenty years ago, Sizer (1992), believed that socio-economic class was the most important expression of diversity, and that same premise holds true today. Educators must look beyond the conflict caused by

economic status and other related issues and work toward the acceptance of all students in the classroom.

Conflict must be reduced in order to perpetuate a culturally proficient environment. As discussed in the social movements of the history of the United States, it is somewhat apparent that entitlement has been the status quo and white, heterosexual men are at the top of the list. Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell, (2003) believe in some cases, even though men might be the minority in the organization or an environment, they felt they have power and privileges that contribute to their sense of entitlement that comes from the larger, dominant group. They go on to say more often than not, empowered members of society are often oblivious to the ways in which they have benefited from their entitlement and believe it is reasonable to say that in some white American families, the entitled values of parents are passed down to their children through modeled behavior.

With the acceptance of the status quo comes the acceptance that certain attitudes, speech, and body language are acceptable when dealing with diversity. Achieving equity in the classroom for all sub cultures has been an uphill battle since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in the 1950s. Impassioned teachers, researchers, and administrators have been debating for decades whether equitable interaction has become a reality in American classrooms (Dindia & Jones, 2004). When teachers expect certain groups of students to perform poorly because of demographic or psychographic student characteristics (e.g. race, sex, intelligence scores, or economic status), then students will indeed perform poorly because teachers will interact less and possibly more harshly with those groups of students (Dindia & Jones, 2004).

Managing conflict and eliminating the status quo is a complex issue and one that educational leaders cannot take lightly. In the early years of integration, minority students were

literally dropped into white schools and were expected to act white and learn as white students did (Loring, 2009). Thus, operational conditions existed in early desegregation efforts that perpetuated educational inequality even as it was struck down in principle, law, and policy (Gay, 2004). Holloway (2003) found some students, even though they were high achievers, downplayed their Mexican-American identity in order to gain acceptance of their peers. Rejecting their culture made it easier for them to fit in with the majority. Practitioners need to promote self-concept, acceptance, and belonging in school and in the external community to help students promote, maintain, and value their true identity. Educational leaders need to migrate toward acceptance of diversity and work to transform themselves and their cultures to reduce conflict in the educational environment.

Managing conflict stresses that educational leaders must move toward acceptance of diversity and work to transform themselves and their cultures to reduce conflict in the educational environment. A public school system that values differences is not without conflict. An organization must manage those conflicts by realizing one's own possibility of misjudging others' actions based on learned expectations. In the diverse setting of a public school system managing the dynamics of difference is about how conflict can deepen the understanding among cultures.

*Adapt to diversity.* Ninety percent of United States public school teachers are white; most grew up and attended school in middle-class, English-speaking, predominantly white communities and received their teacher preparation in predominantly white colleges and universities (Howard, 2007). Given that background, what could they possibly have in common with students of diverse backgrounds and how do you foster trust in a relationship with students? The first priority in building trust is to acknowledge this challenge in a positive, inclusive, and

honest way (Howard, 2007). Teachers and administrators must change their own belief systems in order to work with others in a non-biased environment. Inequities that have been created in diverse school and social systems are not functions of intentional discrimination and educators of all racial and cultural groups need to develop new competencies and pedagogies to successfully engage our changing populations (Howard, 2007). It is important for schools to change and welcome diversity in the classroom and establish that racial, cultural, and economic differences are real.

For cultural proficiency to be successful, educators must establish the need for a personal and professional journey toward a greater understanding of differences. By modeling expectations of adapting to diversity, educators increase their ability to form authentic and effective relationships across differences (Howard, 2007). Students and others must know that educators are genuine in their thoughts and actions before they open themselves to friendship and belonging. When students believe a teacher genuinely cares about their well-being and takes the times to understand them as individuals, their expectations for themselves increase (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Those who truly understand cultural proficiency will work to ensure they show respect for all groups of students.

It is possible that some are unaware of the need to adjust their beliefs, failing to recognize the need to make personal and school changes in response to the diversity of the people with whom one interacts (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). Perhaps this attitude exists because it never occurred to anyone in the dominant group there was a problem. Sometimes people realize changes should be made, but it is difficult to make those changes as it creates an uncomfortable environment for all stakeholders; however, an environment cannot become culturally proficient if the effort to change is not made.

When adapting to diversity, a person confronts social dominance and social justice. Systems of privilege and preference often create enclaves of exclusivity in schools, in which certain demographic groups are served well while others languish in failure or mediocrity (Howard, 2007). There is a great amount of fear in the unknown of diversity, so it is difficult for some to confront the social injustices they come into contact with every day. Diverting from the status quo takes courage. Numerous analyses of educational change have demonstrated that acceptance of diverse cultures will not take hold unless the community is engaged in understanding diversity and investing in the change (Riehl, 2000). It is up to the school district, working closely with local government to promote change and diversity. When diversity comes to town, we are all challenged to grow (Howard, 2007). Communities must adapt to diversity in order to help children adapt to those who live a different way of life.

In order to make changes in schools, the formal curriculum an educational institution uses for instruction must convey an appreciation for diversity (Hoerr, 2007). Many educational institutions fail to realize that curriculum must be reviewed with diversity in mind. Most curriculums are inadequate with respect to the treatment of racial and minority groups. There is little information about African, Native, Latino, and Asian Americans, if it is included at all, and when it is, it tends to be negative and stereotypical (Gay, 2004). Curriculum should recognize the existence of the many cultures that characterize a community, and leaders must model to students how they personally value diversity. There needs to be a bridge between a student's culture and the core curriculum and state standards (Mendez, 2006). In failing to respect the existence or the importance of the distinctive histories, arts, and traditions of ethnic minorities, we fail to respect as equals those whose interests and values have equal standing in the

community (Singh, 1995). This can also be said for females and those who choose a sexual preference outside the norm.

***Train for diversity.*** Teachers feel unprepared to teach diverse student populations (Holloway, 2003). Research by Darling-Hammond and Berry (2006) noted that well-prepared and well-supported teachers are important to all students but especially for those students who come into our schools with greater needs. The demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will require a professional force of teachers who are prepared to teach and ignite a love of learning in the diverse learners who occupy today's classrooms (Holm & Horn, 2003). Teachers must have content knowledge but also must have tools and strategies to support that content, engaging students and creating a relevant learning environment (Daggett, 2011). Educators in rapidly changing schools need to reexamine everything being done and discontinue business as usual. When teachers have explored and experienced diversity through courses and internships in varying contexts, they are better prepared to understand and create meaningful connections for diverse learners (Holm & Horn, 2003). Teachers will require professional training in order to enhance their ability to educate diverse student populations.

Some pre-service education programs in the United States are not adequately preparing teachers to deal with issues of diversity. Historically, only a handful of colleges and universities prepare beginning educators to teach in low-performing schools. That is somewhat ironic considering first year teachers are more likely to be assigned to or hired by low-performing schools (Meyers & Murphy, 2008). Today however, changes in the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) guidelines (Conceptual Framework Standard 4) requires that candidates must be able to demonstrate and apply proficiencies related to diversity and university faculty must integrate multiculturalism in the curriculum for the pre-service



teacher and faculty population (NCATE, 2008). Also, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparedness (CAEP) discusses a plan for recruitment of diverse candidates who meet employment needs (CAEP, 2013) Accomplished teachers understand the impact the classroom environment has on student learning and are better equipped to prepare their students to take on the role of responsible citizenship (Holm & Horn, 2003). The mission of pre-service teacher programs should be to include the teaching of diverse students into the curriculum and model such behavior for prospective teachers. When schools of education make a concerted effort to develop relationships between teachers and professors in a climate of shared responsibility and mutual respect, they model acceptance for diverse perspectives and a respect for differing ideas that extends far beyond the classroom walls (Holm & Horn, 2003).

Engaging in dialogue with minority groups goes even farther than shaping the curriculum in showing each student how much we value the group with which that student is affiliated (Hoerr, 2007). It is easy for the majority to assume that everyone sees things the same way when in fact the majority historically has been the root of the difficulties. Gay's (2004) research indicates that styles of communication can inhibit the sharing of cultures, saying that teachers function in a communicative framework that emphasizes conciseness, directness, objectivity, rationality, and linear thinking while many students (African, Asian, Native, and Latino Americans) think, talk, and write in a storytelling mode with a circular organizational structure, subjectivity, generality, emotionality, and the passionate and personal involvement of the speaker. The difficulty is bringing the two styles together to keep the lines of communication open while developing a true appreciation for one's culture. If groups can do this, it gives assurances that all parties are making an effort to connect.

The language used by adults is seen as a hindrance to becoming culturally proficient. As teachers and leaders we must monitor our verbal expressions and be willing to correct the verbal expressions of others. Examples would be “Why are these kids coming to our school?” or “These kids don’t value education, and their parents aren’t helping either” (Howard, 2007). Those statements reinforce negative behavior and continue to hold back the progress of cultural proficiency. Leaders must move beyond blame and transition toward acceptance and the infusion of new and different cultures and social groups into mainstream learning. People must be resilient in their endeavors to make change.

**Culturally competent leaders.** How do school leaders make cultural competence work for them as individuals and for setting the tone for an entire school? According to Garmon (2005) it takes a deep commitment to social justice to achieve equity and equality for all people. Going back to the essential elements needed to develop cultural competency discussed earlier in the literature review, leaders must examine their own beliefs and values and be sensitive to the beliefs of others before they can make others aware of inequalities. The educational and personal background knowledge of leaders has a significant impact on the buildings they lead (Price, 2007).

***Awareness and self-reflection.*** Making cultural competence work is dependent upon people knowing what they believe and modeling that same behavior. Garmon (2005) cites the work of several prominent scholars when he says building leaders and teachers knowing who they are as people, understanding contexts in which they teach, and questioning their knowledge and assumptions are as important as the mastery of techniques for instructional effectiveness. When one reflects, they must determine if they have encountered three categories of experience—intercultural, educational, support group—critical to fostering the multicultural

awareness and sensitivity necessary to become culturally competent (Garmon, 2005). Assessing one's own beliefs and valuing the diversity of others provides a strong foundation for building leaders to move an environment toward cultural proficiency. Smith (2004) concluded that accountability measures could be used to ensure that building leaders engage in culturally proficient school practices. In her study, she created a survey based on Randall Lindsey's cultural proficiency theories and used it to measure principal's perceptions of effective culturally proficient school practices. Having this assessment available for individuals will provide a tool for them to use to assess their knowledge of culturally proficient practices and understanding. It is vital that building leaders engage in learning opportunities that help them identify where they might be blind to practices in their beliefs as well as the beliefs held by those in their buildings (Keimele, 2009).

The move toward cultural proficiency will not always be a smooth path to follow, and building leaders can expect conflicts as change is initiated. Predispositions and prior experience generally shape the belief systems of individuals, and it is changing those predispositions in most cases that will cause conflict. In order for school leaders to move an environment toward cultural competence they must change the way they communicate with others. The manner in which people are treated supports diversity and is why culturally proficient leaders must shift the balance of power to include people of different races, cultures, gender, sexuality, economic standing, and learning abilities. Leaders must place diversity front and center and work toward equality (Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004). It is not enough to raise issues and provide readings regarding diversity; we have to listen to our students with understanding and dialogue with them respectfully, creating spaces in the classroom where all voices can be heard because all students are free to speak, knowing their presences will be recognized and valued (Allen et

al., 2004). Building leaders, in collaboration with faculty and staff, should establish a school vision and mission that supports diversity, model that vision and mission daily, and then use that same vision and mission to manage conflicts as they arise. The development of inclusive structures and practices must be accompanied by new understandings and values or they will not result in lasting change.

***Influence of leaders.*** Building leaders must continually refine their understanding of cultural proficiency and adapt to diversity in order to model that approach to students. Building leaders are often in a better position than others to influence the climate of the building and should look at diversity as an opportunity for all to learn. School leaders are key players in the process of framing and monitoring new meanings through cooperation and collaboration with others in the environment. Pfaller (2010) in her study suggested that building leaders need to take with them strong beliefs that culture is an advantage and not a deficit or something that needs to continuously be fixed. The role of the building leader is supportive, facilitative, or catalytic, with administrators helping to establish the goals, obtain the resources, stimulate the understandings, change the structures, and promote the practices that improve learning experiences and outcomes (Riehl, 2000). Addressing diversity on instruments used during the interview process will give a building leader an idea of candidates' knowledge of cultural proficiency and how that promotes student learning in the classroom. Building leaders are also responsible for reviewing and monitoring what types of specialized faculty and staff would be needed to meet the needs of diverse students. Jim Collins (2001), in his book *Good to Great*, discussed the importance of having the right people in the right places to move a company forward. This premise directly aligns to the development and adaptation of providing a student-driven, culturally proficient environment that promotes student success.

With leadership comes the obligation of professional learning; training faculty and staff for diversity. Price (2007), in his recommendations from his study emphasizes that school districts must provide training for leaders and teachers in order for a building or district to meet the definition of cultural proficiency. When school leaders are dedicated to making positive changes in how their school accepts diversity, participating in professional development can help make the transition smoother. It takes culturally proficient leaders to provide the resources and/or training that will help shape new ideas and change others to be more tolerant of what is different in the world. Howard (2007) believes that professional training for creating inclusive, equitable, and excellent schools is a long-term process and the theme for leaders should be commitment to the cause: cultural proficiency.

Knowing there are inequities is not enough to help make changes; when there is action, changes begin to occur. Change sometimes comes slowly; however, a deep commitment to change will tip the scales and promote diversity in a positive way. Futrell, Gomez, & Bedden (2003) believe educators know that good teaching matters, but what they have not done is guarantee that every child in America has access to good teaching and to environments that will encourage, not discourage, learning. Building leaders who model diversity in their actions, communication, and beliefs will work more effectively with culturally diverse students, continuing to increase their knowledge and ability to provide environments that work to narrow the learning gap. The culturally proficient leader changes the current way of doing things to acknowledge the differences that are present in staff, students, and the community.

**Cultural competence narrows the learning gap.** In a culturally proficient school, instruction addresses both the local and global context to prepare students for work and careers beyond secondary education. Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century learn in different ways that are

influenced by culture, gender, societal factors, learning styles, and biology (Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2011). The focus is on the individual in a more structured and systematic way to enhance progress, achievement, and participation by using data to correctly identify learning levels. Researchers such as Linda Darling-Hammond, Doug Reeves, and Ruby Payne believe school environment, parent and community involvement, effective curriculum and instruction methods, and strategic staffing play an integral part of a student's successful academic achievement.

***Safe school environment.*** Providing a safe, comfortable, non-threatening environment goes beyond physical safety. Although physical safety is essential, the emotional safety of the environment is important as well. Maslow proposed in his hierarchy of needs that basic wants must be met before students can focus on learning (Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2011). Building relationships based on mutual trust supports Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It is the responsibility of building leaders to lay the foundation of a safe student environment that is tolerant of and enriching to all individuals. Knowing learners helps to create an environment in which students feel safe. In order to narrow the learning gap, Daggett (2011) stressed building relationships as one of the greatest influences on student learning. Daggett (2011) went on to say "the presence of strong, positive, trusting relationships impacts student engagement and therefore fuels students' sense of belonging and commitment to their own learning" (p. 8). Modeling tolerance can build a rapport of trust and acceptance among students, teachers, and building leaders, creating a sense of belonging and maximizing learning. In culturally proficient schools, teachers and administrators demonstrate respect for their students' identities and experiences and take a strong stand that desire and the motivation to succeed can overcome structural inequalities (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Hawley and Nieto (2010) went on to reference a study completed in

1999, which found underachievement among Mexican American students in a Texas high school was a result of uncaring school-based relationships and ineffective organizational structures, as opposed to family culture or poverty. Making connections with students provides a strong foundation for a safe environment in which students can excel academically.

***Parent and community involvement.*** School improvement and academic achievement is a collaborative effort between the parents, the community, and the school. Each of these groups has a distinctive role; however, given cultural differences parents may be unaware of what their role is in the success of the students and their school. It is important for school leaders to take charge and provide opportunities for collaboration to occur.

Schools need the active support of parents to educate students. According to Darling, Kleiman, and LaRocque (2011) higher levels of parental involvement has been associated with higher graduation rates, less discipline referrals, higher academic achievement, and higher attendance rates. With that said, students will perform better when the school and the parents work together and find opportunities for collaboration in learning. However, involvement of parents is not always easily attained. The families of students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds often feel unwelcome and uncomfortable in schools and can be reluctant to engage in the kinds of activities schools sanction. As a result, teachers and other educators may conclude that these families do not value education. In general, African American, Latino, American Indian, and Pacific Island families have a great deal of respect for education and view it as the best way out of poverty and hopelessness (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). It is the schools responsibility to form a bond, open communication lines, and facilitate involvement with parents. This involvement, however, will not look the same from family to family due to factors outside the bounds of what the school can control. What the school can control, however, is

what the big picture of involvement resembles and offering to parents options for becoming involved at school. Providing parents a handbook with contact information, written in their home language, can provide details and opportunities for parent involvement. Price (2007) discusses the importance of building leaders connecting with parents by speaking the language to provide a comfort level to individuals who do not speak English. Flexible scheduling of conferences and other informational meetings for parents is also a way to get parents involved and show parents' schools understand and appreciate their busy schedules and economic situations. Schools with comprehensive parental involvement programs that promote cultural proficiency tend to be more effective in securing higher academic achievement than schools with less effective programs (Darling et al., 2011). Conclusions found in a study done by Claudia Lahaie (2008) reinforced the importance of parental involvement policies and practices to help decrease the learning gap between culturally different students

Community involvement shares equal importance with parent involvement. It is essential for schools to build community partnerships and together offer community service opportunities or service learning projects in which students can learn the value of giving back to their communities. A study done by Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeier, and Benson (2006), which looked at the role of community service and service-learning in reducing the learning gap, found the school leader's positive beliefs about these programs can help create an environment in which students are willing to participate in projects. The study went on to say this participation suggests a link between service learning or community service and academic achievement, helping to narrow the learning gap for some disadvantaged and culturally diverse students (Scales et al., 2006). School leaders in culturally disadvantaged schools can help students and communities connect through service learning or community service projects by promoting a real



world experience in which they can apply what they are learning in the classroom. This connection provides an opportunity for students to create positive relationships with community members and an additional resource for students to turn to when support is needed. Community and business members should also be a part of committees who draft school improvement plans and communicate from their perspectives what is essential for students to know and understand as they finish their secondary school experience.

***Curriculum and instruction.*** NCLB stresses the importance of Highly Qualified Teachers and content knowledge but fails to reference pedagogical knowledge, which, according to the findings of Kemp, Blake, Shaw & Preston (2009), is equally as important as other variables that affect learning. After reviewing John Hattie's *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*, William Daggett (2011) agreed with Hattie that there were some variables in schools (i.e., student-teacher relationships, providing feedback, formative assessments, and socio-economic status) that have a direct effect on student achievement. Effective teaching is essential to academic achievement, and embracing rigorous and relevant expectations for all students will help them reach their highest potential (Daggett, 2011). Daggett went on to say teachers transmitting knowledge or having content expertise is not enough; curriculum and instruction need to go further by providing opportunities for students to make connections, show relevance, be engaged, and embed understanding (p. 8). Raising rigor in a classroom means increasing expectations for teachers and students and ensuring teachers are using techniques, strategies, and delivery systems that go beyond recognition and recall.

Curriculum in a culturally proficient environment should be guided by student need and interest, making it relevant to individuals, and should not intensify ideological struggles that

often find their way into textbooks as interpretations of official findings (Camicia, 2009). Schools are central locations for the communication of social norms and identities and sometimes schools are at the center of conflict regarding controversial curriculum topics many times found in social studies or history and science (Camicia, 2009). According to Camicia (2009), theorists like Stuart Foster and Joyce King have described how textbook curriculum promotes the development of concepts of race, patriotism, and expansionism that cause conflict of knowledge, beliefs, and values. Negative historical depictions and text have increased racial prejudice and discrimination by depicting some groups as subhuman. Donna Loring (2009) authored legislation in Maine that required the state's schools to teach Native American history as it related to that state. Her research and personal experience found that Native Americans were historically seen as savages and, therefore, should be assimilated into the mainstream white culture. Loring went on to say many believed "if you educate the Indian in the white man's culture and values, he will become for all intents and purposes a productive member of white society" (p. 16). Loring (2009) gave an example of what she uncovered in her research of Sitting Bull (1831-1890) being depicted as half-man, half-beast when slain by a Union officer; the cartoon caption read: "The Right Way to Dispose of Sitting Bull and His Braves" (p. 16). That example reinforces the trauma many Native Americans endured as they read text that depicted minorities as inferior to the mainstream white population. Failure to include true accounts of history in our educational system leads to stereotyping, low self-esteem among students, and an unwillingness on their part to embrace education. Curriculum taught in the classroom should focus on state and national standards and reinforce the elements of research-based information.

Increasing the use of technology in schools can help design learning programs that are unique to students. Collectively states have a set of standards they must follow when providing

content and processes guiding student learning; however, the method used can vary from student to student. Technology provides an avenue for students to get away from a textbook and use the internet to research facts and draw conclusions based on those facts. Using this format combined with other deliver systems will help to increase learning. The more ways or methods to help students make connections, the more successful learning will be (Kemp et al., 2009).

Crafting a clear vision regarding technology and how it can move instruction forward is important in reducing the learning gap. Technology that is supportive of the instructional goals can be used to enhance learning during lessons and then assess students on retention of information immediately. The Jefferson Township School District in New Jersey is implementing a flipped classroom using technology provided to students (Walker, 2012).

Walker explained “students have been experiencing a new instructional methodology that flips what is done for homework and classwork” (p. 40). Students use their assigned technology device to view tutorials as homework; when they return to the classroom, the assignment is completed (Walker, 2012). This model of instruction and use of technology has many benefits because the practice is done in a class where assistance from the teacher is at hand. While students are practicing, the teacher can circulate and assess understanding. Supporting content standards with the use of technology allows for retention of instruction through the use of different learning styles and supports curriculum and instruction to help narrow the learning gap

***Staffing and teacher retention.*** Research exploring the qualities of teachers indicates students who are learning in high poverty, diverse settings do not have access to high-caliber teachers. Two-thirds of African American and Latino students attend schools in which more than 50% of the students are from low-income families, yet four-fifths of all teachers are white (Kober & Usher, 2012). Teachers in high poverty schools were more likely to teach out of field,

have neither a minor or major in the subject they were teaching, have less teaching experience, and were more likely to have failed teacher certification exams on the first try (Greenlee & Brown, 2009 ). Greenlee and Brown pointed out that some states, like Florida, have passed legislation limiting the percentage of beginning, out of field, and temporarily certified teachers who can be in a low achieving school as a way of addressing this issue.

It is imperative school building leaders provide support systems needed to develop competent teachers as they enter our classrooms in order to help narrow the learning gap of diverse students. In a study completed by Popp, Grant, and Stronge (2011) the main areas of teacher effectiveness were; 1) the importance of student-teacher relationships and, 2) instructional delivery in order to effectively educate diverse students. Building leaders must make training available for teachers who are not physically, ethnically, economically, or culturally like their students, so teachers can effectively understand the cultures of those who are different. Diverse students bring a wide range of experiences with them to school buildings and leaders must give teachers the necessary tools they need to help them incorporate those experiences into lesson design, instruction, and discussions.

Retaining teachers in challenging schools or schools with a highly diverse population is difficult. Support from the building leaders is among the top reasons teachers leave buildings or school districts (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). Teachers who teach in challenging schools should have access to high-quality professional development, adequate resources, necessary time to bring about change, and full support of the building leader. Teachers who experience success tend to stay in challenging schools because success is a part of the daily routine. Supportive building leaders help to shape an environment in which students and teachers are successful under conditions that may seem less than favorable.

Working conditions are a factor that affects teacher retention. Again, it is the building leader's responsibility to create and maintain a school culture that is positive, friendly, and educational. Greenlee and Brown (2009) discussed how principal leadership can impact working conditions, increase teacher retention, and help to lower the learning gap. This study found that good teachers want to work in high-poverty schools in which principals demonstrate the following characteristics such as:

1. Exhibit strong, risk-taking leadership;
2. build relationships and advocate for teachers;
3. empower staff by including teachers in decision-making;
4. build leadership capacity in the school by providing opportunities for teachers to grow;
5. be accessible to teachers;
6. provide individual and team planning time and ensure a mix of novice and expert teachers within teams. (p. 98).

Not only do good teachers want to work in this environment, students want to learn in this environment as well. Jones (2010) in her study found building leaders want the availability of a good education that should not depend on where children live or whether they are smart enough to be selected for special programs. If done effectively, school reform should benefit all children.

### **Summary**

The past has set preconceived notions regarding certain groups of people and it will be the future that helps to change those predispositions. The research from the literature review indicates that creating a culturally proficient society is far from complete and suggests that social movements rooted in immigration, history, and status quo have been the main barriers to cultural

proficiency. The research finding in this review concur that educators began to receive training in cultural diversity between the years of 1970 to 1980, even though integration was apparent in the classroom as early as the 1950s.

The intentions of moving toward cultural proficiency is not to destroy the American way but to enrich it by fusing together the ideologies of many groups of people, all of whom have been contributors in one way or another to the educational system in America. Cultural proficiency is a commitment by school leaders to develop techniques for achieving educational equality in schools for all students. It is reasonable to say, after reviewing related literature, to become a culturally proficient educator, change is the key. Leaders must understand their own values and beliefs before they can understand and respect other cultures. If leaders can do that, the literature stresses it is easier to manage conflict that arises from diversity and help to reduce it when it enters the classroom. As conflict decreases among stakeholders in the community the school becomes a more stable environment in which teaching and learning will thrive. However, the research also points out many teachers are not prepared to teach in diverse settings. Teachers, supported by building leaders, need to improve their ability to teach diverse populations through training and communication and accept the challenge with a positive attitude. For many people this means facing the limits of their own knowledge and skills and becoming co-learners with others to find ways to promote and approach cultural proficiency.

Twenty-eight years of experience in public education and serving in six school districts of varying sizes in Missouri has provided me with the opportunity to see tolerance and intolerance of varying cultures as it relates to teaching and learning. In these districts I have been a teacher, coach, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. The roles of teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent of curriculum, instruction, and assessment have

provided me with first-hand knowledge of the attitudes and beliefs of the building principal and how they model that behavior and ideas to staff and students. In this same role, I have had to review data related to standardized test scores and facilitate discussions that resulted in changes to curriculum and instruction based on those scores. My experience in most districts has been trying to determine changes in curriculum and instruction that directly impacted poverty students as they were the group where the learning gap was the largest. While at one school as superintendent, we experienced a 1% increase in our Asian population in a 1-year time frame that prompted my interest in my research topic and reinforced my desire to learn more about diversity and reducing the learning gap. I have also observed how leadership of the building principal plays a vital role in developing a school culture that is conducive to tolerance and how that culture has a direct impact on student achievement.

An additional observation through my career has been that in rural Missouri, novice teachers enter school districts with limited knowledge of cultural proficiency and even more disturbing have limited knowledge of how to address cultural differences in their relationships and daily lessons. Based on the literature review, pre-service education institutions must get on board with cultural proficiency and provide a framework for understanding cultural differences and how one can manage those differences in the classroom. A majority of the research supported several suggestions: more rigorous teacher preparation programs, a curriculum relevant to all students, parental involvement, and building culturally proficient teachers and leaders to even the playing field in academics for all students.

Reducing cultural bias and eliminating barriers to learning is first and foremost in the success of students. Increasing cultural competence is paramount in creating learning opportunities for students. According to this extensive literature review, there are still many

biases in American education and the dissertations included in the review indicate research is still needed to develop extensive learning opportunities that will help create culturally proficient leaders that would directly impact student learning. Chapter Three will provide the methodology and procedures that guided the study in order to answer the specific research questions and address the problem statement of creating building leaders who are culturally proficient and how that modeled behavior can be transmitted to others.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this case study was to assess the current state of cultural proficiency of school leaders and determine what changes, if any, were needed in an organization to promote cultural proficiency in the school and the classroom. The study also determined what elements would help to create and maintain a culturally proficient classroom and school environment. The vast differences in cultures of the foreign born and the natives create numerous difficulties for educational leaders in communication, instruction, and assessment in an educational environment. Considering the cultural and ethnic diversity in America, there is a necessity to question the cultural proficiency of building educational leaders and public education classrooms in general. These classrooms are filled with students of different cultural backgrounds, making education a challenge to every teacher and student. Challenges come in the form of understanding different lifestyles, languages, word context, body language, traditions, and dress. These challenges create learning difficulties for students that ultimately affect student achievement in the educational environment. Given the current emphasis on NCLB and the importance of reducing the learning gap among student sub-groups, it was essential to study in depth what elements were needed to reach children of diverse backgrounds and how to help them reach educational proficiency according to NCLB (Jones, 2010) and the Missouri state standards. If it is determined the educational settings need to be changed in order to create a culturally proficient environment, the study will provide research-based suggestions for making those changes.

The case study took place in School A, a suburban school district located in east central Missouri with a population of 13,162 citizens living within a three-square-mile radius (MO

Census Data, 2010). According to the school district website, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education classified this district as one of the most diverse per capita in the state. The school district serves a population in which 70% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, according to the Missouri Comprehensive Data System (2014). Addressing the diversity, approximately 49% of the students are language minority with 20% of those students receiving English Language Learner services from the school district. Table 3.1 shows the diversity of the population in the school district being studied as compared to the diversity in the state. According to MCDS (2012), due to a small sampling of minority populations in the state, it was difficult to determine the exact percentage of students in certain ethnic groups.

Table 3.1

*Enrollment Characteristics of District A Compared to Missouri*

Race/Ethnic Background of	District A	of Missouri
White	69.9%	74.2%
Bosnian	40%	*
Black	12.8%	16.8%
Asian (primarily Vietnamese)	12.8%	*
Hispanic	2.8%	*
Native American	< 1%	*
Multi-racial	3%	*

Note. \*represents a percent that has been suppressed due to a potential small sample (MCDS, 2013)

Case study methodology as described by Marshall and Rossman (2006) focuses on society and culture in a group, a program, or an organization (p. 55). This type of study places the researcher in the setting, conducting interviews and observations with the research outcome dependent on the views of both the researcher and the participants. Marshall and Rossman (2006) went on to discuss Brantlinger's (1997) seven categories of crucial assumptions for

qualitative research, which relate to the case study approach of this study: (a) the researcher felt the nature of the research to be critical with an educational agenda to identify and promote cultural proficiency at the building and district levels to promote student achievement; (b) researcher's proximity to the participants was distant and objective; (c) direction of the researcher's gaze is outward toward others, externalizing the research problem and looking for understanding; (d) purpose of the research was intended to be useful and informative to the professional career of the researcher and other school building and district leaders as well as those who craft and vote on education policy; (e) the intended audience of the study was the scholarly community, educational leaders working with students, and educational policy makers; (f) the research was political with an agenda to enhance the educational climate and curriculum in schools to promote student success by narrowing the learning gap; and (g) researcher's exercise of agency was a part of education and education policy.

Creswell (2013) identified three types of case studies, including a single instrumental case study, multiple case study, and an intrinsic case study. Creswell went on to discuss the various structures of a case study as described by researchers like Stake, Lincoln and Guba, and Yin. This research was classified as a single case study, which Yin (2009) says is used in situations in which a need exists to study a critical issue. Using Yin's description, this case study is a holistic design that captures the entire case in one study. The structure of the research is what Yin (2009) describes as a linear-analytic approach or standard approach in which the researcher discusses the problem, the methods, the findings, and conclusion. The review of literature is narrowed using a funneling approach from the broad topic to a specific outcome or study, which in this case is narrowing of the learning gap of students by supporting and promoting a culturally proficient learning environment.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions emerged from an investigation to determine how organizational leaders must embrace a culturally proficient environment in America's classroom to promote student success. Academic settings must embrace the differences of others and use those differences to dig deeper into learning. By doing this school leaders can manage conflicts and create a learning environment that promotes success for all students. Building leaders must also train themselves and others to enhance knowledge of diverse population. To institutionalize cultural knowledge requires the integration of the information and skills that enable members of the school system to interact effectively in a variety of cross-cultural situations. Cultural competence can no longer be seen as something external or supplemental to the core of the organization. To achieve the purpose of this study the following research questions guided the research:

1. What are the essential elements or attributes needed to develop the cultural competence of building leaders in order to lead a culturally proficient school?
2. What staff training or programs have building leaders implemented that directly address school personnel understanding of diversity and/or cultural proficiency?

## **Research Design**

According to Creswell (2013), the case study method best documents characteristics familiar to social scientists because of program outcomes and quality elements that may not be as evident with other research designs. Marshall and Rossman's (2006) qualitative research allows for a descriptive design combined with strategic data collection. These researchers state that "strengths of qualitative studies should be demonstrated for research that is exploratory or descriptive and that stresses the importance of context, setting, and participants' frames of

reference” (p. 54). This study sought to generate theory about characteristics for a successful, diverse school district and professional training necessary to support that system. To accomplish this grounded theory methodology was used. Grounded theory is used to refer to any approach to developing theoretical ideas that begin with data (Swandt, 2007). A key idea of this theory development is to move beyond description and use data that is generated or “grounded” from participants who have experienced the process in its’ setting (Creswell, 2013). Data is systematically gathered, analyzed, and reported through a specific process developed by the researcher. The primary source for collecting the data is through interviews that are triangulated with observation and artifact review. Categories and themes are developed from the interviews, and coding the data is the formal representation of analyzing what you have learned. From there, interpretations are made from what was learned through the interviews, field notes, and the analysis of other district documents and artifacts.

The research for this study was conducted in four phases: (a) interviews with selected teachers and administrators; (b) collection of observational data (teacher to student in the classroom; administrator to student in the building, and student to student in the classroom) and field note observation; (c) review of other documents, and web site looking for inclusion of diversity; and (d) analysis of findings through open, axial, and selective coding of data for the purpose of identifying themes and categories. Each phase provided data which answered research and supported overall findings.

The data collection process began with semi-structured interviews with three administrators and 7 teachers in the selected school district. An interview guide was used for all participants. Assessment of cultural attributes of a building leader requires an analysis of oneself and one’s public school environment in order to have a clear sense of how much cultural

proficiency has a significant impact on student achievement. When assessing culture, culturally proficient leaders must recognize how their own culture affects others and be able to describe the cultural norm of their organizations. Marshall and Rossman (2006) state qualitative researchers rely mainly on the interview process and describe interviewing as a “conversation with a purpose” (p. 101). They go on to say these conversations should be informal and should portray the participants’ perspective on the topic and not the researcher’s views. In order to gain valid and reliable information, the interviewer conveyed that the participant’s views are valuable and useful and focused listening on the participants’ answers. The interviews were informal and semi-structured, conducted in a relaxed atmosphere. The interview had two goals: (1) establish the understanding of cultural proficiency by the teachers and administrators and how the proficiency of the building leader can drive the instruction to maximize learning opportunities and (2) determine the amount and type of professional development the district has offered to teachers to help them become culturally proficient. Teachers and administrators answered similar questions to determine if specific attributes are evident in the culturally proficient leader. Open-ended questions used in the interview reflected the elements of the Cultural Proficiency Continuum, Table 1.1 (Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005) found in Chapter One, as well as the Model of Continuous Improvement and Key Components of Cultural Proficiency as displayed in Figure 1.1 (Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005; Pfaller, 2010, p. 9), also found in Chapter One. Interview questions for classroom teachers are displayed in Table 3.2 and focus on the teachers’ perspective of administrative leadership and if that leadership created a culturally competent environment necessary for narrowing the learning gap. Table 3.3 contains parallel questions for building administrators to see how they, in self-reflection, viewed their

own role in creating a culturally competent environment that helped to reduce the learning gap for diverse students.

Table 3.2

*Interview Questions-Teachers*

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Questions for Selected Teachers

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1. What do you see as the role of the school leader in creating a response to cultural proficiency? Explain how cultural proficiency of a school district plays a role in reducing the learning gap between majority and minority students?
  2. Can you tell me about district created school policies and/or procedures that directly address cultural proficiency?
  3. Can you say, with certainty, the curriculum you use regularly creates awareness for and addresses cultural differences? If so, how?
  4. Can you say with certainty that your building leader models cultural proficiency and does the building leaders knowledge of cultural differences impact the direction of the school? If so, what strategies does the building leader implement to directly address the multicultural diversity in the building?
  5. What background knowledge about cultural proficiency did you possess before you became a teacher?
  6. Can you share with me staff development and/or program opportunities that have been offered to you that directly address staff understanding of racial diversity and/or cultural proficiency? If yes, did the training you received regarding cultural proficiency lead to changes in instructional strategies and curricular content?
  7. Do you believe the building leaders' perspectives in regards to cultural proficiency impacts school climate and student achievement? Explain your answer.
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Table 3.3

*Interview Questions-Administrators*


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 Questions for Selected Administrators
 

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1. How has your role as the school leader in creating a positive response to cultural proficiency has helped to narrow the learning gap between majority and minority students?
  2. Can you tell me about district created school policies and/or procedures that directly address cultural proficiency?
  3. Can you say with certainty the curriculum teachers' use regularly creates awareness for and addresses cultural differences?
  4. Can you say that as a building leader you model cultural proficiency and does your knowledge of cultural differences impact the direction of the school? If so, what strategies do you implement to directly address the multicultural diversity in the building?
  5. Please share with me the background knowledge of cultural proficiency you brought with you to the role of building leader.
  6. Can you share with me staff development and/or program opportunities that you have offered or that have been offered to your staff that directly addresses their understanding of racial diversity and/or cultural proficiency? How did the training received regarding cultural proficiency lead to changes in instructional strategies and curricular content?
  7. Please share with me how you believe your perspectives in regards to cultural proficiency impact school climate and student achievement?
- 

Upon completion of the interview, each participant was asked to complete two additional tasks found in Table 3.4. The first task asked each participant to rank from 1 to 4, with 1 being the most important, the essential elements needed to develop cultural competence. Task number



two asked each participant to rank, using the same scale, the elements they felt were most important in narrowing the learning gap for students.

Table 3.4

*Rank order criteria*

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Rank order each task

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Task #1-Essential elements needed for cultural competence

Assessing and valuing diversity

Managing conflicts caused by differences

Adapting to diversity

Training for diversity

Task #2-Components for narrowing the learning gap

Safe school environment

Parent and community involvement

Curriculum and instruction

Staffing and teacher retention

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The second phase of the study focused on classroom observational and field note observation data collection regarding the interaction of teachers and students in the classroom as well as interaction of the building leader with teachers and students during the school day. The field note guide that was used during the classroom observations and field note observation is in Table 3.5 and represents the elements from the Cultural Proficiency Continuum found in Chapter One, Table 1.1 (Lindsey. Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005), which assesses an organization's

development toward a culturally proficient environment in conjunction with the Model of Continuous Improvement and Key Components of Cultural Proficiency as displayed in Figure 1.1 (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003; Pfaller, 2010, p. 9), which outlines the endless circle of growth required for leaders and organization to be culturally proficient. The perspective of teachers is particularly important to this study as they reflect on the essential attributes of the cultural proficiency of their building leader, necessary to narrow the learning gap of diverse students.

Table 3.5

*Field Note Guide*

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Classroom and Building Observation

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1. Observe classroom artifacts or features that reflect promotion of tolerance, cultural awareness or cross cultural understanding.
  2. Observe curriculum and materials used that reflect attention to students' interests and range of backgrounds.
  3. Observe a mutual respect between individuals.
  4. Observe encouragement of student interactions across ethnic, racial, and linguistic lines.
  5. Observe interactions that reflect cooperative working relationships among students.
  6. Observe climate of respect for students' ideas, questions, and contributions and participation of all students is encouraged.
  7. Observe celebrations of individual and/or group achievement.
  8. Observe building leader and teacher building relationships with students.
  9. Observe an atmosphere that is safe and free from conflict.
  10. Characterize through observation staff interpersonal interactions with students.
  11. Characterize through observation the building leaders' interpersonal interactions with students.
-

Participant observation as used in phase two of the study is the notion of witnessing social interaction first hand by engaging for a period of time in the setting of the classroom, hallway, cafeteria, and other areas where administrators, teachers, and students interact (Schwandt, 2007). Activities that are observed in the daily lives of the participants were reconstructed by using field notes. These classroom observations and field notes, based on Table 3.5 were reviewed and transcribed into qualitative data ready for coding using the identification of major themes. Immersion into the study through observation is a means in which the researcher can gain a better understanding of the nature, purpose, and meaning of cultural proficiency in the selected school district (Schwandt, 2007). Culturally proficient leaders will anticipate how an individual will interact with, conflict with, and enhance one another. Being cognizant of how culture affects others and insights gained from observations of the school culture will help leaders and the district to make academic changes so that all students safely and comfortably strive toward success.

Phase three of the study involved investigation of district documents and artifacts from multiple sources to support the prominent themes in the interview and observational data. A document analysis as described by Schwandt (2007) occurs when “various procedures involved in analyzing and interpreting data generated from the examination of documents and records relevant to a particular study” (p. 75). Sources of these data may include but are not limited to the following: (a) agendas for meetings; (b) presentations from teacher meetings; (c) junior high school newspaper; (d) district instructional model manual; (e) information provided by the district; (f) web site information; and (g) other documents of the district.

In phase four, interview data was coded using a grounded, context-sensitive scheme to identify themes present in the data. In this type of coding, the actual language of the participants

was reviewed to generate open codes or categories to refine the meaning of the categories (Schwandt, 2007). Analyzing data for the purpose of explaining and developing an understanding of what is taking place or possibly not taking place to create a culturally sensitive education environment that create learning opportunities for students is the mission of the study. It is important to note however, when analyzing data through coding, Schwandt (2007) noted there is a tendency to regard categories or themes as fixed rather than flexible and cautioned researchers to be open to the dynamic structure of the data. Phase four also included a comparison of documents and how they align with the Cultural Proficiency Continuum found in Chapter One, Table 1.1 (Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005) and with the Model of Continuous Improvement and Key Components of Cultural Proficiency found in Figure 1.1 (Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005; Pfaller, 2010, p. 9).

### **Researcher's Role**

This case study examined the attributes necessary for a culturally proficient leader to create an environment that supports and promotes learning opportunities for all students. The study compliments my background, having led school districts as an assistant superintendent and a superintendent in the capacity of an instructional leader. In a leadership role, I have had to review data related to standardized test scores and facilitate discussions that resulted in changes to curriculum and instruction based on those scores. My experience in most districts has been trying to determine changes in curriculum and instruction that directly impacted groups of students where the learning gap was the largest. In that same role, I have also observed how leadership of the building principal plays a vital role in developing a school culture that is conducive to tolerance and how that culture has a direct impact on student achievement.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education model evaluation for the superintendent specifically indicates the accountability of student performance falls on the shoulders of the superintendent as the district leader (Missouri DESE, 2012). With the implementation of the Missouri Learning Standards, expectations for student performance have been raised significantly; therefore, expectations related to instruction are raised as well. It is the responsibility of the central office to guide and direct instruction so students will meet or exceed expectations. It is also the responsibility of the central office to provide the learning opportunities for building leaders to grow and develop personally and professionally so they can lead a building that is conducive to student and teacher success.

### **Data Management**

This case study was conducted during the 2014-2015 school year. Document collection and participant interviews began during January of 2015 with the approval of the school district and the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Data were analyzed and the findings presented to the committee in spring of 2015.

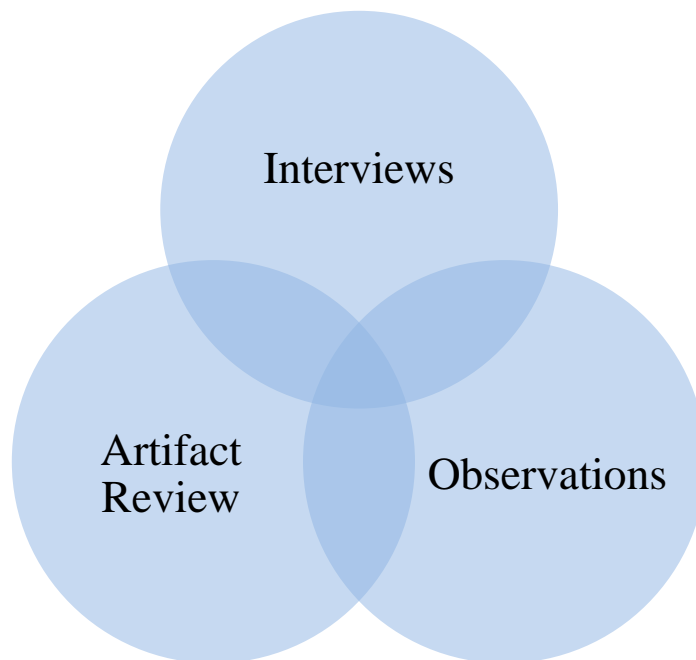
Data collected for this study was regarded as confidential and all information was secured in a protected setting using an external hard drive in an effort to maintain confidentiality. Any supporting documents used for the study were coded with an assigned code and dated at the time acquired and then scanned to the external hard drive. Documents and artifacts were obtained by requesting from the district or retrieving from the district's webpage.

Data was collected and sorted into themes using the process of open, axial and selective coding. Descriptive coding was used to analyze the pertinent topics for this study. When reviewing data, special reference was given to the Cultural Proficiency Continuum found in Chapter One, Table 1.1 (Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005) and with the Model of

Continuous Improvement and Key Components of Cultural Proficiency found in Figure 1.1 (Lindsey, Roberts, & Campbelljones, 2005; Pfaller, 2010, p. 9), using those as guides for topic relevance and major themes.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for this qualitative study consists primarily of interviews, observations, and document or artifact collection. Creswell (2013) states that qualitative data continues to emerge and change but most can be grouped into four basic types, three of which will be used for this qualitative study: observations, interviews, and documents. Figure 3.1 shows how each phase of the process supports and enriches the information retrieved in the previous phase providing the reader an in-depth description of School A in determining the characteristics for a success, diverse school district.



*Figure 3.1* Conceptual model for data collection

This model also shows how each phase intertwines with other two phases of the data collection process providing a complete look at addressing the research questions as represented by the darker areas of the circles.

Creswell (2013) presented four types of observations that can be used in research. For this study the participant as observer was used. In this observation type, the researcher is participating in the activity at the site but maintains more of a passive participant role allowing, for the taking of field notes and observation to occur without direct involvement with the activity or the people. Creswell went on to say a good qualitative observer may change their role during an observation, moving from one role to another (p. 167).

The following process was used to conduct observations and interviews in this study. An observational protocol based on Creswell's research (2013) outlined the collection of observational data. Field notes were gathered as a passive observer and were divided into two columns: (1) the left column will be titled "descriptive notes, listening," which indicated the observer's attempt to summarize what I heard and was told during classroom and campus observations and (2) the right column was titled "descriptive notes, viewed," which will discuss what I witnessed during the classroom observation and also during the campus walkthrough.

Creswell recommended adopting an interview protocol or guide. For this study the protocol was: (a) to document interviews on a prepared interview sheet that included a heading disclosing date and interviewee audit code; (b) to conduct interviews using standardized verbal instructions given prior to the interview; (c) to record on the interview sheet; and (e) to ask an opening and closing question to establish rapport and end the interview. Creswell also stated that good interview procedures include staying with the questions, staying within the time limit if

possible, being respectful and courteous, being a good listener rather than a frequent speaker, and recording all information on the interview sheet in addition using an audio recorder (p. 166).

### **Data Analysis**

The goal of data analysis is to prepare and organize the information into themes through a process of coding and then represent the information in figures, tables, and narrative discussion. According to Creswell (2013), coding and displaying information as mentioned above are the essential core elements of qualitative data analysis (p. 180). Creswell went on to say the analysis process conforms to a general outline represented by a data analysis spiral where the researcher moves in analytic circles rather than a fixed linear approach (p. 182). To accomplish this, grounded theory methodology was used as was described in Chapter Three (p. 53). Grounded theory is used to refer to any approach to developing theoretical ideas that begin with data (Swandt, 2007). A key idea of this theory development is to move beyond description and use data that is generated or “grounded” from participants who have experienced the process in its setting (Creswell, 2013). The data is systematically gathered, analyzed, and reported through a specific process developed by the researcher. The primary source for collecting the data is through interviews that are triangulated with observation and artifact review. The steps are: (1) create and organize files for data, (2) thoroughly read through interviews making notes and form initial open codes, (3) describe the case and its context by establishing themes and patterns by coding data, (4) interpret the data by determining what was learned through the process, and (5) present an in-depth picture of the case by using narrative, figures, and tables representative of the data



## **Trustworthiness**

The purpose for establishing trustworthiness in a qualitative study is to support the argument that the study's findings are worth giving credit to and data have been collected objectively (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness has been defined by Schwandt (2007) as "that quality of an investigation and subsequently the findings that made the study noteworthy to audiences" (p. 299). Critics of qualitative research have concerns with how qualitative research is conducted and how research data is collected. In any qualitative research study, four issues of trustworthiness are addressed: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility as discussed by Schwandt (2007) parallels internal validity and is established by developing an audit trail and using procedures such as triangulation, member checks and peer debriefing. Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied and relevant beyond the limits of the study. Dependability is demonstrated in this research study by ensuring the process was logical, traceable, and well documented through an audit trail (Schwandt, 2007). Last, confirmability gauges how well the study's findings are supported and confirmed through a combination of techniques—triangulation, a researcher's journal, and an audit trail. Lincoln and Guba (1985) in their book, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, listed six approaches for the researcher to implement to curb bias and establish trustworthiness: (a) prolonged engagement; (b) persistent engagement; (c) triangulation; (d) peer debriefing; (e) member checks; and (f) an audit trail.

**Prolonged engagement.** To establish credibility and trustworthiness in a qualitative study prolonged engagement is the most effective instrument that should be used (Swartz, 2002). Prolonged engagement is spending a sufficient amount of time in the field gathering data and building relationships in order to answer the research questions and satisfy the study's purpose.

Prolonged engagement increases the credibility of a study. The research for this study took place in the spring of 2015. The data collected, including initial contacts with district leaders and participants, interviews, and document collection, took place over the course of two months providing sufficient time to collect data in a variety of formats, establish rapport, and build trust with the participants. Prolonged engagement allowed me an opportunity to answer questions participants had about interviews, observations, and documents that were collected as they related to confidentiality and how they would be used within the study.

**Persistent engagement.** Persistent engagement entails addressing bias and ensuring that all data is rechecked and reevaluated. Through persistent engagement, information can be obtained by acquiring enough depth to get a solid understanding. Creswell, (2013) in his explanation of persistent engagement refers to Lincoln and Guba (1995) saying that in the field, the researcher makes decisions about what is salient to the study, relevant to the purpose of the study, and of interest for focusing on the research questions. It also involved checking for misinformation as a result of misleading answers to interview questions. Negative case analysis as described by Creswell (2013) is used to determine if information received will fit the codes or themes of the study. Follow-up conversations and member checks were used to check for inconsistencies in the data.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation is verifying the fact of the study through the use of multiple and different sources of information and involves corroborating evidence from these sources to shed light on a theme (Creswell, 2013). According to Schwandt (2007), the central point of this procedure “is to examine a conclusion from more than one vantage point”, (p. 298). He goes on to say that triangulation “is both possible and necessary in this type of discovery research where the genuine meaning of answering the research questions can only be uncovered

by viewing it from different vantage points” (p. 298). The data collection techniques used included standardized open-ended interviews with teachers and administrators, observations, and acquisition of documentation.

**Peer debriefing.** Creswell (2013) defined the role of a peer debriefer as an disinterested individual who keeps the researcher honest by asking hard questions about methods and meanings of explanations referring to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) description of “devil’s advocate.” In the case of this study, peer debriefing took place with a few other graduate students and colleagues in the education profession. Submitting my data and interpretation of data to be scrutinized by other researchers helped to get additional insight, as well as verification of my interpretation and served as a formative evaluation prior to completion and submission to the committee.

**Member checks.** According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) as cited in Creswell (2013) “member checks are the most critical technique for establishing credibility” in a qualitative study (p. 252). This approach allows for participants of the study to confirm the researcher captured the authenticity of their beliefs, feelings, and message accurately. For this study the researcher checked for understanding during the interviews by asking for clarity or asked them to restate as can be found in the transcribed interviews. Participants were provided the opportunity to expand, clarify, and correct their responses through this method.

**Audit trail.** An audit trail is a systematically maintained document system or an organized collection of materials that includes the data generated from the study and all documents used in triangulating the data (Schwandt, 2007). The audit trail is used by the researcher as a means of managing record keeping and reflects the dependability and confirmability of procedures used in this study. Data were securely stored on the researcher’s

computer, an external hard drive, and a flash drive for on-going usage. Hard copies of information were kept in a file box and stored at the researcher's home. The following were held in a secure area:

- digital recordings and verbatim transcriptions of interviews;
- field notes of classroom and campus observations;
- personal notes, e-mails, and researcher's journal;
- collection of documents and artifacts;
- document and data analysis for coding purposes.

### **Evidentiary Inadequacies**

Erickson (1986) identified five types of evidentiary inadequacies that are ethical issues researchers must consider during data collection and interpreting the data. These evidentiary inadequacies weaken the integrity of the qualitative research. The first type of evidentiary inadequacy is inadequate amount of evidence (Erickson, 1986). Erickson's research highlights the importance of maintaining the quality through data analysis and collecting data. This inadequacy was addressed through prolonged and persistent engagement engaging with the participants on site long enough to gather multiple types of data through interview, observations, and document collection.

The second of Erickson's inadequacies is the inadequate variety in the types of data used in a study. This inadequacy was addressed through the triangulation of individual interviews, observations, and site document collection. Use of the audit trail reinforces that a variety in the types of data were used for the study.

Erickson's third type of evidentiary inadequacy is the interpretive status of evidence from the data collection. Sufficient time was spent in the field to ensure against this inadequacy.

Member checks were used to verify the credibility and accuracy of the data retrieved from the participant interviews. Also peer debriefing served to double-check my interpretation of the data.

The fourth type of evidentiary inadequacy Erickson (1985) identified was inadequate disconfirming evidence. As researcher, I was careful not to focus on findings that were thought to satisfy my own thoughts and beliefs. Persistent engagement entails addressing biases and ensuring that all data are reevaluated and rechecked identifying possible inconsistencies in data.

Erickson's (1985) final source of evidentiary inadequacy was inadequate discrepant case analysis. It was important to interview each participant by asking all the questions in the same order providing consistency and not to invalidate or validate instances that might have been derived from the data. Additionally relevant studies were identified in my literature review to support or discriminate my results. Furthermore, interviewing and observing participants at their worksite created an adequate discrepant-case analysis.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this case study is to assess the current state of cultural proficiency of school leaders and determine what changes, if any, are needed in a school district to promote cultural proficiency in the classroom and provide equal opportunities for learning. Chapter Three provides an extensive and comprehensive view of the research design for the study as well as the methods of data collection and analysis that was used. Methods to ensure trustworthiness were explained as well as the steps taken to ensure against evidentiary inadequacies. Chapter Four is a presentation of the data using open and axial coding gathered from interviews, observations, and the document review. Chapter Five provides the results and recommendations for future study.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Presentation of the Data**

The purpose of this case study is to assess the current state of cultural proficiency of school leaders and determine what changes, if any, were needed in an organization to promote cultural proficiency in the school and the classroom. The study also determined what elements would help to create and maintain a culturally proficient classroom and school environment. The vast differences in cultures of the foreign born and the natives create numerous difficulties for educational leaders in communication, instruction, and assessment in an educational environment. Considering the cultural and ethnic diversity in America, there is a necessity to question the cultural proficiency of building educational leaders and public education classrooms in general. Classrooms are filled with students of different cultural backgrounds, making education a challenge to every teacher and student. School leaders who recognize and understand cultural differences can work to establish an environment that provides optimal learning opportunities for all students.

### **Audience**

Those who may benefit from the findings of this study are school leaders' whose job responsibilities include, but are not limited to, providing a safe, comfortable learning environment for all students while improving student achievement and providing learning opportunities for all students. The focus of this study is to determine the characteristics of a diverse, successful school and these findings can be used by policy makers at the local, state, and national levels as they explore what school improvement models are best to move schools from academic failure toward achieving academic success. The findings of this study would also benefit school counselors as they provide students with tools to help them thrive in a diverse

society. Others who may gain from this study's findings are educators who are responsible for training our pre-service teachers in colleges and universities by providing them with some background knowledge on how to create educational opportunities for diverse student populations.

### **Transcribed Interviews**

Interviews were conducted on the campus of School A with three administrators and seven teachers over a two-day period. Participants were excited to share their story as it related to School A and this study, answering the questions with enthusiasm. Participants expressed interest in reading the findings of this qualitative study upon its completion. Respondents sometimes used incomplete sentences, casual language and acronyms during the conversation which could cause confusion for the reader in the word-for-word transcription; however, in most cases acronyms were explained in the text. No words were added to any of the transcripts which might have provided clarity in certain situations however slight editorial changes for repeated phrases at the beginning of a thought or words such as "umm" or "uh" were deleted. Where the school name was mentioned by the respondents, I substituted School A to keep the district's identity anonymous.

### **Audit Trail Notations**

To protect anonymity, audit trail notations were assigned to each participant of School A that participated in the study. Participants' total years of experience in education ranged from 9-24 years as shown in Table 4.1; however, two participants had less than five years of experience in School A. Table 4.1 also displays the code assigned to each participant with a random number from 1-10, gender, and then A for administrator or FA for faculty. Throughout Chapters Four and Five when individual participants are referenced, their audit trail notation code is used to

identify them. Direct quotes from participants reflect their audit trail notation code followed by a slash and a number that denotes the page number in the transcribed interview from which the notation was taken.

Table 4.1

*Audit Trail of Participants from School A*

Participant	Years in Education	Years in District	Position
9MA	24	15	Superintendent
10FA	21	19	Asst. Superintendent
2MA	14	14	Principal
1FFA	18	15	Teacher
3FFA	14	7	Teacher
4FFA	10	6	Teacher
5FFA	9	3	Teacher
6FFA	10	9	Teacher
7FFA	9	4	Teacher
8FFA	21	21	Teacher

An audit trail was also kept for other sources of data that were reviewed and referenced in Chapters Four and Five. These sources of data include classroom observation data, field notes, selected documents that were reviewed, achievement data reviewed and the researchers' journal. Each item has been given a specific identification code which will be used when reference is made to that particular piece of data. A list of these items with coding can be found in Table 4.2.



Table 4.2

*Audit trail of field notes, observations and document collection for School A*

Document	Identification Code
Field Notes	FN
Classroom Observation Data	OBS
Documents Reviewed	
District Mission and Belief Statements	MBS
District Information	DI
RACER	RCR
Meeting Agenda 1	MA1
PowerPoint for Meeting 1	PP1
Meeting Agenda 2	MA2
PowerPoint for Meeting 1	PP2
SIOP Training Manual	TM
Junior High Newspaper	JHNP
Comprehensive School Improvement Plan	CSIP
Website information	WEB
Researcher Journal	RJ

### **Presentation of Axial Codes**

The axial coding process for the study identified categories that were relevant to the study. During the process of reviewing transcription data, open codes were recognized and grouped which led to the emergence of axial codes or themes. Themes that emerge from the data and analyzed were: (a) cultural awareness, (b) leadership, (c) teachers, (d) instructional model, (e) curriculum, (f) students, (g) parent and community involvement and, (h) environment.

Figure 4.1 presents the axial codes at the top in bold type and a sample of open codes beneath each axial code derived from the transcription data. The figure continues on the next page.

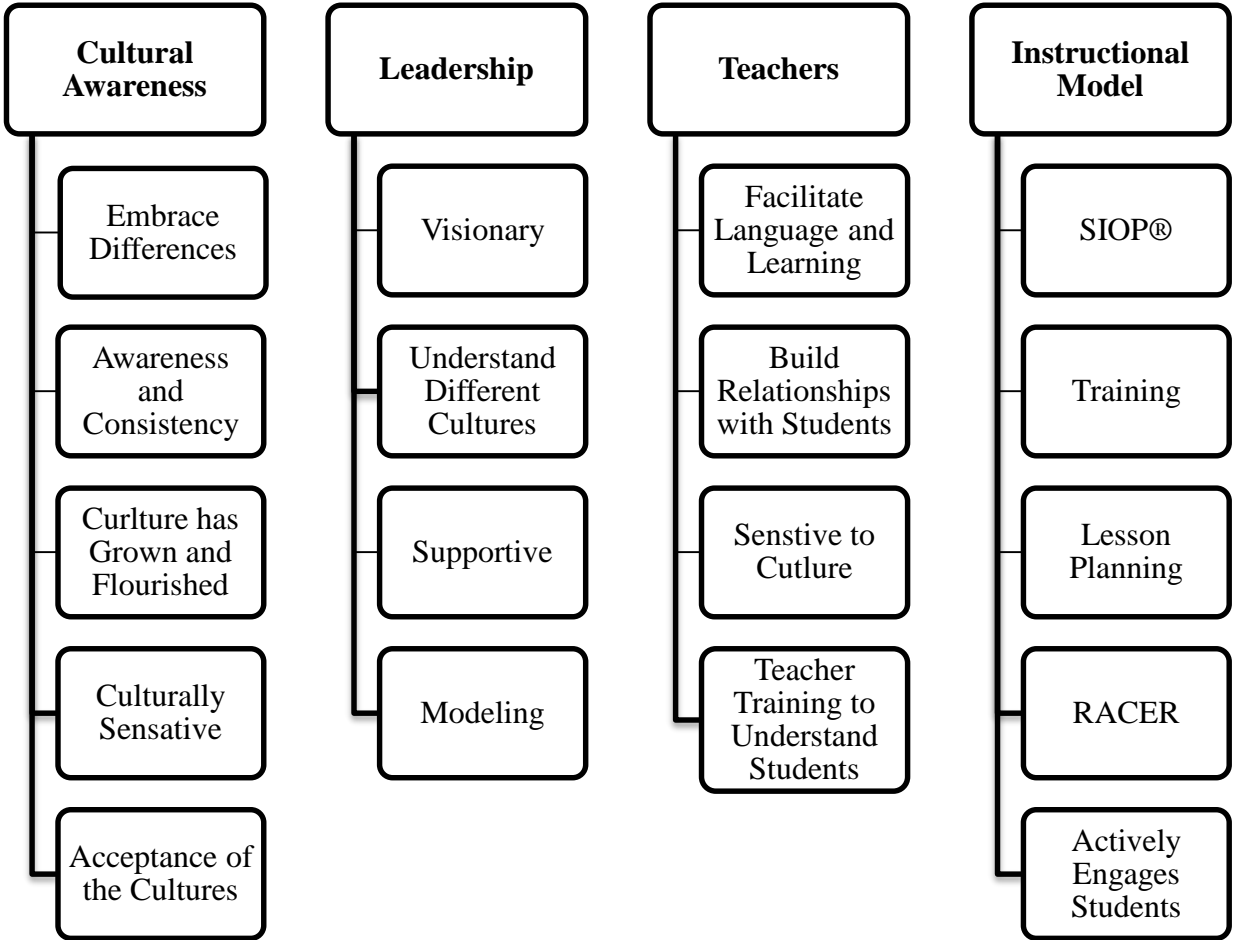


Figure 4.1 Axial codes and sample of open codes for participant interviews

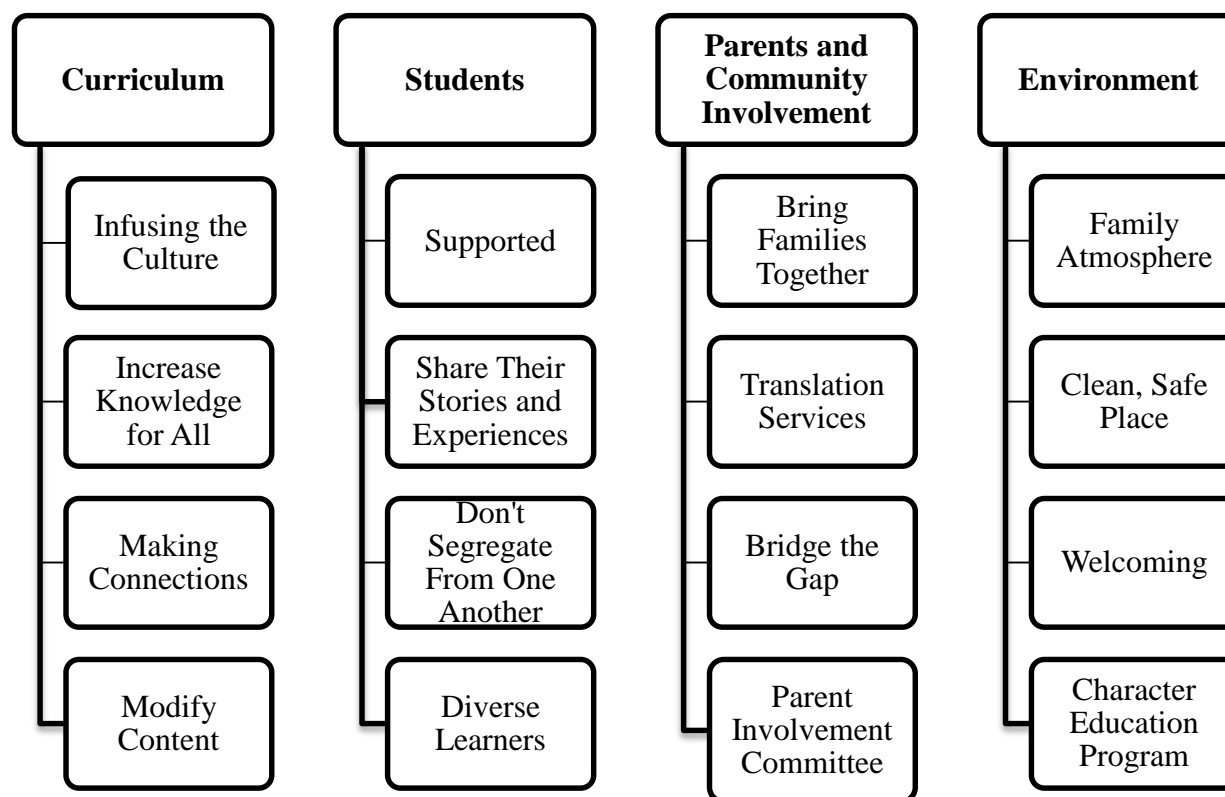


Figure 4.1 (Continued) Axial codes and sample of open codes for participant interviews

### Analysis of Axial Codes

The themes that emerges from the collection of data were: (a) cultural awareness, (b) leadership, (c) teachers, (d) instructional model, (e) curriculum, (f) students, (g) parent and community involvement and, (h) environment. Data from multiple sources-interviews, observations, document collection- were triangulated to support these themes. These themes are not interdependent of each other and at times will be discussed interdependently.

**Cultural awareness.** During the axial coding process, Cultural Awareness was identified as a theme for School A. In Chapter Two of this study Garmon (2005) states that building leaders and teachers knowing who they are as people, understanding contexts in which they teach, and questioning their knowledge and assumptions are as important as the mastery of

techniques for instructional effectiveness. Making cultural competence work is dependent upon people knowing what they believe and modeling that same behavior.

Comments about cultural awareness were woven into each interview and the evidence to support what I was told by the administrators and the teachers was verified through data collected during observations and examination of documents. Teacher 6FFA firmly believed that cultural awareness was important and said, “This district is very unique because we are so diverse and we always been that way” (6FFA/1). She continues by saying, “It’s just kind of the culture we’ve had here” (6FFA/1). Teacher 1FFA believed cultural awareness was very important and that it is just there saying,

In terms of the culture of the school, I don’t know it’s just weird because it’s so just like there and I mean I don’t feel like it’s a glaring issue or anything so it’s just kind like something our kids are awesome in that way they just kinda all melt together and work together so well so I don’t know umm. (FFA/3)

Following up with teacher 1FFA there was evidentiary support in the audit trail that included observations of students mixing together in the hallways (FN/1), in the cafeteria, and also on the playground (FN/2).

During the interviews I found that cultural awareness had not always been at the forefront of the district. Teacher 6FFA was discussing the closeness of students and said, “so I think we’re really fortunate I don’t know how our district went through that transition because I know we weren’t always as diverse as we are now” (6FFA/1). Teacher 8FFA went into more depth about the history of School A and talked about the early years in School A, 20 years ago when she came to the district saying,

In the beginning they did not recognize that these kids were even part of our district, it was like, we have to make sure our kids get those services first and it was like, they are our kids, they just happen to speak another language so it has grown, I mean it is so different now. (8FFA/1)

She followed up by discussing the change from the early years when the district began to recognize and address differences and shared this with me,

Just the fact that you have to recognize that those are your kids and you actually need to learn about their culture, learn about ways to help them , and put some practices in place that helps these kids learn and make sure you have enough teachers to teach them and you not, you know they're not, so they're not sitting in the back of the classroom drawing pictures instead of actually learning and some kind of a program to train teachers on how to help our students who do not speak English. (8FFA/1-2)

As things grew, we actually I had gotten two grants to train teachers so we had one grant where I had folks come in and train, well we pulled about, I don't remember how many, 15 teachers that were interested and we thought we could train them and they'd go back to their schools with their teams and they could talk and bring some of these things back. So we did that and we have so many sessions and I had an elementary leader and I had a secondary leader and we went through a lot of different things that you could do to help these students learn, input and all of that. (8FFA/2)

And then the district as we grew we started, the administration started recognizing more and more that we had to, these kids were affecting everything so I honestly think that No Child Left Behind helped our ELL population. (8FFA/2)

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum represented in Table 1.1 discuss the evolution of cultural proficiency as is represented in Teacher 8FFA's description above and exemplifies the necessary components leaders must acquire in order to move the school culture in a positive direction.

Teacher 8FFA was describing movement on the continuum from cultural incapacity toward cultural pre-competence and beyond.

The continued growth of cultural awareness is a theme that teachers keep at the forefront each day and discussed that it was small things that everyone did that supported cultural awareness. Continued growth of cultural proficiency is portrayed in Figure 1.1 as a continuous cycle by a district and is characterized in the conversations of those interviewed. Teacher 3FFA said, "I know it wasn't just by accident it happened over time but sometimes it's almost it's just small things and then you step back and really see this made a big difference" (3FFA/1). Later

in the conversation I stated at School A they had a very unique opportunity and she responded by saying,

We do and sometimes it's hard to verbalize because so much is just small things that have been woven into our fabric that become expectations that this is how we do things. It's a lot of subtleties. (3FFA/5)

These small things were noticed during observations with flags of different countries displayed in all of the buildings (FN/1) and the word "Culture" on a pillar in front of the JH/HS building (FN/4).

Another way the school exhibits cultural understand is through character words. One of the character words was "respect" which was clearly displayed in each of the buildings and also clearly shown on the front of the Junior High Newspaper (FN/1 and JHNP/1). The schools mission statement found on the district website also celebrates cultural awareness stating,

School A will provides a safe and enriching environment where ALL children will learn to become responsible and empowered citizens, where diversity builds character and strength, knowledge enhances freedom and opportunity and commitment leads to success. (MBS/1)

Teacher 3FFA summed it up saying, with what I observed as enthusiasm, "We're a community regardless of our differences that it all boils down to that we have a lot of similarities" (3FFA/4).

The idea of respect and a community regardless of differences was very evident when I looked out the back door of the elementary building and you could physically see a Lutheran Church, a Catholic Church, a Buddhist Temple and the St. Louis Arch (FN/4). I was also told by the superintendent during our campus tour there was a mosque nearby as well (FN/4).

Over the past several years, one of the teachers indicated that she believes the cultural proficiency of the school continues to grow each day by,

Finding ways to embrace the different cultures where kids can learn about each other's cultures and just doing things like you know, mix it up day where kids move to different tables it's interesting though a lot of our students are interspersed anyway so

we don't see tables where example just Bosnian students or just you know Korean students so to some degree we have been very blessed. (3FFA/1)

This teacher went on to say the cultural awareness of the district includes diversity in terms of disabilities and students who might have a debilitating disease. She said students researched and shared information to increase awareness in this area saying,

Diversity, in terms of different abilities, because we also do a lot with that. We also had our National Jr. Honor Society students they actually you know they really researched and created a presentation about for example Turrets Syndrome and just different you know physical disabilities, different you know it could be psychological or emotional disabilities and they presented it to students, they went around to the different advisories creating awareness. And you know then we raised money for different organizations through can food drive and just having the kids kinda put, I don't know if I want to say it put face or really to understand more about some of those disabilities as they are raising money for them you know so. (3FFA/2)

This information was also supported in the document review with an article in the Junior High newspaper giving information on Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, ALS, and raising money for finding a cure and ending ALS (JHNP/3). The article went on to give information on how the students and staff raised money through the ALS ice bucket challenge.

Teachers believe their culture is strong because if they do have issues, they are dealt with swiftly but fairly through the discipline process and crediting the building leader for making discipline a priority. One teacher stated,

Honestly since I have been here we really haven't encountered any type of racism or discrimination but I know we have policies about that of course and I know that if something were to happen then it would be very, dealt with very strictly. It basically, you know not only written but spoken and practiced that everybody accepts and works and learns with everybody else and that discrimination, racism is not acceptable. (3FFA/3)

Going further with the building leader's ability to recognize and understand differences when handling discipline issues, Teacher 3FFA said the building leaders' awareness was very evident when in disciplining,

I know that through his even discipline I know that he takes some of the cultures into perspective, cause you know there's different family dynamics with some of the different families. So he does a very good job in terms of disciplining students, in how he handles that. (3FFA/4)

Backing that statement up was what 2MA stated about handling discipline issues and supporting the growth of cultural awareness saying,

Because I know my students and I know, I've been here awhile I kinda know what to put up with and not to put up with. I think the students understand that I have their back whether they're Asian, Black, white, Bosnian, whatever I really don't care, you're a kid and you're going to make mistakes and my job is to try to make sure that you admit it, learn from it, and don't repeat it. (2MA/3)

***Summary of Axial Code “Cultural Awareness”.*** From the interviews, cultural awareness is important in the School A district. However, according to selected participants interviewed, cultural awareness has not always been in the forefront but in district but has evolved as the number students with different cultural backgrounds increased. In reviewing the transcripts, respect for others' cultures helps to maintain a culture that continues to grow and flourish as students learn together. School A finds different ways to embrace and celebrate the differences in their district. Flags from the different countries represented at the school are proudly displayed in each building.

**Leadership.** A strong theme that arose during the interviews was that of Leadership at the building level and also at the district level. Those interviewed believed unanimously that leadership had an enormous impact on the culture of the building and the stakeholders. A few individuals mentioned a previous principal that didn't appreciate the situation at School A and one said,

We had a principal, before the current one in JH who didn't share the vision of awareness & consistency and we had some issues that began to appear. Since changing, teachers, students and parents are happier and the culture has grown and flourished. (9MA/3).

Another person interviewed reinforced in their dialogue a similar opinion,



Well we had a few years with a different principal in there and I would say that his cultural proficiency was relatively low, leadership were relatively low, we did see a dip in our achievement, we saw an increase in referrals, really everything so it speaks to it, like I said it's hard sometimes to verbalize everything we do but it's just so many little things that are woven together. (3FFA/7)

And still another individual focused on the consistency from the top down and said the experience with a different administrator that consistency was missing. She stated,

I think it's the consistency that we're coming through with and that has really tightened up under 9MA and 2MA. Under our previous administrators we didn't have, we had SIOP, but we didn't have the consistency of everything as far as what are expectations were of students and how we dealt with students. I think the consistency that 2MA and 9MA have brought have really helped in that sense. (7FFA/5)

The importance of modeling an understanding of diversity was an opinion that was expressed also by more than one person. In Chapter Two Jim Collins (2001) was referenced in his book *Good to Great* and how he believed it was vitally important to have the right people in the right places within an organization for it to be successful. At School A, five individuals mentioned how important it was for school leaders, as well as building leaders, to have an appreciation and understanding of different cultures and modeling those beliefs and ideas. Teacher 3FFA said, "it's definitely like two-fold, it's the building but has to come also from central office and the superintendent and just really finding ways to embrace the different cultures" (3FFA/1). Teacher 1FFA believes the school leaders' role is to recognize the differences and said,

I think their role is to obviously recognize there is a lot of different cultural diversity at the school and not to just kind of ignore it and accept it know that it is something that might create some issues but know that to it might enrich the environment as well. (1FFA/1)

Her colleague continued with the same theme of modeling from the central office but expanded the conversation by including the guidance they get from the top and how the district has created learning opportunities for not just students but also for parents and community. She said,

I do feel like that 9MA's understanding of our diversity and his, not just understanding but his appreciation of it guides the staff's appreciation of it when we make so many efforts to communicate with all our parents in their own native languages when we send things out in several different languages, when we offer interpreters for every conference those kinds of things that when that understanding comes from the top and it filters down to the staff and then to our students even that kind of appreciation of their culture, not just acceptance of the culture, it's not an acceptance here it's very strange and very different and I love it, it's not an acceptance, it's not just like acknowledging you came from somewhere else it's we appreciate that people came from somewhere else. (7FFA/1)

Teacher 5FFA had a different twist on the importance of leadership from the top saying that it was important for school leaders to provide background information on the different cultures in School A. She believe ongoing communication was very important and said,

So I think as far as a school leader their first school goal should be to make their people coming into the district aware of their cultural differences and what they're working with and they should give their staff a background on the different cultures that they're working with and there should be some ongoing conversation whether or not that's formal professional development or just some ongoing conversation you know we're planning this big event we'll see how it will be received by our different communities. So I think as long as that's in the school leaders' mindset, and moving forward and they bring it up as necessary, then it's an ongoing organic conversation I think that that can really help us as teachers and then in turn help our students. (5FFA/2)

However, the most compelling statement about school leaders, or district leaders in this instance, came from 6FFA who said that my questions about leadership was "right on the money" (6FFA/6) and explained by saying,

When 9MA and 10FA were announced as the new superintendent and assistant superintendent our entire faculty immediately gave them a standing ovation. We were so happy to have them and they have been in our district working for years and I think them having a clear vision and being such hard workers, and having such good relationships has caused our principals to feel that way, our, I see instructional and assessment teams feels that way and in turn our teachers feel that way. Because when your boss really cares about you and is working really hard, you want to work hard for them and it's

trickle down affect, cause our students feel like that too, we have good relationship with them and they work hard for us. (6FFA/6)

The ability to lead is complex in that the building principal must possess the ability to communicate ideas and have a vision while informing, facilitating, supporting, empowering, and, when necessary, confronting those who refuse to make the change in believing that all students should have equal opportunity to learn (Price, 2007). While no teachers talked specifically about a visionary leader the administrators discussed the importance of school leaders and building leaders having a vision for the direction they wanted the school to go saying “it is important to be a visionary leader, model expected behavior for teachers to be aware and embrace differences” (10FA/1). Her colleague said it was important in, “leading the building toward the same vision and goal of educating students in a way they can understand” (9MA/1). While the other administrator did not directly address vision, 2MA did address making adjustments when necessary to make the culture better and also being visible in the building as very important to the culture,

I think that truly I think that I’m the reason why I think we do so well is I’m a problem solver, that’s what I do, I make adjustments, that’s where coaching came in and that’s why I believe I was a good coach I can put pieces of the puzzle together if I find deficiencies I plan to get them back where they need to be. I do that with my staff ...we have fun, work hard, play harder, but they know that what my expectations are, they knew what type of teacher I was, they know that I’m 100 miles an hour all the time. Before, the teachers and students didn’t really see the principal too often, now they can’t help but see me. (2MA/9)

When I visited the principal’s office during the campus walkthrough 2MA had the school goals on a whiteboard on his office wall and a column with the heading “what can we do different to make us better” (FN/3).

Many of those interviewed firmly believed that building leadership was the reason why School A was experiencing success. Dr. Pfaller (2010) discussed in her dissertation that building

leaders need to take with them strong beliefs that culture is an advantage and not a deficit or something that continuously needs to be fixed. In Figure 1.1, Dr. Pfaller emphasized the importance of continuing to improve and revisiting the issue of cultural proficiency as an unbroken circle. Teachers who were interviewed expressed that belief. Teacher 8FFA talked about the importance of building leaders perspectives of cultural proficiency,

If they are not on board with what we are doing, our teachers are not going to do it. If they're not finding ways to support our teachers like with whether it's administration here with coaches and professional development or the ELL teachers for instance with our SIOP minute, and out presentation and our helping the teachers as we go into classrooms, if that wasn't present I, there would be some teachers that would be awesome and would just continue and soak it in and there would be some teachers that would still be using workbooks, honestly. So yes, it definitely impacts and everybody knows that that, they're very clear, we know what is expected. (8FFA/7)

Another teacher said she felt it was important for building leaders to possess knowledge of cultural proficiency because if they didn't have that understanding students would suffer,

I think that as our building principals, if they are supportive of all our students then they have an understanding of what those students need then it will definitely impact student achievement. I mean I think if our building leaders weren't really aware or didn't have a lot of knowledge of how to support those students then I think, you know, those students might fall through the cracks. (4FFA/6)

She also said,

Building leaders knowledge of the cultural differences does impact the school because our building leaders need to be aware of the different cultures that make up our school and I think our leaders are very aware they can say "we have nine different languages here, we have so many cultures here" and they can kinda speak to the different cultures that we have and I think that is key for our, in order for our district to be successful. (4FFA/3)

Teacher 1FFA said that if leaders didn't embrace differences it would be "a huge bummer" (1FFA/4) and "I think pretty much everyone that we work with is like they love that part of working at School A which is great, you know, if you didn't you would have a hard time" (1FFA/4).

Modeling expectations is important in the Cultural Proficiency Continuum in Table 1.1. By modeling expectations of cultural proficiency, educators increase their ability to form authentic and effective relationships and teachers, students, and others know that building leaders are genuine in their thoughts and actions. Modeling cultural proficiency was mentioned by 4FFA in her interview and was very supportive in saying that School A's leaders did model cultural proficiency,

Our building principals do a good job of modeling that for the students because in our district you really have to because it's upfront and one of the first things you see when you, what School A is known for. I think that our leaders have to have an understanding of the different cultures we have and they have to model that. (4FFA/3)

Another teacher, when asked if the principal modeled cultural proficiency was very adamant that he did and said, "2MA, yes, I think, 2MA's been here forever and he loves School A" (7FFA/3).

When I asked if he walked the talk, she explained,

Yes he does, when he came in he really worked very, very hard, see I was here under the other principal as well, but when 2MA came since he has been here for so long he knows our clientele and he knows our, I don't want to say customers, he knows our people, he knows our community and he worked really hard to make everyone feel comfortable. And, he does work really well with students of, not even just ELL learners but students that we have that are poverty stricken and things like that he'll, he did a can food drive, like teachers didn't drive that, teachers often do things in our advisories but teachers didn't drive that and he said we are going to do a can food drive, and it's going to be a school wide thing and he does his own thing sometimes too like he wants the outreach to. (7FFA/3)

When Teacher 5FFA was asked if the building leader modeled cultural proficiency she stated, "I would say yes but there is always room for an improvement" (5FFA/5). However, she further expanded her view by saying,

I would say that our school leaders they do model that they are fully aware of differences between the different cultures and sometimes needing different approaches and different ways to address to address different issues at school between different cultures. (5FFA/5)

*Summary of Axial Code “Leadership”.* Leaders in School A recognize, understand, and honor the differences of their students and staff. Leaders model cultural proficiency and continually assess the learning environment making way for changes if necessary. Interviews reflect teachers are supportive of the leadership. Leaders have built strong relationships with students, staff, parents, and community and that, participants believe, is why the district is experiencing success. Those interviewed believed unanimously that leadership had an enormous impact on the culture of the building and the stakeholders.

**Teachers.** The third theme that emerged from the conversations was Teachers and their importance in the classroom but also their buy-in to the programs and people in School A. When participants were asked what their background knowledge of cultural proficiency was before they came to School A the majority said they had very little experience with the exception of two who felt they had some previous experience with diversity. After graduating from college Teacher 5FFA spent that summer on a Native American reservation and had this to say about her experience,

The town was split 50/50 between white and Lakota Sioux and so I learned very quickly and so I learned very quickly that cultural proficiency was you know knowing and recognizing that people are different and knowing where they came from was key in order in working together. And so that 3 months I think really set the tone for me in teaching and how important it was to recognize everyone’s background as important and in terms of understanding in order to move forward. (5FFA/6)

The other teacher traveled abroad, teaching for a year in Taiwan and felt she had quite a bit of experience with diversity. She felt her travels helped her relate to students and had this to say about her knowledge of cultural proficiency,

I taught in Taiwan for a year and traveled around SE Asia, which I love to talk about with my students because we have so many Asian students and we have so many Vietnamese students so they love to hear that their little Missouri teacher has been in Vietnam and I can talk to them about Vietnam and aiwan as well that I lived in Taiwan, they find that fascinating when we talk about it and even our American born students love to talk about

my travels because they have their dreams all as well they have oh, you've done it and they want to talk about what that might be like and how I did that and then after , when I came home. (7FFA/3)

I made a follow up statement to 7FFA saying she was on the other side and was the minority while traveling and she expanded on her statement explaining,

I understand too when a parent comes in and they are just completely blind to our culture, not our culture necessarily but our language, I am completely understanding of how that feels when you are the only person who does not speak the language in a room how uncomfortable that is, that you get nervous that they're talking about you, and you have all these, and you have that feeling, I completely can sympathize and understand that so that lends really well to those conversations too when I have parent conferences and I have to have a translator it lends well to not talking to the translator, talking to the mother and those kinds of things because I know what that's like. (7FFA/4)

The remainder of the participants interviewed felt they had little or no knowledge of cultural diversity before coming to School A and some said they had gained their knowledge through the years working in the district,

So it was you know relatively minimal but, actually, my first 7 years of teaching I taught in a private school and it was pretty much white affluent and then I came here and I just absolutely love it and love learning about different cultures, I love you know how our students have become a community and that you can go in the cafeteria and see a table of students there might be one African student, there might be one student from Vietnam, there might be a student from Bosnia, there might be some Caucasian students so I just think it creates so many learning opportunities it's just such a rich environment. I've learned so much from the students and they are so proud to talk about their culture. (3FFA/5)

I didn't grow up with a lot of diversity I moved to St. Louis to go to college and my first year of teaching I was teaching in Riverview Gardens which is not diverse at all it's all one population and so coming here, it was different from where I grew up vastly, but it's cool because I've had those different perspectives so that gives me an opportunity to appreciate what we have here and then seeing my first list of students when I began to teach I thought I don't know how to say these names I never seen them before and just I guess I just kinda saw that everyone accepted it and that was just the way that it was which was really cool and I think it probably took me a year or two to reflect and think about how different that is and how cool it is and that's the way our kids and teachers operate. So, it was definitely different. (6FFA/4)

And still another said it had been “a learning process along the way” (1FFA/3). She also stated “when I first came to School A there wasn’t that much diversity but it has just grown over the years” (1FFA/3). Administrators also stated their cultural proficiency had grown as the population of the district began to grow with 10FA saying, “most experience has been here watching this district and people grow and change” (10FA/2). A statement from 9MA was very similar “knowledge grew as the district grew in the number of ELL students” (9MA/2).

When I visited with the building administrator he shared with me how enthusiastic he was about the teachers in his building, “I really have good teachers, I’m really lucky” (2MA/1).

He followed with,

I think that when trying to get to the cultural proficiency I think we do a really good job with character ed trying to promote that we are equal and I’ll tell you what we are really lucky that our students and our teachers understand the diversity and accept it without challenging it. I think they were kind of brought up in it from a younger level so they’re kind of working with the cultural diversity and the different religions and different languages and the different barriers. (2MA/2)

He also added that building relationships with students was very important and teachers did that through a family advisory time,

I’ll tell you what really helps I believe is we have a 25 minute advisory time right after lunch every day or right before lunch depending on which advisory you have and it’s a looped advisory and it’s a family advisory so therefore it’s filled with 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders and then you continue with that teacher for the rest of your junior high career so that you’ll be able to form that relationship with that teacher. (2MA/2)

The audit trail provided further evidence of the importance of the advisory time as it was mentioned in the teacher meeting PowerPoints (PP1/3 and PP2/3). He also went on to say that he and his assistant had visited a neighboring district that didn’t have diversity and he provided some information about that visit and teaching,

There were only 4 minorities, everything else was blonde hair, blue-eyed. My assistant and I at the end are like, I wouldn’t want to teach here. That’s not us, that’s not what we do, we’re used to this, we’re used to learning about in different advisory projects they



have different, where they do different projects about their country and present and it's kind of cool to learn about, that's what a Mexican flag looks like, and kids are like, that's kinda cool and learning what they eat in the culture and different traditions they have. It's cool. Not to know that and not to be able to do that daily and have teachers to experience that wouldn't be as much fun I don't think you know. (2MA/6-7)

In visiting with teachers, they too expressed sensitivity to cultural differences.

Teacher 7FFA said, "maybe you just get here and you learn and you accept it and you move on and you become more culturally sensitive" (7FFA/5). She also talked about teaching at School A and was very enthusiastic about the cultural differences and felt it added to the learning experience,

It's not an acceptance here it's very strange and very different and I love it, it's not an acceptance, it's not just like acknowledging you came from somewhere else it's we appreciate that people came from somewhere else. In the middle school 2MA has posted all of the signs from all of the cultures and countries that our students have come from so it's that we really appreciate and like it because they bring a lot to the table and a lot to talk about so as far as increasing our learning they also bring a lot of their experiences and a lot of their home culture to the classroom which adds to it a lot. (7FFA/1).

One of her colleagues discussed her thoughts on teaching and how "I could move them forward as best I can while being sensitive to their backgrounds and their struggles too" (5FFA/7). She also went on to say there was diversity among the teachers as well in culture but also experience,

One of the things that I was really impressed with when I interviewed here was in terms of having a diverse school district is having a diverse staff. And just having a diverse, it doesn't have to be you know just diverse racially but having staff members, our principal has told us many times I want people with all different experiences and I think that really helped as because people with student, staff different experiences can help understand and work with students with different experiences. And so the staff who you know have this experience might relate better to this kid and that kid needs one champion to help them get through and they can make it through high school if they have one person who believes in them and so our principals has said, "I want people who grew up in South County and grew up and went to School A and our now teaching at School A but I want people who didn't grow up in South County and I want people outside of St. Louis and outside of Missouri and people with different experiences". So he hired an Army Vet, he hired me coming out a of black school in Chicago and but I think that's been huge,

because the more diverse your staff is, the more likely you are to work better as a staff, which then helps you understand working better with your students. (5FFA/7).

Teacher 7FFA backed up those thoughts saying, “I feel like School A does a really good job of hiring teachers who are culturally sensitive” (7FFA/4).

Teachers were also asked about the professional development they received to support them in their jobs to teach students of different cultures. The training that was mentioned by all respondents was what they received for their instructional model, which will be explained in detail in the next section. However, teachers said School A was always willing to provide trainings or send them off campus to provide them with professional learning; “They make it known that we can go to PD outside the district and they’re very supportive of that” (5FFA/6). Teacher 1FFA mentioned, “PD’s about ELL learners just you know how to kinda support them and modify and also to kinda know when to push them a little bit further, we’ve had a lot with that” (p. 4). All three administrators mentioned training for the ELL teachers and having them bring that information back to the district to share with teachers. Teacher 3FFA said they also do book studies one of which was Ruby Payne’s *Frameworks of Poverty*, “which helped us not only look at cultural differences but the socioeconomic differences in looking at some of the resources that students have at home in terms of support and structure places due to homework” (p.5). She went on to say they also reviewed some of Marzano’s works as well.

The most interesting training teachers discussed was not related to curriculum or instructional strategies but rather to the parents and the community in helping staff at School A better understand immigrants that had moved into the school district. Teacher 8FFA said that in the beginning,

We have had opportunities for some learning in the past as far as cultural differences I know in the very beginning we did a lot of, we talked a lot about how our Bosnian students were traumatized. Going back to professional development we had was it

possibly Barnes Hospital, they came in and they talked about Post Distress Disorder. (8FFA/3).

I wanted some clarity so I said, PTSD? She responded, “Yes, PTSD” (8FFA/3). Teacher 6FFA elaborated on the training regarding PTSD in order to give background information on the Bosnia culture,

We have offered different professional developments on basically Bosnian war because a lot of our students came from Bosnia they came here as refugees and so I learned what it was they came from which you kinda need that information because some of our students and parents suffer from PTSD from being in a war zone. So that was really eye-opening. (6FFA/5)

Keeping staff updated on the Bosnian community was also mentioned by 10FA “training regarding the Bosnian community, their culture and difficulties during the war before coming to the USA” (p, 2). Administrator 9MA said, “...trainings on the Bosnian heritage and background since that is the largest group of students and parents, that training is still offered” (p. 3).

There were two additional trainings offered that were a direct result of recent issues in the local areas that affected student and parents in the School A district; the riots in Ferguson and the killing of a Bosnian man. ELL teachers provided the training, and the focus was to provide information to staff at School A in order to help students as they try to understand events happening in the local area. Teacher 4FFA talked about these trainings,

We also had another training recently and I’m sure you heard about Ferguson, and we are not close to Ferguson, I’m bad with directions but I couldn’t even tell you how far we are and maybe 45 minutes or so but we had in our Wednesday meeting one of our ELL teachers talked about that and how that affects or might affect certain students, our African American students and things that we could say or things that we can do or lessons that we can give and that was recent just before Christmas break so we did, and they’re always aware, and then we had a family, a Bosnian man that was killed in St. Louis city and they talked about that. We’re always aware of what’s happening not just in our community but in St. Louis because we talk about that in our meeting and then how do we help our student with that. So we are always talking about looking at what’s happening in our city. (4FFA/6).

*Summary of Axial Code “Teachers”.* Teachers in this district treat all students the same while at the same time are sensitive to cultural differences. Teachers, with the exception of two, had little or no experience with cultural diversity before coming to School A but their knowledge of cultural proficiency has grown since teaching in the district. Teachers have been offered professional development to increase their knowledge of the different cultures they are teaching which gives them better knowledge in lesson preparation and delivery. According to participants, teachers within the district are diversified in experience, background, and ethnicity and many believe that is helpful in providing education to the students in the district. Teachers and administration feel that building relationships with students promote a successful learning environment.

**Instructional Model.** The Instructional Model used by the district is Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP®) and was talked about extensively when I asked respondents about specific procedures that addressed cultural proficiency. Document review supported the discussions of the SIOP® instructional model (TM/13-14) used in the district. This instructional model was started in the district several years ago with a grant,

Our SIOP program started in the junior high where they, we had a grant for nine teachers and a principal, that was 9MA at the time to go down and for two years, over a two year period to learn SIOP. And then the following year, third year I guess we got another grant that brought SIOP and we did SIOP in the secondary side. (8FFA/6)

Administrator 2MA, who was a teacher at the time of the initiation of the teaching model, was also involved,

Luckily I was one of the guys that went through SIOP at the beginning, at the infancy stages. In fact 9MA was principal then along with him and 9 other teachers we would go to Mizzou twice a quarter and do a two day training on SIOP and bring it back. (2MA/7)

Question two on the teacher and administrator guides asked participants about policies or procedures that created a culture where everyone is aware of diversity. A majority of the participants responded with the answer of the SIOP® instructional model. Teacher 1FFA firmly responded,

That would definitely be our SIOP model that's pretty much why we started it so we could recognize that there's that need there and it really, works a lot like with the speaking aspect which is really nice because then the kids are hearing the language piece all the time and then communicating with other kids a lot of like partnering and group work and things like that. I think that is probably the number one thing is just that instructional model that we have. (1FFA/2)

The teachers also discussed the SIOP® procedure being used consistently across the district,

SIOP and the method is just really good teaching practice to make things clearer to a student like with the academic vocabulary but since we have it as a district model I think the expectation that everybody's doing it the same all the time no matter where you are really helps that uh kids see the same things in each classroom. (7FFA/2).

The consistency of using this model district wide was reinforced by Teacher 4FFA, "We are just a huge SIOP district so that is something that all the teachers are doing across the board so that's a standard base" (p. 2) and again by Teacher 3FFA "SIOP, and I am sure they told you is our district instructional model and it's an expectation of everybody" (p.6). Teachers also discussed that when using this model it has been highly beneficial for the ELL students because of the focus on language skills but because of the structure, it has benefitted all students,

We use SIOP model, Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol which specifically addresses the needs of our English Language Learners. And, for us not only are we a diverse school district but we a lot of students who are learning English as a second or third language and so across the entire district we have all implemented this protocol which focuses on vocabulary knowledge which focuses on building background, making connections and when they started SIOP before I got here but what I have seen in my classroom and what I have seen and heard from people who have been here longer is that it has benefitted all of our students even though it's designed for students learning English. So that, first and foremost has been huge in helping our students learn English. (5FFA/2)

Students in the ELL program have different levels of proficiency of English and Teacher 3FFA discussed how, “SIOP really helped teachers to reach all students regardless of their native language” (3FFA/5) and she also said, “SIOP has changed you know really changed the game for us” (3FFA/6).

Teacher 4FF expanded on the importance of the SIOP® model providing a structure for building background in lessons which is component number two of the model (TM/13),

One of the big things we have here is SIOP, and I don’t know if you have heard anything about SIOP, it’s amazing and one of the biggest things we do is we focus on vocabulary and background knowledge. With every lesson that I do I talk to kids and try to figure out their background knowledge because everyone’s different but everyone brings something to the table and sometimes students aren’t really aware that they know something about a certain topic so it’s really important to focus on that background knowledge piece and then also the vocabulary. Just basic words because some words might mean something else in a different culture so I think with our SIOP it’s vocabulary and background knowledge, those are two huge pieces that you can kinda front load before you teach a lesson which really, really helps students and I mean we are just a huge SIOP district so that is something that all the teachers are doing across the board so that’s a standard base. (4FFA/2)

The reinforcement of vocabulary is discussed by teachers and administrators. In the classrooms that I visited the academic vocabulary was clearly posted for students to see (OBS/1-2). Teacher 7FFA said,

The SIOP method is just really good teaching practice to make things clearer to a student like with the academic vocabulary but since we have it as a district model I think the expectation that everybody’s doing it the same all the time no matter where you are really helps that kids see the same things in each classroom, each classroom they know what to look for for the day, what the vocabulary will be for the day. (7FFA/2)

Administrators also discussed the importance of SIOP® and the emphasis on vocabulary and 9MA said the district received a grant to participate in the research-based program “for improving the academic achievement of ELL students because it promotes language, speaking, and academic vocabulary as well as actively engaging students” (p. 1). Administrator 2MA continued this discussion by saying test scores indicated that students were low in vocabulary so,

Now during the bell work this year because we had a problem with vocabulary, we always do, we do DOL's, daily oral language so the teachers will either in or on their prompt will be misspelled, a couple of errors here and there, the kids have to fix those errors it could be that there's different sentences on the board and they have to do DOL and correct them as they go and that's every classroom, every teacher, every hour. (2MA/3)

I wanted to clarify with 2MA so I asked him again if they worked on language and vocabulary every day and he responded "every classroom, every teacher knows it, kids understand it and uh, we started last year because looking at our MAP scores we were low in those things" (2MA/4).

Daily oral language was witnessed in classroom observation number one (OBS/1) where the language object was clearly posted for students to see and the teacher was working with students on their bell work. Administrator 2MA further in his explanation,

Language vocabulary, that's where the DOL came into and constructed response so we put in a RACER, restate the question, answer it, answer the question, cite it with evidence, make sure you explain that evidence and then re-read your answer and edit if possible (RCR/1). So, we do that district-wide. (2MA/4)

One teacher also discussed and supported the initiation of RACER saying "and last year 2MA asked the writing department, the English department to create the what we call the district protocol for writing the RACER and that we are now implementing that district wide" (7FFA/5).

Additionally,

I think some of the work that we've ended up doing has really benefitted our students from other countries because whenever we look at our data and we see where our deficiencies are, we know that if English isn't your first language, grammar is going to be difficult for you, so one thing that we noticed that there was a pattern with elementary coming up through the middle school and so last year, 2MA was like in every class our bell work is going to be grammar because there is a hole there. And likewise with writing, writing is difficult, especially non-fiction writing so I'm sure he talked to you about RACER. We decided you know we are going to really focus on this area because it's a problem for all students but especially if English is not your first language so every teacher in every class is going to do a RACER once a month. And I think focusing in on one thing and doing it really well has helped all our kids but especially those kids that struggle, because if English is your second language everything is kinda overwhelming

so we really want our kids to feel confident in knowing how to do one thing and grow from there. (6FFA/5-6)

Evidentiary support for the RACER scoring guide (RCR), which was mentioned by individuals, can be found in the audit trail along with instructions on how to answer constructed response questions. During my campus walkthrough, I saw on the principal's wall in his office the RACER chart where he keeps track of each teacher's progress on completing RACER objectives (FN/3), which supports the discussion of the importance of the procedure in the district. Further evidence of RACER discussions was found in the PowerPoint (PP2/1-2) which was used during a teacher's meeting and provided data for the first few months of school.

Teachers talked extensively about the SIOP® model but along with that when they were asked about staff development opportunities they had been offered, participants praised the district for supporting their instructional model with training. While I was on the campus of School A, they were conducting a training session for their new teachers to the district (FN/3). The training was facilitated by the Junior High Assistant principal, and when I visited the room, they were engaged in song and dance reviewing the components of the SIOP® instructional model. Other teachers in the district knew the training was taking place as mentioned by 6FFA "There's SIOP training going on in the district right now" (6FFA/6) as well as 8FFA, "As a matter of fact today they are doing SIOP training with new teacher" (8FFA/6)). The building administrator also mentioned SIOP training "My assistant principal is doing it right now, conducting training. We do 4 different days where they do different, there are 8 components and they 2 at each one" (2MA/7). Not only does the district do initial training for new teachers, but when I asked 3FFA about follow up training, she said, "One of my jobs as a SIOP coach so I go in and do the pre-observation, observation, post conference so that to me led to a shift in



instruction” (3FFA/6). Another teacher said, “If they’re not comfortable with it, they have support until they get comfortable with it and make it part of their instruction” (8FFA/7).

Teachers were very supportive of the SIOP® training and felt it was the basis for their success with students “I think all the SIOP training we went through with UMSL, I think that is the biggest piece there because that kind changed the way we all taught” (1FFA/4). Participants continued to praise the instructional model regarding how it helped move students forward and increased learning opportunities and academic achievement scores. Teacher 3FFA said that with SIOP “We had dramatic improvement in our achievement and we had a huge decrease in discipline referrals” (p. 6). Teacher 4FFA expanded the conversation saying,

Because we are so different but I think when students are more aware of that then it kinda brings us closer together and I think at School A we do a good job of meeting students where they are and so by doing that I think that is key into bridging narrowing that gap, the learning gap. (4FFA/1)

Teacher 4FFA said training improved learning for all students, “When I got training in SIOP it made me more aware of those key pieces of lesson components that we need to put in place not just for our diverse learners but for all of our population” (4FFA/5). Learning how the model supported students was discussed by Teacher 6FFA when she said she had been trained in SIOP,

...which uses four different modalities of communicating content to students; speaking, listening, reading and writing so that really addresses how to support your students with the content like having them say it to one another before they have to give an answer using the sentence frames. (6FFA/5)

Using the SIOP® model for lesson planning was praised and discussed by teachers saying, “SIOP is a pretty big thing, it’s the glue and then there’s just a lot of little elements and overall it’s just the expectation of this is who we are” (3FFA/7). As discussed by teachers, lesson planning using this model just comes alive and gets students actively engaged as described here by one teacher, “...like with the speaking aspect which is really nice because then

the kids are hearing the language piece all the time and then communicating with other kids a lot of like partnering and group work and things like that” (1FFA/2). Teacher 3FFA supported the instruction model for lesson planning because “It’s student centered, you know, that the students are taking an active role in their learning and taking some ownership, you know, giving kids some autonomy” (3FFA/6). Another teacher went on to say, “We do a lot of think-pair-share; we do a lot of turn and talk, we really get kids moving, and moving and thinking” (4FFA/6).

Still another teacher went on to emphasize student engagement saying,

Oh yes, students are very much engaged, kids can work together to problem solve and create that discourse because you know the lower level content isn’t going to lend itself to all of the work we do with SIOP. We want kids to discuss and debate and write. (3FFA/6)

Administrator 2MA also talked about the instructional model and lessons when he said,

It’s just, just not rocket science, I mean it’s Madelyn Hunter I mean it’s good teaching, it’s good strategies, it’s good, it’s getting the kids to talk about a lot more than just sitting and getting, sharing responses and able to share that because we’ve got to get the vocabulary down. We’ve got to get language going. By you saying it talking, talking, talking, talking...it’s kinda like that waaa, waaa....but when they have to use it and explain it, and then they get little tips or sentence starts to kind of start their sentence and get the thoughts going. I think that helps a lot. (2MA/8-9)

***Summary of Axial Code “Instructional Model”.*** SIOP® (Sheltered Instruction

Observation Protocol) is the model that is consistently used throughout the district, no exceptions. Teachers new to the district are trained in this model with follow up training as well as support within the district. This model focuses on the daily language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening as well as emphasizes academic vocabulary and background knowledge. This model provides structure in planning lessons that benefit all students and not just those with a language deficit. The data is used to determine deficiencies in learning and lessons are then adjusted accordingly. Again, this is done as a district to provide consistency.

The SIOP® model is very popular with the teachers and the administration, and many feel the consistency of using this model K-12 has been the key to their success.

**Curriculum.** Curriculum in a culturally proficient environment should be guided by student need and interest, making it relevant to individuals providing students more opportunities to make connections and embed understanding (Camicia, 2009; Daggett, 2011). Question three on the interview guides for administrators and teachers spoke directly to the curriculum used in School A. When this question was posed to administrators 9MA said, “Individuals share their experiences related to history, traditions, and such and infuse that into the curriculum” (9MA/2). Administrator 10FA said students “display pieces of their culture” when they are studying different units (10FA/1). Administrator 2MA said, “Luckily I have some teachers that in their own body and soul love to create lessons that bring awareness” (2MA/5).

Infusing the culture into the curriculum was evident in the conversations with the teachers. Teacher 7FFA reinforced the practice of infusing the students’ differences,

We like to pull in stories from all different cultures and things like that and I might not be a world literature teacher, but I try to at least talk about the world and the kids like to bring in different things they are familiar with, so absolutely we kind of leave ourselves open to that. (7FFA/2)

I also found that teachers, whose regular curricular content for American History, might get a different look and students might hear something different than the information provided in the textbook at School A. Teacher 5FFA had this to say about her curriculum when I asked if it created cultural awareness,

I would say yes, but I have the advantage, I teach psychology and I teach sociology which is the study of how people get together and I teach American history. And so, between all of those things I mean it just fits in perfectly with different cultures and how they work together. Psychology would with individuals, sociology with the groups and then even in American history there are references in WWI & WWII to the genocide in Bosnia and tying that in and then we talk about the Vietnam war and that takes up more days here than it would elsewhere because we talk about this is what your American

history book says, and then this is what other resources say and you my kids will talk about my dad said this and my grandpa said this, so I'm lucky that I get to work with all the different cultures but, that that is my curriculum. (5FFA/3)

She also went on to talk specifically about when she first introduced the Vietnam War at School A and her kids said, "That's not what they tell us at all, what you just said was 100% different from what I learned when I was in Vietnam in school" (5FFA/4). She went on to say, "Everything got changed then after that day" (5FFA/4) and reinforced the curriculum "It's not a one size fits all" (5FFA/7) and you have to meet students where they are and move them forward "while being sensitive to their backgrounds and their struggles too" (5FFA/7). In other classes Teacher 8FFA said she knew of a lot of teachers who "Brought in, at the high school for instance, Bosnian stories, and used different literature for different countries, I do remember Bosnian literature book that actually was the Bosnian version of Romeo and Juliet" (8FFA/3).

Modifying content was discussed and teacher 1FFA said, "We can't just do the regular thing like come in and takes notes" (1FFA/2). Modifying also takes some training and teacher 5FFA said she received that training the first year she was in the district from the ELL teacher on "how to modify some of your content to fit the needs of English Language Learners" (5FFA/6). The training taught her to "pick out what's more important how to communicate your curriculum with them, how can you assess for their understanding based on their varying experiences and things like that" (5FFA/6). She went on to say,

Learning those things and using the SIOP model as well really helped me take a look at introducing those things really made me take a look at where are my students and how do I get them to move forward. (5FFA/6)

To help with the modification process Teacher 6FFA said that when the district sat down to go through the process of curriculum writing, "You'll have an ELL person and a reading person on each team to address the needs of our diverse population" (6FFA/2).

Making connections or application in the real world was something else I heard from teachers. Teacher 3FFA talked about real world application,

We definitely try to embrace and look at real world applications of math and we've looked at how other countries learn math but I know especially more so in like your ELA or your social studies areas, fine arts, I know they've looked at art from some of the different cultures, looked at music from some of the different cultures, you know like a FACS class asking people to share some of the different dishes of different cultures. So that's definitely, like I said there are aspects of every subject area but just more so in others. In the math classroom it's more in our environment. (3FFA/3)

Teacher 4FFA said she and her colleagues, "...do a good job of bringing that cultural awareness in to the curriculum" (4FFA/3) and "Teachers are very aware of the different cultures that we have in our district and so they tie that in" (4FFA/3). Giving an example she said, "We just had the winter break so they were able to tie in several different cultures, holidays, different things that people do, they were able to tie that in so we do a good job of that here" (4FFA/3).

Learning from students while teaching the curriculum was also mentioned by one of the teachers,

I came here and I just absolutely love it and love learning about different cultures. I've learned so much from the students and they are so proud to talk about their culture. I've asked them to explain to me tell me about this holiday or tell me about what's your tradition for this or what's your favorite dish or the kids love to bring in food for the teachers, and they're really proud as they should be. (3FFA/5)

Also mentioned before were the trainings teachers received on the Bosnian culture and Bosnian War that expanded their learning experiences. Administrator 10FA said it was important to "keep staff updated on the Bosnian community regarding their culture and difficulties during the war before coming to the USA" (p, 2). Teacher 6FFA also said professional development was provided for staff "on basically Bosnian war because a lot of our students came from Bosnia. They came here as refugees" (6FFA/5).

*Summary of Axial Code “Curriculum”.* Adjustments are made by individual teachers to infuse the different cultures into the daily learning. Teachers believe that when students infuse their own culture into the lessons, it gives relevance and helps students make connections to real world application. The sharing of information from different cultures enriches and provides a deeper knowledge of understanding and concepts. Curriculum is modified and adjusted by individual teachers to help all students in School A from those who speak little or no English to those who speak several languages. Curriculum in a culturally proficient school should be guided by student need and interest, and teachers do this in School A by making it relevant.

**Students.** At the center of cultural proficiency in an educational institution are the students and what the educational system can do for them to open the door for increased educational opportunities. Diversity at School A is proudly displayed on the High School web site with a picture to provide a visual of students of different cultures (WEB/3). Administrator 2MA offered this statement regarding students at School A,

We are equal and I’ll tell you what we are really lucky that our students and our teachers understand the diversity and accept it without challenging it. They were brought up in it from a younger level working with different religions, different languages, and different barriers. (2MA/2)

Teacher 4FFA set the stage for this section when she said,

It’s really cool with our students like you might see someone who is Russian, someone who is Vietnamese, someone who is African American, someone whose Bosnian, I mean just all together, hanging out, playing soccer. Our girls who wear, the head wraps, I mean it’s just no, no different, it’s normal for our students to be next to someone who looks different, who speaks a different language it’s just so normal for them, it’s so awesome, I love, I just love School A. (4FFA/7)

Her enthusiasm for the students was shown in her continued discussion,

I feel like our students are going to have a major impact in the world because for them it’s not difference and so if that’s how they look at life as long as they continue to look at life, and can you just imagine in the different fields they go into, I mean it’s just it’s

going to be great. We did have a Harvard grad a few years ago. I'm so excited to see what these kids will do. It's just we have some phenomenal students here. (4FFA/7)

Teacher 6FFA expressed that because teachers model that all kids are treated the same despite their differences, the kids have that same attitude, "And our students are like that too, they all hang out with each other and don't seem to be segregated among themselves" (6FFA/1). This statement was reinforced at all grade levels when I observed in the classroom where all students were working together with no segregation (OB/1), again in the campus walkthrough when I was in the cafeteria (FN/2), again during the High School lunch tutoring period in the library (FN/2) and at the elementary while observing students playing on the playground (FN/2). The comfort level observed peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher was high as noted in the field notes (FN/2).

Support for students through the implementation of the advisory program and also selective clubs was discussed by several participants. Administrator 2MA put into practice the advisory and his explanation of the program was,

I'll tell you what really helps I believe is we have a 25 minute advisory time right after lunch every day or right before lunch depending on which advisory you have and it's a looped advisory and it's a family advisory so therefore it's filled with 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders and then you continue with that teacher for the rest of your junior high career so that you'll be able to form that relationship with that teacher. (2MA/2)

He added "It's protected time that I want to keep because the relationships teachers form with students but also that close knit community" (2MA/2). He went on to talk about "the character council class that all students take which involves different lessons, public speaking, but also service learning projects creating an awareness outside of the school community" (2MA/5). Through the advisory program students are given opportunities to share with each other as explained by Teacher 3FFA,

...giving kids opportunities to explain some of their different holidays and then we incorporate a lot of that into advisory but giving kids opportunities to really teach each other about some of the differences but also finding similarities because the kids you know through some of these discussions or class meetings you know they really find out there's a lot more similarities than differences but you know there're also fascinated. (3FFA/1)

Students are also supported through “our diversity club absolutely and sending them to a peace jam every year” (5FFA/5). Teacher 7FFA said students also like hearing that one of their teachers had visited their home country,

We have so many Vietnamese students so they love to hear that their little Missouri teacher has been in Vietnam and I can talk to them about Vietnam and Taiwan. I lived there, in Taiwan and they find it fascinating when we talk about it and even our American born students love to talk about my travels because they have their dreams all as well they have oh, you've done it and they want to talk about what that might be like and how I did that. (7FFA/3)

Support through intervention programs and the ELL program was discussed by teachers:

“...any sort of additional support like obviously like ELL or I know there has been a lot of interventions set up” (1FFA/1). One of these supports was witnessed in the High School library where students were participating in a tutoring session during the lunch period (FN/2). Teacher 8FFA talked about securing “two grants to train teachers on ELL strategies and have them bring the information back to the school” (8FFA/2) and also about becoming a certified ELL teacher, “I started my ELL endorsement process” and the creation of the ELL program once the district began to get several immigrant students. She went on to say “We started with about 45 kids district wide, and now, every classroom is about 50%” (8FFA/1).

***Summary of Axial Code “Students”.*** At the center of School A are the students of various ethnic groups, experiences, and backgrounds. However, as participants told their stories and answered questions it is evident that students do not segregate themselves but mix together without questions. This was evident in the hallways, cafeteria, library, and on the elementary



playground. Through the interviews participants felt that students honored cultural differences because it is modeled by administrators and teachers. Also evident were support systems for students such as the advisory program, tutoring, the ELL program, and diversity club.

**Parent and Community Involvement.** Making parents and community feel welcome and a part of the school was a focal point during the interviews. School improvement and academic achievement involves a collaboration of effort between the parents, the community, and the school. Each of these groups has a distinctive role; however, given cultural differences parents may be unaware of what their role is in the success of the students and their school. It is important for school leaders to take charge and provide opportunities for collaboration to occur. This is a belief of School A and is displayed in the “About Us” section of their school district web site (MBS/1).

Neither of the interview guides directly addressed parents and/or community, but during the conversations this topic rang out as a theme. One of the topics under this axial code was supporting parents by keeping open communication. Teacher 4FFA made the statement, “We don’t want to just support our students, but we want to support the parents too” (4FFA/2). This support, according to participants, comes in many forms, but one was the use of translation services during meetings, parent conferences, phone calls home, and other communications.

Teacher 5FFA talked about the translation services by saying,

We have translators available for the 3 big languages that we use Bosnian, Vietnamese and Arabic, but then we can request a phone-in conference with any other language that we need because now we have little pockets of other languages. (5FFA/5).

Teacher 4FFA talked about bridging the gap between parents and the school and said,

A lot of our parents don’t speak English, so we have to understand like you know how do you bridge that gap, how do you communicate with the parents. I mean 10FA is great about getting translators in here for our different events. I mean we have a line that we can call and put in a code for the different language if we just need to do a parent call

home. Those resources are accessible to us at any time so that we can communicate with our parents that don't speak English so, our leaders, our principals are really great about that. (4FFA/3)

This statement showed support by the administration for this service to help with the communication between school and home. Administrator 10FA supported the, "use of translation services for telephone conversation, use of services to send newsletters home in native languages, and use of translators during conferences and parent meetings" (10FA/1).

When translators are used for conferences, Teacher 7FFA reinforced that you should speak to the parent and not the translator using her prior experience of teaching in a foreign land,

I understand too when a parent comes in and they are just completely blind to our culture, not our culture necessarily but our language, I am completely understanding of how that feels when you are the only person who does not speak the language in a room how uncomfortable that is, that you get nervous that they're talking about you, and you have all these, and you have that feeling. I completely can sympathize and understand that so that lends really well to those conversations to when I have parent conferences and I have to have a translator. It lends well to not talking to the translator, talking to the mother and those kinds of things because I know what that's like. (7FFA/4)

Teacher 3FFA supported the use of translation services as well but also said,

We try to make things as accessible to parents as we can. You know they've put letters in the home in native languages. We have several staff members who, we have a staff member or a few who speaks Bosnian. (3FFA/7)

For clarity I asked, "so bi-lingual?" and she said,

Yes, bi-lingual staff members and they definitely are the ones if we know a parent has a lower English proficiency. You know sometimes parents get alarmed if the school calls home, so having those people on hand and we also have a telephone service as well, it's a voice they recognize and are able to fully explain what's going on cause usually it's something minor but just that is a really neat aspect. (3FFA/7)

Sometimes there is frustration when teachers are unable to contact parents, especially when they leave messages, and the parents do not return phone calls. In that situation Teacher 5FFA says it is important to understand the family dynamics of other cultures, so they rely on colleagues to help them work through these situations,

For example, you're having trouble getting ahold of mom. Well that's because dad often runs the family and so there are those trouble shooting that if you are having an issue use the policy of going to someone else and asking or going up the chain and saying , 'I'm not getting through to this family' and then we do have just procedures well let's just get you a translator, let's talk with somebody who has other details or information about the family and so whether or not it's something I'm not aware of that there's an unspoken policy of well, this is what's going on in the family. This is what we expect in the culture. I don't know how much is policy verses ongoing communication. (5FFA/3)

Teacher 6FFA also spoke about the culture at home saying, "I think it is important to know and address when you know parents coming from how their home culture might be different from your own" (6FFA/2). Teacher 3FFA continued the discussion of understanding family dynamics when conducting student led conferences or disciplining,

There's different family dynamics with some of the different families like in student led conferences you know the parents come in with the students. You know in some cultures for example the male students are, you know, given I guess more responsibility and freedom in the home maybe sometimes even I guess surpassing the mother's authority so it's interesting. You have to take all that into account. (3FFA/4)

She continued, "...where as in some cultures the mother is the head of the household, and in some cultures it is very much male-driven" (3FFA/4). Teacher 4FFA mentioned special services and how administrators and teachers needed knowledge of the parent's home cultures in order to get special services for some students,

One thing I know is with our special school district some cultures look at that as a negative based on what they were exposed to in their country. That's why it's important for our district leaders to really have an understanding of the different cultures because sometimes kids might need services and their parents are like, 'no' because in their country it was such a bad thing. (4FFA/7)

Bringing the community together was another open code that emerged from the interviews and also found in the evidentiary documentation. I was told by the superintendent as he gave me a tour about a bond issue that was passed to put turf on the football/soccer field and how this was supported by the community as a whole but highly supported by the Bosnian community (FN/4). The Junior High newspaper also ran a story that discussed the field and how

excited individuals were to have this facility for the students and the community (JHNP/5).

When I left campus after the first day visit, I observed several individuals using the field playing soccer but also walking the track (FN/4). Teacher 3FFA talked about open communication and finding out what the community wanted saying, "...just finding out what the community wants, and you know they really wanted a soccer field so that's something that was a gift to the whole community but the Bosnian families were really excited" (3FFA/7). She went on to discuss the honoring of cultural differences at a soccer tournament after the new field was opened,

When we opened the soccer field having a tournament and it was primarily our Bosnian families but, making sure that at the concession stand we just didn't have your hamburgers and hot dogs but we actually had some Bosnian dishes giving everybody a chance to really express their culture and their heritage. (3FFA/1)

Teachers shared information on cultural fairs and parent night activities that bring community together saying, "We've had some cultural fairs in the past where people can showcase different dishes, traditions, attire, some of those are really, really neat and they've done some Bosnian parent nights, Vietnamese parent nights" (3FFA/7). Teacher 4FFA continued the discussion of bringing parents into the school by sponsoring activities for them to attend,

We try to have a lot of different math night, literacy night. We just had magic house where we're bringing our families together, so I think that's important because the students are here together but the parents aren't and so by bringing everyone together the parents have a better understanding of the different cultures children are exposed to. (4FFA/2)

Teacher 8FFA provided information on some specialized programs that were set up to provide information for parents in order for them to help their kids at home,

In the past we've had Title I, or ELL, or Title III meetings where we try to get the parents to come up and we would do "how can you help your kids", little sessions that they could move into like, 20 minute sessions so we try to do quite a bit. (8FFA/7)

The idea of bringing families together is not recent. Teacher 8FFA explained that even in the beginning when the ELL program first started they provided informational programs for parents,

When we first started the program, we had navigating the school system and I set up meetings we had an interpreter and I had nurses speak about the nurse, principals talk about discipline, talk about if need help our counselors, and just went through meetings like that and they were not hugely popular but we probably had 30, about 30 folks at least come, 30 maybe to 40 but I guess back then we didn't have a huge, huge population, so maybe about 30 but anyway and that was very beneficial and there has been a lot of things.

Individuals also mentioned a parent advisory program that has been established at the school. Administrator 2MA mentioned this program as part of the system they use: "You have parental involvement committee that deals with parents," (2MA/1) which was also mentioned by 4FFA in her discussion of involvement: "I know that we have, have a parent engagement committee" (4FFA/2). She went on to say,

But we have so many things put in place to support our English Language Learners just to really support our community that I think that's why we do so well and I think it's important with our school climate. (4FFA/6)

***Summary of Axial Code "Parent and Community Involvement"***. Making parents and community feel welcome and a part of the school was a focal point during the interviews. Interview questions did not directly address parent and community involvement, but participants spoke about the programs and activities they have that include parents and invite community into the buildings. Translation services are also offered to parents for conferences, programs, and phone calls home if necessary. There is also a translation service for newsletters that send information home in the selected native language. School A uses these services to help bridge the gap between home and school and provides a positive experience for parents and community as they partner with the school. A parent involvement committee is also used to help create a family atmosphere.

**Environment.** Providing a safe, non-threatening environment that models tolerance ties directly to the Cultural Proficiency Continuum found in Table 1.1 and Administrator 2MA spoke directly to that when he said,

I think that to start off I think we gave them a nice, visual place to come to everyday. I think that starts it, I think that we, re-did the foyer, I have put in a \$30,000 custodian daily who cleans my hallways and cleans everything. I want this place to be where kids come to get away from home and whatever is happening there and to walk through the doors into a clean house, safe environment, with good people, good students, good... I think that goes a long way. (2MA/9)

During the campus tour you could tell the buildings were clean and well maintained inside (FN/3) and outside (FN/4) as was observed by the researcher.

Environment is a theme that runs across the board with students, teachers, parents and community. Addressing students, Administrator 2MA spoke about the importance of building relationships and how vital that was to the learning environment when he said, "I'm never in my office" (2MA/10) and went on to say

The worst part about being a principal, besides my family, is not being able to see kids in the classroom learning. I love teaching, I love changing their viewpoints for the better and to build those relationships and have fun and so I love getting in the classrooms just to see what's going on, you know, it's kind of like coaching. (2MA/10)

What he said helped build these relationships and provide a productive learning environment was the PBIS program, and Character Education: "We do PBIS, Positive Behavior Intervention Support, which deals with the discipline and reward system and also the school culture" (2MA/1) and continued to share that School A was a, "Missouri School of Character" (2MA/11 and JHNP/1). As previously mentioned but also important to the environment, character words are also displayed outside the Junior High School on the pillars where students, faculty, parents, and community enter the building (FN/4 & JHNP/1). Document review found that PBIS was on one of the teacher meeting agendas (MA1/1) and was addressed in both teacher meeting PowerPoints

(PP1/1 & PP/1). The PBIS Universal Expectations for School A are posted on the district website saying it is a process for creating safer and more effective schools by structuring a learning environment to support the academic and social success of all students (WEB/4-5). It also goes on to say School A is a proud participant in PBIS (WEB/4). He also felt the advisory program was very important in building relationships with students saying it was a,

Family advisory so therefore it's filled with 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders and then you continue with that teacher for the rest of your junior high career so that you'll be able to form that relationship with that teacher. (2MA/2)

He went on to reinforce that saying, "I think the advisory kind of creates a family type atmosphere (2MA/2). Teacher 3FFA also felt the environment was "cohesive" (3FFA/2) with all the pieces they had in place.

Addressing teachers and the environment there have been statements by teachers that include, "It's so awesome, I love, I just love School A" (4FFA/7) and,

It's not an acceptance here. It's very strange and very different and I love it. It's not an acceptance, it's not just like acknowledging you came from somewhere else it's we appreciate that people came from somewhere else.

Others say, "I think pretty much everyone that we work with is like they love that part of working at School A which is great, you know, if you didn't you would have a hard time" (1FFA/4). Teachers even talk about Administrator 2MA's feelings about the district saying, "2MA's been here forever and he loves School A" (7FFA/3). Administrator 2MA in turn said this about the teachers, "It's a really good, really good team. It's easy for everybody in my building to come to work every day. It sucks when we don't have school" (2MA/11).

The environment plays a huge role in the relationship with parents and the community. Teacher 4FFA/2 made the statement, "Our school is so welcoming that we have parents who come up all the time just to have lunch, parents call. It's true and our motto is 'We are family'"

(4FFA/7). When parents and community are invited in I was told for instance on financial aid night that, “They had snacks from a Vietnamese restaurant and Bosnian-made pizza” (5FFA/5) and then during the soccer tournament,

Making sure that at the concession stand we just didn’t have your hamburgers and hot dogs but we actually had some Bosnian dishes giving everybody a chance to really you know express their culture and their heritage. (3FFA/1)

Also, as mentioned before, the use of translators make parents and community feel comfortable during school sponsored activities by bringing in “interpreters on a night for the families twice a year on parent-teacher nights” (8FFA/2) and having “interpreters on grounds for at least Bosnian, Vietnamese. Now we’re adding Arabic, and occasionally if we need it Turkish or Russian” (8FFA/8). Teacher 7FFA said this about Administrator 2MA in regards to the environment: “He knows our community and he worked really hard to make everyone feel comfortable” (7FFA/3).

The environment is welcoming also to those outside the district. As I was touring the campus, I was told that in 2009 a foreign delegation from Taiwan came to visit the district and investigate their success working with such a large population of diverse learners (FN/1). A teapot was given to the school and they display that in the foyer of the JH building (FN/1).

***Summary of Axial Code “Environment”.*** School A works to create a safe, welcoming, and respectful environment for students, staff, parents, and community. Much of this is accomplished through Character Education and PBIS programs that promote a respectful, responsible, and positive environment. Teachers and administrators say they love working in this district because of the differences and students benefit from the differences. Building a trusting relationship with students, teachers, parents and the community will support and cultivate learning opportunities for students.



## Summary

The data in this chapter are representative of interviews from seven teachers and three administrators in School A. Once the data was transcribed and coded major themes developed regarding the culture of School A. Each person interviewed believed their district recognizes, understands, and honors cultural differences. The eight axial codes or themes that emerged from the data were: (1) cultural awareness, (2) leadership, (3) teachers, (4) instructional model, (5) curriculum, (6) students, (7) parent and community involvement and, (8) environment.

Chapter Five defines the grounded theory that arose from this study and explains the findings, comparing them with research findings from previous studies in Chapter Two as well as alignment with the theoretical framework for the study. Selective codes were used to answer the study's research questions. Implications for how the finding may be used by practitioners will be presented as will recommendations for further studies.

## Chapter Five

### Results and Conclusions

State political officials have criticized Missouri education for failing to meet students' academic needs for several years. One of the greatest shortcomings has been the inability of our public schools to provide equal learning opportunities for an exceptional education to all students. The purpose of this study is to determine characteristics for a successful, diverse school district and the training that is necessary for staff in order to support the students and the district. The research questions used to guide this study were:

1. What are the essential elements or attributes needed to develop the cultural competence of building leaders in order to lead a culturally proficient school?
2. What staff training or programs have building leaders implemented that directly address school personnel understanding of diversity and/or cultural proficiency?

A two-day visit was made to School A in January, 2015. The primary sources for data collection were conversations and interviews with three administrators and seven teachers, observations of classrooms, hallway, cafeterias, libraries, playgrounds, and collection of relevant documents used for verification and triangulation of data. Collection of additional documents was requested and sent via email. Participant educational experience as displayed in Table 4.1 showed educational experience ranged from 3 to 21 years within the district and 9-24 years total in education.

Using the purpose for the study, the research questions, and the theoretical framework to guide the process, I gained a thorough understanding of the data through a process which included: (a) interviewing, (b) listening, (c) audio recording, (d) review of the audio, (e) transcribing, (f) analyzing the data using open, axial, and selective coding to identify the themes.

The eight axial codes or themes that emerged from the data were: (1) cultural awareness, (2) leadership, (3) teachers, (4) instructional model, (5) curriculum, (6) students, (7) parent and community involvement and, (8) environment. Chapter Four presented the data from the interviews, observations and field notes, and the document collection as a narrative story of the participants.

Chapter Five describes the grounded theory that arose from this study, explains the findings, compares those findings with the research findings from previous studies as reported in Chapter Two, and in doing so, answers the research questions. Recommendations for how the findings may be used by practitioners are presented as are recommendations for future studies.

### **Grounded Theory**

This study sought to generate theory about characteristics for a successful, diverse school district and professional training necessary to support that system. To accomplish this grounded theory methodology was used as was described in Chapter Three (p. 53). Grounded theory is used to refer to any approach to developing theoretical ideas that begin with data (Swandt, 2007). A key idea of this theory development is to move beyond description and use data that is generated or “grounded” from participants who have experienced the process in its setting (Creswell, 2013). The data is systematically gathered, analyzed, and reported through a specific process developed by the researcher. The primary source for collecting the data is through interviews that are triangulated with observation and artifact review.

Characteristics for a successful, diverse school are evident in research findings in the literature review, but few describe a systematic approach that designates the most important elements. The goal of this study was to develop theory to expand and enrich the current research

by defining and describing the characteristics that could be used in Missouri school to create learning opportunities for all students in a culturally proficient environment.

What this process and its outcome showed was that participants interviewed, administrators and teachers, believed there were some very important characteristics that needed to be in place for a school to have success with a diverse population. The themes that emerged as a result of open coding were: (1) cultural awareness, (2) leadership, (3) teachers, (4) instructional model, (5) curriculum, (6) students, (7) parent and community involvement and, (8) environment as displayed in Figure 4.1 in Chapter Four. In a majority of the interviews all five of these characteristics emerged through the interview and conversation.

The four selective codes revealed through the analysis of the data- (1) leadership, (2) instructional model, (3) environment that supports diversity and, (4) parent and community involvement-became the basis for development of the theory. Each theory represents a characteristic that is needed for a successful, diverse school that creates learning opportunities for all students. This process of selective coding helps to write a story that connects the categories and explains each of the theories and helps to answer the research questions for this study. The remainder of Chapter Five contains the relationship between the rank order task and the selective codes themselves compared to the theoretical framework, the discussions for each theory that emerged, recommendations for the education field, and recommendations for further research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cultural proficiency may be thought of as the ripple effect of one's cultural sensitivity, as reflected in the way an organization treats its employees, its clients, and its community (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). In the case of School A, the purpose of this study was to determine

what characteristics were needed for a successful, diverse school that promoted learning opportunities for all students. Just as important is the district training that comes with that in order for the environment to grow and flourish.

Lindsey, Roberts, and Campbelljones (2005) presented a framework for understanding cultural proficiency via the use of a continuum that provides a means of assessing how a school or district deals with cultural differences. This continuum located in Table 1.1 symbolizes the context for this study and exemplifies the needed components for culturally proficient school leadership that emerged from the research.

In conjunction with Table 1.1, Pfaller (2010) in her dissertation on studying a culturally proficient school also used a model she felt symbolized the context of a study of this nature. The basis for her study was a circle of continuous improvement and development that placed improvement in four primary quadrants of a circle: (a) knowledge, (b) beliefs, (c) commitment, and (d) honor and respect. All four areas are interdependent of each other holding equal weight and importance in order for a culturally proficient leader to be successful. The endless circle of growth and learning, as seen in Figure 1.1, along with the key components representative of culturally proficient leadership portrays a balanced format for this study.

Using the purpose for the study, the research questions and the framework established in Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1 two rank order tasks, found in Table 3.4, were developed and were completed by the participants to determine what elements they felt were important in creating a culturally sensitive environment. The results of those tasks were then compared to the data analyzed through the coding process used in the grounded theory. Each participant was to rank the criteria with “1” being what they felt was the most important in both tasks. Table 5.1 represents the responses given by each participant for the two rank order tasks.

Table 5.1

*Rank Order Task Results by Participant*

Task 1-Essential Elements Needed for Cultural Competence				
Participant	Assessing And Valuing Diversity	Managing Conflicts Caused by Differences	Adapting to Diversity	Training for Diversity
9MA	1	4	3	2
10FA	1	3	4	2
2MA	1	2	3	4
1FFA	1	3	4	2
3FFA	1	2	3	4
4FFA	1	4	3	2
5FFA	1	2	4	3
6FFA	1	4	3	2
7FFA	1	3	2	4
8FFA	1	3	4	2
Task 2-Components for Narrowing the Learning Gap				
Participant	Safe School Environment	Parent and Community Involvement	Curriculum and Instruction	Staffing and Teacher Retention
9MA	2	4	3	1
10FA	4	2	1	3
2MA	3	4	1	2
1FFA	3	4	1	2
3FFA	1	4	3	2
4FFA	4	2	1	3
5FFA	1	3	2	4
6FFA	1	2	4	3
7FFA	1	3	2	4
8FFA	4	3	2	1

Note. Each participant ranked the items from 1=most important to 4=least important.

The results of task number one clearly show that all participants believe that a leader must be able to assess and value the cultural proficiency of an environment for it to be successful. The importance of continuous improvement as displayed in Figure 1.1 further supports the finding that on-going assessment of the culture is vital to the success of a district. The second most important element in the task was training for diversity as determined by the participants. Cultural awareness emerged as an axial code during the analysis of the data and the importance of training was discussed in the axial codes of the instructional model and teachers.

In task number two, the number one criteria for narrowing the learning gap for students was determined by participants to be the curriculum and instruction with a safe school environment as the second most important. A close third, however, was staffing and teacher retention. From the analysis of the data, curriculum was one of the eight axial codes that emerged. A second axial code, environment, also emerged and participants discussed a safe school environment as important in the creation of learning opportunities for all student. Staffing was discussed under that axial code of teachers and how their sensitivity to students' cultural differences played a large role in student success.

The results of the rank order tasks align and reinforce the findings of the data analysis from the coding and using grounded theory methodology. The outcomes in Table 5.1 offer an additional piece of data which interrelates and supports the four discussions of selective codes which follow.

### **Theory One-Leadership**

The first and strongest code that emerged from the data was that of leadership. The data revealed that their leaders' acceptance and honoring of cultural differences is one of the keys to success in School A's diverse system. The ability to lead is complex in that the building

principal must possess the ability to communicate ideas and vision while informing, facilitating, supporting, empowering, and, when necessary, confronting those who refuse to make the change in believing that all students should have equal opportunity to learn (Price, 2007). While vision was not addressed by all participants, it was determined through the reviewing of the data that participants believed it to be important. Data analysis revealed that teachers believed the school leaders were continuously looking for strategies and techniques to make School A and its students and teachers more successful. Willingness to accept ideas from others and the flexibility to use and incorporate those ideas has helped to fulfill the vision of establishment of an environment that educates the whole child. Teachers and administrators reinforced that when leaders took action to facilitate change and bring cultures together to enhance and support cultural awareness learning opportunities began to grow and flourish.

The willingness of School A's leaders to model the understanding of diversity showing a daily appreciation for individual diversity was discussed by all teachers during the data collection process. Assessing one's own beliefs and valuing the diversity of others provides a strong foundation for building leaders along with a deep commitment for social justice, equity, and equality for all stakeholders within the system. The daily display of this commitment is why participants said they love working in this district. The expectations of the leaders are clearly communicated daily. Teachers mentioned that leaders were continuously assessing ways to embrace the different cultures and felt if they did not, students would suffer. By modeling expectations of cultural proficiency, educators increased their ability to form authentic and effective relationships and teachers, students, and other know that building leaders are genuine in their thoughts and actions.



Retaining teachers in challenging schools or schools with a highly diverse population is difficult and support from the building leaders is among the top reasons teachers leave buildings or school districts (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). The guidance, support, and communication teachers received from the administration, top down, participants felt provided understanding and learning opportunities for students, teachers, parents, and community. This guidance and support promoted the buy in from teachers and parents in order to develop a system that promoted and celebrated cultural differences and increased the learning opportunities in School A. Data analysis from teachers and administrators revealed that when leadership was not as strong and a previous administrator did not share the concept of honoring the different cultures students, moral for teachers was low, discipline referrals increased, and academic performance was low. They went on to reveal that support for teachers through the discipline process of students was weak and hampered learning and learning opportunities within the system. When the administration was changed, the climate of the school began to change as well and teachers felt comfortable with the direction of the restructured leadership. Table 4.1 revealed the range of experience within the district was 3-21 years for participants who were interviewed.

Along with guidance and support, communication emerged as a strength for school leaders. The administrators' willingness to facilitate two-way communication to stakeholders helped set the stage for the support teachers felt they had from school leaders. Not only that but their willingness to communicate, through their speech and actions, made clear their commitment to continuous improvement within the district.

The consistency of the school leaders in their guidance of the district emerged as important in developing a culture of awareness where differences are valued on the campus of School A. Administrators and teachers both mentioned the cohesiveness of the school leaders'

expectations gave a clear direction for the school district in terms of policies, procedures, and daily teaching and learning.

It was also revealed in data that administrators were actively involved in the trainings that took place in the district. The willingness of leaders to model the importance of professional learning by organizing, attending, and being actively involved was respected and appreciated by the teachers. Teachers knew school leaders had “been in the trenches” and understood their role as teachers in working with diverse populations. With that understanding, teacher mentioned that fostered communication and the exchange of ideas on how to provide the best possible learning opportunities for the students and parents.

The concept that School A provided a family atmosphere was evident from the data. Administrators and teachers worked to build strong, trusting relationships between those two groups, but also branched out to form strong relationships with students, parents, and community. The research of prior studies in the literature reviewed revealed that school leaders are key players in the process of framing and monitoring the level of trust within a district through cooperation, collaboration, and communication. Teachers mentioned their leaders displayed those attributes within the system. There was no evidence that administrators wanted to run the show or let people know they were the boss. Administrators were conscious of the fact that it takes everyone, despite their cultural difference, working together in order to increase the success of the district. It was clear from the data that administrators felt it was important to build strong, trusting relationships.

### **Theory Two-Instructional Model**

The Instructional Model was the second selective code that emerged from the data and was addressed by all participants in the study as an important factor in the success School A.

The Instructional Model used by the district is Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP®) and was talked about extensively when I asked respondents about specific procedures that addressed cultural proficiency. As reported from data, this program, started by a grant and has become the instructional process district wide thus providing the consistency as students move from grade to grade and building to building. The belief by the teachers was the consistency in using this model district wide has provided the basis for increased improvement in learning opportunities in School A. The idea that SIOP® helped all students and not just those who were deficient in the English language was of great importance to the teachers as shown in data.

The training when the model was introduced to the district as well as the continued training for new teachers reported as a contributing factor to the increase in learning opportunities for students. Data revealed the initial training gave a firm foundation for the model and is continued with new employees to the district and also further reviewed by using SIOP® coaches within the district for all employees. Teachers, as they reported in the data, felt the training they received made them more aware of those key pieces to include in the lessons that were needed not only for diverse learners but for all learners. As reported in Chapter Four, this researcher witnessed the training for new employees while visiting the district. The commitment to the continued training was very important to teachers and administrators as was displayed in the data.

How this model addresses lesson planning was also discussed in the data by participants. Lesson planning, as described in the data, focused on three important pieces; (1) background knowledge, (2) lesson objective, (3) language objective and (4) academic vocabulary. It was deemed that background knowledge, the language objective, and using the academic vocabulary

were the pieces that teachers believed were the most valuable. Teachers and administrators reported in the interviews that building background knowledge was essential in the understanding of the curriculum for ELL students but also for those whose first language was English. It was simply, as participants stated, giving them the knowledge they needed to put lessons into perspective and make them relevant. Vocabulary was identified for each unit and daily lesson and was used repeatedly during lesson delivery. Along with that piece, the data stated that a daily oral language lesson was used by all teachers each day which helped all students better understand the use of the English language appropriately.

Popp, Grant, and Stronge (2011) state it was important for teachers to use an instructional delivery system that enhanced the learning of all students. School A, through the analysis of the data, believes the SIOP® instructional model does that by keeping students actively engaged by emphasizing speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Lesson delivery, according to the SIOP® model isn't a one size fits all and involves the use of several formats in order to accommodate the learning styles of all students. One of the pieces that emerged from the data to help emphasize this concept was the use of RACER to help improve the daily oral language skills of the students. RACER was explained in the data as a way for students to restate, answer, cite, explain, and reread to help students gain a better understanding of information. Explanation from the data said this has helped to increase content understanding but also has helped with the process of writing.

Modifying the curriculum, through the use of the SIOP® model emerged as important to student learning. ELL teachers were mentioned several times assisting in lesson modifications that would help students whose native language was not English. Also ELL teachers and reading teachers were members of curriculum writing teams to help with the modifications prior to

teachers presenting the lessons in class and provided information that all content teachers could use.

Also mentioned in the data was infusing the different cultures into the curriculum during lesson delivery. One administrator mentioned that he had some teachers who loved to create lessons that bring in the cultures of the students. Infusing the culture into the curriculum through the use of the instructional model was supported in the data. Diverse students bring a wide range of experiences with them to school buildings and teachers, through the use of the SIOP® model can make the necessary adjustments to help them incorporate those experiences into lesson design, instruction, and discussions.

### **Theory Three-Environment that Supports Diversity**

A third selective code to surface from the data was the importance of an environment that supports diversity in an educational system and in a community where diversity is honored. The cultural differences displayed in the school environment can also be seen just outside back door of the elementary school. Just beyond the school property line, stands a Lutheran Church, a Catholic Church, a Buddhist Temple and on the horizon, the St. Louis Arch. That visual as discussed in the data by an administrator is powerful. The acknowledgment of a culturally proficient environment was discussed by many of the participants as a family atmosphere and the importance of making everyone feel welcome. One administrator said they welcomed visits from the education and business community to come in and visit as was my case and the delegation from Taiwan that came to the district in 2009.

Providing a safe, comfortable, and non-threatening environment allows for culture to grow and enhances an environment that is conducive to learning. One administrator was adamant that because he gave students and staff a clean, nice, visual place to come to everyday, filled with

good people, went a long way to enhancing the environment. With that in place, he said that allowed students and staff to focus on the positive, leaving their negative issue at the door step.

Teachers are also important in the maintenance of a positive environment for School A and data revealed felt they treated all students the same while being sensitive to the individual differences of culture. It was mentioned several times that teacher sensitivity to cultural differences enhanced the learning environment. Knowing the background of students and having students share their experiences increased the awareness for everyone; students and staff. Teachers went on to emphasize that having students share information about their cultures in the classroom helped to build positive relationships with students as well as positive relationships between students. Teachers also mentioned that when administrators hired teachers from different background, both cultural and in terms of life experience, that helped to enhance relationships and the school environment. By doing this, students had several adults they were comfortable with and build bond those strong relational bonds.

From the data, it was evident that eight of the participants had little or no personal background with cultural proficiency or diversity prior to employment in School A and felt they had gained their knowledge while working in the district. It was mentioned by several that cultural proficiency had been a learning process over the years as the number of diverse students had grown. The two participants who had experience with cultural diversity stated their prior experience had helped them adjust when they came to the district. Participants also said however, the district did a good job of providing them background knowledge of the cultures within the district through professional development. Participants mentioned specific trainings related to the Bosnian community as they are the largest minority population; their culture, how they were traumatized by the war in Bosnia and that some suffer from PTSD due to that war.

Also, the data revealed, there were two trainings that were a direct result of recent issues in the local area that affected students and parents in the school district; the riots in Ferguson and the random killing of a Bosnian man in St. Louis. Teachers said these training were held to provide information for teachers on how to help students work through issues they might have related to these events. It was apparent from the data that school leaders made training available for teachers who are not physically, ethnically, economically, or culturally like their students, so teachers can effectively understand the cultures of those who are different.

Students also have a major impact on the school environment. Student leaders are powerful and vital to the process of assessing the culture, seeing what they bring to the table as understanding, tolerance, and/or barriers. It is important for students to recognize and celebrate their own culture and experiences and then share that culture with others. From the data it was evident that students had several opportunities to share their experiences and culture with adults and other students through their school day infused in the curriculum and in class. Teachers and administrators believed this sharing of experiences helped with the understanding students had of different cultures. Acceptance and valuing of diversity by students can be the determining factor in a young person's educational experience and in this case the data reflected the teachers and administrators believed that to be true.

The data also revealed that students mixed together and did not segregate themselves by groups thus helping to create a cohesive environment. This mixing was supported in the interview and also field note observations which showed students mixing together in the hallways, cafeteria, library, and on the playground. Teachers and administrators felt that because they modeled acceptance of all cultures, that expectation trickled down to the students. One teacher went as far to say there had not been any issues of racism but if there were, she knew it

would not be tolerated and handled swiftly by the administration. The noted practice of the students mixing together was seen as a very important piece that supported the cohesive environment.

Character education was mentioned by the teachers and the administrators and the data explained how they believed that to be an important factor in establishing and maintaining a positive environment at school A. Character education and PBIS are used as district initiatives for all students and the participants were very proud that their school was designated a Missouri School of Character. Of the character words that were discussed, teachers and administrators mentioned respect and responsibility several times during the interviews and they were also displayed inside and outside of the buildings. Discipline through PBIS and the maintenance of the character education program were reported to have decreased the number of discipline referrals and provided consistency in discipline policy further promoting a safe school environment.

#### **Theory Four-Parent and Community Involvement**

Parent and community involvement emerged as a focal point in the data even though no questions specifically addressed that in the interview guide. Parents have a distinctive role in the education of their children however, given the cultural differences parents may be unaware of what that role is. Previous research on parent and community involvement says it is the schools responsibility to form a bond with parents and the community by opening the lines of communication and the doors to the school and invite individuals to be a part of the process (Hawley & Nieto, 2010). Depending on the family dynamics, the involvement may look different from family to family but when looking at the big picture it is the school's responsibility to create the opportunities for parent and community involvement.



It was shown in the data the school helped make parents aware of what their role was in the education process by providing trainings about the services offered at school such as Title I, ELL, and Title III. In the early years when the ELL numbers began to grow, a teacher mentioned meetings they had just to explain the roles of individual staff members such as the principal, counselor, and school nurse. They also had the principal explain the discipline policy and what parents could expect if their student got in trouble at school. Other events that brought families together in the school buildings were, as describe in data, math and literacy nights helping explain to parents what was happening in those content areas and also having students demonstrate what they are learning in class. Parents were also given opportunities to come in as students were preparing for graduation and college and receive information on financial aid and scholarships that are available. Parents are formally invited into the school a minimum of two times per year for conferences to discuss student achievement. The data also demonstrated a strong commitment to parents by using a parent advisory committee as a strong piece of the character education program. This committee seeks parental input on important school issues that affect all students. School improvement and academic achievement involves a collaborative effort between the parents, the community, and the school.

Bridging the gap through the use of translation services, discussed extensively in the data, is offered to parents for conferences, programs, and phone calls home if necessary. According to interview data the three main languages for translation services are Bosnian, Vietnamese, and Arabic although the data revealed translation services were available for other languages if necessary. School A uses these services to help provide a positive experience for parents and community as they partner with the school. According to the data, the school can also send newsletters, flyers, and other important information home in the native language of individual

families through the use of a translation service. Along those same lines one teacher mentioned that School A had staff members who were proficient in some of the languages of their families and those individuals were sometimes used to help with communication.

Parents and community members, as reported in the data, are invited into the classrooms and as professional development for teachers to speak about a particular culture or event.

Teachers and school leaders demonstrated in the data they supported this practice as it benefitted both the students and staff continuing to promote the concept of partners working together to educate students.

One important concept that emerged from the data was gaining an understanding of the family dynamics in each of the different cultures. A couple of teachers expressed frustration when first coming to the district because they couldn't set up a line of open communication for a family. Learning through conversations with administrators, colleagues, and professional development the head of the household is different based on the culture in question. Knowing this important piece of information teachers said made a huge difference when communicating with families.

The data also revealed that bringing the community together for cultural fairs was very popular in the district. This was time that individuals could show case traditional clothing and share stories, and prepare and share food of their native cultures. It was stated in the data that students mixed together and learned about each other and that was just as important for families. Also, the data revealed that during family events in the district snacks or concession stand items included dishes of the different cultures and not just American food such as hamburgers and hot dogs.

School A also made parents and community true partners in education, as discussed in the data, when they solicited their opinion on what should be placed on a bond issue. Community members were surveyed and one of the results came from the Bosnian community who suggested and supported a soccer/football field. With the support from the entire community, the bond issue passed and the soccer/football field and other improvements are being made in the district as stated in the data.

The practice of getting students involved in service learning projects will also form a bond between the school and the community. An administrator stated in the data that these projects are planned during the advisory time and it is the teacher's responsibility to coordinate with the community to carry out these plans. One of the teachers mentioned these projects as way to bring the community closer together with the varying cultures of the district. These project as describe in the research provides real work experience that student can take back to the classroom and apply (Scales et al., 2006).

### **Summary of the Findings**

The purpose of this study was to determine characteristics for a successful, diverse school district and the training that is necessary for staff in order to support the students and the district. Data showed that a diverse school district is successful when four specific elements are present and daily implemented in the school. These elements are: (1) leadership, (2) instructional model, (3) environment that supports diversity, (4) parent and community involvement. Each of these categories is supported with open and axial codes from the analysis and triangulation of the data, including interviews, observations, and document examination. These codes also directly aligned to the theoretical framework provided in Table 1.1 and Figure1.1 as being important elements in creating a culturally proficient environment.

## **Interpretation of the Data**

Through a case study data analysis process that included open and axial coding, major themes were revealed for School A. When the analysis was completed, four selective codes emerged that identified the characteristics of a successful, diverse school.

Leadership emerged as a selective code and was one of the major themes. From the data, the evidence showed there were strong opinions that leaders in School A were aware of diversity, honored diversity, appreciated differences, and continually assessed ways to embrace differences. Data also revealed leaders not only modeled the previous attributes about cultural diversity but also provided a strong atmosphere of cooperation, collaboration, and communication which helped to make the district successful. Data also revealed that leaders of School A provided a consistent message to students, staff, parents, and community regarding the importance of providing equal learning opportunities for all students.

The second selective code that emerged from the data was instructional model. The idea that the SIOP® instructional model helped all students and not just those who were deficient in the English language was of great importance to the teachers as shown in the data. The data strongly indicated the belief of the teachers was the consistency in using this model district wide has provided the basis for increased improvement in learning opportunities in School A. Also the continual training and support the district provides for this instructional model was deemed as especially important in contributing to the success of teachers, students, and the district. This model also, as stated in the data, provides for daily opportunities for students to practice daily language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking which helps all students.

An environment that supports diversity was another selective code that is important to creating and maintaining a successful, diverse school. The data revealed that many teachers had little experience with diversity but the district provided trainings to help them understand the different cultures in their school district. The teachers and administrators felt that providing a safe, comfortable, and non-threatening environment for students and staff where everyone worked collaboratively toward the same goals enhanced the learning opportunities for students. The fact that teachers treated all students the same while recognizing individual differences also set the stage for students to copy that same behavior. Students mixed with others academically and socially as supported when analyzing the data. An environment that supports diversity through policies, communication, and actions is an integral part of a successful, diverse school.

Data analyzed indicated that parent and community involvement was also important for a successful, diverse school. Teachers and administrators believe a school can help bridge the gap between school and home by offering translation services for meetings, conferences, phone calls home, and printed materials by sending documents home in the native language of the family. It is also important to provide training for the families so parents understand what their role is in the school, know whom to contact when they need help, and also to help parents understand the programs and services available to their students. It was also revealed that it is important for administrators and teachers to understand family dynamics in order to communicate better with families.

### **Research Questions**

The discussion of each of these theories provided answers to the research questions that guided the study:

**Research Question 1.** What are the essential elements or attributes needed to develop the cultural competence of building leaders in order to lead a culturally proficient school? Data indicated the following selective codes answered this question:

1. **Leadership:** A leader must believe in and model cultural awareness and continually assess their individual awareness as well as the cultural awareness within the environment. Leaders must be able to communicate the importance of cultural proficiency in a manner that is authentic and non-threatening.
2. **Instructional Model:** A leader must support an instructional model for the district that provides necessary components which creates learning opportunities for all students through the use of the model. Included in this instructional model is the use of curriculum that is relevant to students and can be transferred to real world experiences for better student comprehension and understanding.
3. **Environment that Supports Diversity:** A leader must work to create and maintain an environment that supports diversity through policies and procedures that promotes a safe, comfortable, and non-threatening where students and staff can grow and flourish.
4. **Parent and Community Involvement:** A leader must work to bridge the gap between home and school by creating partnerships with and providing positive opportunities for parents and community to come into the building. The use of translation services further improves the communication between school and home.

**Research Question 2.** What staff training or programs have building leaders implemented that directly address school personnel understanding of diversity and/or cultural proficiency? Data indicated the following selective codes answered these questions:

1. Leadership: School leaders implemented an instructional model that is used district wide that addresses and reinforces background knowledge, daily language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, uses academic language daily, and actively engages students in the lessons.
2. Instructional Model: The district offered initial training when the instructional model was introduced to the district and then annual training for new employees who come to the district. Follow up and continual training is established during each school year with instructional coaches and ELL teachers.
3. Environment that Supports Diversity: Training is provided by the district to increase the awareness of staff members of the different cultures within the district helping them work more efficiently and effectively with parents and students.
4. Parent and Community Involvement: The established procedure that provides translation services for parents who native language is not English helps to establish open lines of communication between school and home.

### **Recommendations for the Field**

The purpose of this study was to determine the characteristics for a successful, diverse school and what training is necessary for staff in order to benefit the students and the district. The motivation for completing the study is to add findings to the existing research literature which could benefit school leaders whose job responsibilities include the improvement and equalization of learning opportunities for students. School leaders were the primary audience, but this research will benefit school counselors, curriculum directors, institutions of higher education who train teachers, principals, and superintendents, and policy makers who discuss and make decisions regarding school reform to increase academic achievement.

The following list of recommendations is provided to the reader based on a composite of major findings that were discovered as a result of this dissertation study. The recommendations serve as guidelines for individuals and school districts that have a desire to increase cultural proficiency and/or implement school reform in their school environment. The field would benefit from:

1. School leaders having the courage to question their own assumptions and attitudes and redefine their purpose being able to face their own anger, guilt, racism, or status in society. Once accomplished, model that self-reflection for staff, students, parents, and community.
2. School leaders reflecting so as to recognize the areas in respect to cultural differences where they may be blind to gaps that attribute to inequity in the school environment in which they lead.
3. School leaders providing background knowledge and information of the students and the community when new employees enter the district. This training should also include information in regards to family dynamics for varying cultures within the school district.
4. School leaders, through a collaborative method with curriculum directors, teachers and parents, laying the groundwork for adopting and supporting an instructional model that promotes learning for all students and keeps students actively engaged in learning. The instructional model must be consistent throughout the district so students know the expectations as they move from grade to grade and class to class. When implemented, the district must be committed to providing new training when



- necessary, follow up, and continual training through the implementation of instructional coaches.
5. School leaders building and maintaining a climate of trust and safety with staff and students and allowing for the growth of partnerships with parents and community.
  6. School leaders seeking opportunities to showcase and celebrate cultural differences in their schools.
  7. School leaders hiring teachers of diverse backgrounds and experiences to enhance the exposure students have to individuals unlike themselves.
  8. Curriculum directors guiding and coaching teachers on infusing cultural proficiency into content lessons.
  9. School counselors understanding the components necessary for creating a culturally proficient environment as a way to guide and help students as they work through social issues in a school setting.
  10. Higher education institutions providing a training program for pre-service teachers, principals, and superintendents to know the importance of cultural proficiency and the impact it has on a school environment.
  11. Higher education institutions teaching teachers to be culturally competent before they enter the classroom.
  12. Education policy makers using this study as a guide for implementing school improvement in failing school districts in Missouri with highly diverse populations.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study was limited to 10 participants, 8 females and 2 males, and was conducted in a small school district of less than 2000 students. Further research is recommended as follows:

1. Additional research in a diverse school district with a significantly larger total population of students and comparing the results to this study.
2. Additional research in a diverse school district in a different area of the state and a rural district as opposed to a urban or suburban school district.
3. Additional research to include a more balanced number of participants, male to female, and a more racially mixed group.
4. Additional research interviewing superintendents and their role in leading the district to become more culturally proficient.
5. Additional research that focuses primarily on the elementary age student and their awareness of cultural differences within the school environment.
6. Additional research of a district in a neighboring state of comparable size and diversity and comparing the findings of the two districts.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to develop theory to expand and enrich the existing research by determining characteristics for a successful, diverse school and learn what staff training or procedures were implemented by the district to develop and maintain a culturally proficient environment. Extensive data collection and analysis revealed four characteristics that emerged that are essential for a successful, diverse district: (1) leadership, (2) instructional model, (3) environment that supports diversity and, (4) parent and community involvement. While each of these characteristics are important individually, they are just as important collectively, as they intertwine and build a strong base for schools beginning a reform movement.

The Missouri education system currently has two unaccredited and 11 provisionally accredited school districts according to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary

Education (2015). This study is valuable to educational leaders in those school districts, as well as other districts, to be used as the potential framework for school improvement beginning with reform in leaders themselves. Once educational leaders have the courage to question their own assumptions and attitudes and redefine their purpose in response to cultural proficiency they will model that self-reflection for staff, students, parents, and community. From there, leaders will be able to analyze the organization in which they work recognizing potential blind spots that attribute to inequities in the school environments in which they lead. These inequities can then be addressed through a restructuring of the school environment, the implementation of an instructional model that addresses the needs of all students, and the forming of strong bonds with the parents and community as determined by this study.

The literature addressed the importance of a culturally proficient leader and how that person could positively affect the school environment. While giving examples of some elements that are needed to develop a culturally competent environment, the literature failed to address specific variables that impact culturally proficient leadership in schools or specific training needed to support and maintain that environment. When I ran the study, what I hoped to find were those specific leadership attributes and practices culturally proficient leaders used to create and maintain an environment that supports diversity and promote a safe, comfortable, and non-threatening where students and staff can grow and flourish. What I found was that culturally proficient leaders must believe in, consistently model cultural awareness, and continually assess their individual awareness as well as the cultural awareness within the environment and be able to communicate the importance of cultural proficiency in a manner that is authentic and non-threatening. The other piece that was revealed in the study was the importance of providing background information to staff about the different cultures in the educational environment thus

providing understanding of who the students were and where they came from in order to make connections for students when providing instruction. The significant contribution this study adds to the field of educational research is its identification of the impact a culturally proficient leader has on students, teachers, the school environment, and the community. These characteristics were identified by the participants in School A as reasons why their school is successful in improving student performance and pulling a diverse community together that supports the school and the education of the districts' students.

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## APPENDIX A

## IRB Approval Letter

December 9, 2014

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Tanya Vest  
Carleton Holt

FROM: Ro Windwalker  
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 14-11-296

Protocol Title: *A Case Study to Determine Characteristics for a Successful, Diverse School District*

Review Type:  EXEMPT  EXPEDITED  FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 12/09/2014 Expiration Date: 12/08/2015

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Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

**This protocol has been approved for 10 participants.** If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

## APPENDIX B

## Letter of Informed Consent

January 13, 2015

Dear Participant:

I am writing this letter to invite you to participate in a research study designed to illuminate culturally proficient school leadership and its impact on narrowing the learning gap for students. Your district provides the type of school system needed due to the diverse student population and your history of high academic achievement.

I am a graduate student in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of Arkansas pursuing a doctorate under the direction of Dr. Carlton Holt, my doctoral advisor. By conducting this research I hope the results of this finding will help in the preparation of future school leaders. Input from you will be an important part of improving the educational experience of school building leaders in the future.

Participation will consist of one interview of approximately 20-25 minutes and an observation within the classroom using an observation guide that I have developed. Interviews will be recorded and scripted and those transcripts will then be coded and analyzed only by me. No identifiers will be used in any published reports emerging from this study. All information collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University policy. Participation in this research is voluntary and should you decide you no longer want to participate, you may withdraw at any time. Choosing not to participate or withdrawing will have no negative consequences.

If you have questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Dr. Carleton Holt, faculty advisor, (479) 575-5112 or by e-mail at [cholt@uark.edu](mailto:cholt@uark.edu). For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's IRB Coordinator, at (479) 575-2208 or by e-mail at [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu).

Thank you in advance for considering this invitation and I look forward to hearing from you. You may email me at  
or call

Respectfully,

Tanya Vest

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\_\_\_\_\_ Yes I agree to participate in an interview process and/or observation regarding the attributes building leaders need to create a culturally proficient environment and narrow the learning gap. I also give permission for tape recording of this interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ No I do not agree to participate

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

## Permission Email from Dr. Randall Lindsey to recreate Table 1.1

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**From:** Randall Lindsey <[randallblindsey@gmail.com](mailto:randallblindsey@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Friday, October 31, 2014 8:27 AM  
**To:**  
**Cc:** Delores Lindsey  
**Subject:** Re: Permission

Hello Tanya,

Please inform your committee that you have my permission to use the Cultural Proficiency Continuum in your dissertation study. Should you need reference to a specific publication, please advise and I will mention it specifically.

Congratulations on making it to this point in your professional studies. Good luck as you continue making the democracy accessible for all children and youth.

My very best to you,

Randy

Randall B. Lindsey, Ph.D.

Corwin Author  
Professor Emeritus, California State University, LA

## APPENDIX D

Permission Email from Dr. Renee Pfaller to recreate Figure 1.1

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**From:** Renee Pfaller <[pfaller\\_r@ics-milw.org](mailto:pfaller_r@ics-milw.org)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 07, 2014 10:26 AM  
**To:** Tanya Vest  
**Subject:** Re: Dissertation

**Hello Ms. Vest,**

**I am excited and humbled that you are studying this very crucial hot topic. I like your research questions as they are common threads that will be revealed to you as you conduct your study.**

**I did find that "closing the achievement gap" was not only difficult but unfounded in my research. I changed mine to narrowing the "learning gap" as this was far more observable. Ideally we all want to "close the gap" however the variables which impact this goal are numerous and multifaceted. I am currently implementing a staff training model to empower teachers and other staff members on their journey to cultural proficiency for all students. I work at a very diverse school with primarily Native American students.**

**You have my official permission to use my picture of the model. It is ancient and not mine as it symbolizes a way of life and a way of thinking. "The Medicine Way" by Kenneth Meadows may be a good resource to better understand the depth of this model. I do have many resources since completing my doctorate that have supported our work in this journey.**

**Good luck to you and please feel free to ask any questions you may encounter along the way. You are on an exciting path and are about to do amazing things for kids not yet born!**

**Sincerely,**

**Dr. Renee L. Pfaller**

## APPENDIX E

## Interview Questions-Teachers

Table 3.2

*Interview Questions-Teachers*

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Questions for Selected Teachers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What do you see as the role of the school leader in creating a response to cultural proficiency? Explain how cultural proficiency of a school district plays a role in reducing the learning gap between majority and minority students?</li><li>2. Can you tell me about district created school policies and/or procedures that directly address cultural proficiency?</li><li>3. Can you say, with certainty, the curriculum you use regularly creates awareness for and addresses cultural differences? If so, how?</li><li>4. Can you say with certainty that your building leader models cultural proficiency and does the building leaders knowledge of cultural differences impact the direction of the school? If so, what strategies does the building leader implement to directly address the multicultural diversity in the building?</li><li>5. What background knowledge about cultural proficiency did you possess before you became a teacher?</li><li>6. Can you share with me staff development and/or program opportunities that have been offered to you that directly address staff understanding of racial diversity and/or cultural proficiency? If yes, did the training you received regarding cultural proficiency lead to changes in instructional strategies and curricular content?</li><li>7. Do you believe the building leaders' perspectives in regards to cultural proficiency impacts school climate and student achievement? Explain your answer.</li></ol>

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## APPENDIX F

## Interview Questions-Administrators

Table 3.3

*Interview Questions-Administrators*

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**Questions for Selected Administrators**

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1. How has your role as the school leader in creating a positive response to cultural proficiency helped to narrow the learning gap between majority and minority students?
  2. Can you tell me about district created school policies and/or procedures that directly address cultural proficiency?
  3. Can you say with certainty the curriculum teachers' use regularly creates awareness for and addresses cultural differences?
  4. Can you say that as a building leader you model cultural proficiency and does your knowledge of cultural differences impact the direction of the school? If so, what strategies do you implement to directly address the multicultural diversity in the building?
  5. Please share with me the background knowledge of cultural proficiency you brought with you to the role of building leader.
  6. Can you share with me staff development and/or program opportunities that you have offered or that have been offered to your staff that directly addresses their understanding of racial diversity and/or cultural proficiency? How did the training received regarding cultural proficiency lead to changes in instructional strategies and curricular content?
  7. Please share with me how you believe your perspectives in regards to cultural proficiency impact school climate and student achievement?
-



## APPENDIX G

## Field Note Guide

Table 3.5

*Field Note Guide*

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**Classroom and Building Observation**

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1. Observe classroom artifacts or features that reflect promotion of tolerance, cultural awareness or cross cultural understanding.
  2. Observe curriculum and materials used reflect attention to students' interests and range of backgrounds.
  3. Observe a mutual respect between individuals.
  4. Observe encouragement of student interactions across ethnic, racial, and linguistic lines.
  5. Observe interactions that reflect cooperative working relationships among students.
  6. Observe climate of respect for students' ideas, questions, and contributions and participation of all students is encouraged.
  7. Observe celebrations of individual and/or group achievement.
  8. Observe building leader and teacher building relationships with students.
  9. Observe an atmosphere that is safe and free from conflict.
  10. Characterize through observation staff interpersonal interactions with students.
  11. Characterize through observation the building leaders' interpersonal interactions with students.
-

## APPENDIX H

## Rank Order Task

Table 3.4

*Rank order criteria*

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**Rank order each task**

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**Task #1-Essential elements needed for cultural competence**

Assessing and valuing diversity

Managing conflicts caused by differences

Adapting to diversity

Training for diversity

**Task #2-Components for narrowing the learning gap**

Safe school environment

Parent and community involvement

Curriculum and instruction

Staffing and teacher retention

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