

Cultural Proficiency Receptivity Scale: A Critical Analysis of Prospective School Leaders

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Abstract

For a leader to be effective, it is imperative that he or she is culturally proficient in order to best meet the needs of their teaching staff and students. This involves adopting a mindset, level of awareness, and engagement that shows appreciation for others' culture. The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a significant difference between educational leadership candidate groups relating to how equitable educational practices were perceived as measured by the *Cultural Competency Receptivity Scale*. This study also provided the foundation for determining if leadership may engage in ways to support their teachers in implementing culturally responsive teaching practices with the goal of increased positive social development and academic achievement for their students. The data from the study indicated significant differences between the educational leadership candidate groups who participated in the fall of 2015 and 2016. Implications for future research and training for leadership candidates were suggested based on the results of the *Cultural Proficiency Receptive Scale*.

Cultural competency of school leadership is vital to school success. More importantly, it is vital to the success of teachers, staff, students, and their families. Understanding culture, its impact, and how to properly connect disparate cultures within social contexts is paramount. School leaders need to understand individuals from different cultures and engage each other effectively, as this will lead to a true definition of what cross-cultural relations should be. In addition to this endeavor, it should be understood that cultural competency does not primarily

entail building relationships with people from a single culture that a classroom is discussing, studying, or interacting with (Anderson, 2012; Clayton & Goodwin, 2015).

Cultural competency has been viewed in varied perspectives across different disciplines for decades. For the purpose of this selection, cultural competency is defined as: the level of effectiveness individuals possess that demonstrates their ability to effectively build and maintain relationships with others from different cultures. This includes understanding that culture shapes us on personal and professional levels (Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012). Cultural competency also means that individuals can be effective in interacting and/or building relationships with people from any culture throughout time (Anderson, 2012). It is a mindset, or a way of thinking. Similarly, culture shapes a person's sense of who he or she is and how he/she may fit into a school, community or society (Punke, 1969).

For a leader to be effective, it is imperative that he or she is culturally proficient in order to best meet the needs of their teaching staff and students. This involves a concerted effort in adopting a state of mind, having the awareness, and responding to each other in a way showing appreciation for others' culture. There is reciprocal space, where people look to understand one another. Being culturally proficient means that a leader must be able to respectfully navigate interactions among members of the school community by enacting policies that align with an inclusive community (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onuegbuzie, 2009; Cowan, 2007; Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012). Essentially, being knowledgeable about teaching and learning about different individuals and groups while maintaining the capacity to honor what they represent is central to being a culturally proficient. Culturally proficient leaders and educators do not necessarily know all there is to know about every cultural group (El Ganzoury, 2012). They do, however, make concentrated efforts to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to learn new information and to use it effectively. It is imperative to add to the knowledge base of culturally proficient practice by conducting research, developing new approaches based on culture, and increasing the knowledge of others about culture and the dynamics of difference provides the foundation for maintaining levels of cultural proficiency as educational leaders (Raskin, Krull, & Thatcher, 2015). As educators and as future administrators, it is vital that we help the staff view our students and families through a clear lens (Bustamante et al., 2009). It is paramount that seeing our students and families more clearly will aid in the development of policies and practice, in the schools, that will promote success of all of our students (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995).

Purpose of the Study

According to the Center for Responsive Schools (2016), there are three guiding principles educators need to recognize when working in schools containing diverse student populations. These principles are: (a) knowing the children we teach (individually, culturally, and developmentally), (b) knowing the content we teach, and (c) knowing the families of the children we teach (as partners). These principles are deemed essential to children's education. There is equal importance placed on how the adults at school work together as it is in direct correlation to their individual cultural competence and proficiency. This further delineates that lasting change begins with the adult community (Cowan; 2007; Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012). In order for teacher and student relationships to be strengthened through cultural proficiency, it is essential for each of the previously mentioned relationships to be a focus in a culturally responsive

building where leadership facilitates this process (Anderson, 2012; Clayton & Goodwin, 2015; Raskin et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a significant difference between educational leadership candidate groups relating to how equitable educational practices may be perceived as measured by the *Cultural Competency Receptivity Scale*. It is currently unknown if prospective school leaders examine their own perspectives related to their beliefs about their own cultural receptivity (Cowan, 2007; Raskin et al., 2015). This study will also determine if the *Cultural Competency Receptivity Scale* provides sufficient support for candidates to measure their own levels of receptivity in order to address the needs of diverse student populations in schools (Bustamante et al., 2009). According to Lindsey, Roberts, and Cambell-Jones (2013), “Cultural proficiency is deep, personal introspective work one undertakes before attempting to influence the behavior of others” (p. 21).

Method

In fall of 2015 and 2016, educational leadership candidates enrolled in a diversity leadership course for school administration were invited to assess themselves using the *Cultural Competency Receptivity Scale* to determine how their perspectives may impact their practice as leaders. Based on the results, the candidates could understand how their perspectives may or may not have an impact on how they lead and support their staff. This study also provided the foundation for determining if leadership may engage in ways to support their teachers in implementing culturally responsive teaching practices with the goal of increased positive social development and academic achievement for their students.

Participants and Setting

The individuals who participated in this study were educational leadership candidates in a professional studies program offered as a degree in the School of Education. The course was a Diversity Leadership class at a university located in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States during the fall 2015 and 2016 (e.g., fall 2015 = 23; fall 2016 = 26) academic quarters on campus. It is important to note that all of the participants in this study were preparing to become school leaders and the intent of the assessment was to determine whether the *Cultural Proficiency Receptivity Scale* provided support in determining them as being a culturally competent, proficient, and responsive.

Instrumentation

The *Cultural Proficiency Receptivity Scale* is a nonscientific instrument designed to guide the candidates through a process of self-reflection (Lindsey et al., 2013). The CCRS contained 15 items on a Likert scale. Responses ranged from 1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree. A high score (e.g., between 6 and 7) indicates that participants are proponents of honoring differences and see diversity as a benefit.

Before the fall 2015 candidates completed the questionnaire, the instructor conducted an hour-long discussion on the importance of being culturally competent, and its impact in the classroom. The candidates were asked to take the instrument home, score themselves, and write a one-page reflection. The following week, the same candidates assessed themselves again using

the same instrument. In fall of 2016, candidates completed the same process using the same instrument. The instructor did not provide a one-hour discussion nor require a one-page reflection for this group. The significance of the study was determined based upon the average scores between both of the candidate groups.

Data Procedures

The *Cultural Proficiency Receptivity Scale* had 15 questions on a Likert scale. The scale requested ratings on the 15 statements from 1 (for strongly disagree) to 7 (for strongly agree) scores. A higher score indicated that participants engage in ways that “honor the differences among culture, seeing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully among a variety of culture groups” (Lindsey et al., 2013, p. 74). The t-test for independent samples was used to test for differences between the candidate groups.

Descriptive and Statistical Analysis

The fall 2015 group received an hour-long discussion about the CCRS, and then allowed to complete the survey at home. The fall 2016 group completed the survey at home without having prior discussion. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA; e.g., t-tests) was used to determine if significant differences were evident between the 2015 and 2016 candidate groups on each of the 15 items in the scale. Descriptive statistics consisting of mean scores and standard deviations were calculated.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Educational Leadership Candidates

Variable	2015 Cohort (n = 23)		2016 Cohort (n = 26)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Receptivity Scale Items Denoting Significance				
Item 3: Educational Environment and Learning Experiences	5.39	1.07	6.85	.78
Item 4: Systemic Oppression - Self	4.13	1.14	6.42	.75
Item 5: Questioning Systemic Oppression – Others	4.61	1.26	5.96	1.03
Item 6: Students Benefit from Practices Supporting Their Background/Culture	5.74	1.25	6.35	.84
Item 11: Cultural Discomfort/Disagreements are Normal in Society	5.82	1.55	4.84	1.73

The mean scores for the items which the fall 2015 and 2016 candidates reported to have had an impact in promoting cultural proficiency and equitable educational practices as measured by the *Cultural Proficiency Receptive Scale* were summarized above.

Cultural Proficiency Receptivity Scale Items

Item 1: I believe that all children and youth learn successfully when informed and caring educators assist them and make sufficient resources available to them. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. No significant difference was found ($t(47) = 1.010, p > .05$). The mean for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 6.74$) with a standard deviation of .54 was not significantly different from the mean score of the 2016 candidates ($m = 6.57$) with a standard deviation of .57.

Item 2: I want to do whatever is necessary to ensure that the students for whom I am responsible are well-educated and successful learners. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. No significant difference was found ($t(47) = -2.257, p < .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 6.39$) with a standard deviation of .78 was significantly difference from the mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 6.81$) with a standard deviation of .49.

Item 3: I am committed to creating both an educational environment and learning experiences for students that honor and respect who they are. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. A significant difference was found ($t(47) = -6.486, p < .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 5.39$) with a standard deviation of 1.067 for the 2015 students, and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 6.85$) with a standard deviation of .78.

Item 4: I am willing to ask myself uncomfortable questions about systemic oppression (e.g., racism), cultural preferences, and insufficient learning conditions and resources that are obstacles to learning for many students. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. A significant difference was found ($t(47) = -8.378, p < .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 4.13$) with a standard deviation of 1.14 for the 2015 students, and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 6.42$) with a standard deviation of .75.

Item 5: I am willing to ask questions about systemic oppression, cultural preferences, and insufficient learning conditions and resources that may be uncomfortable for others in my school or district. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. A significant difference was found ($t(47) = -4.10, p < .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 4.61$) with a standard deviation of 1.26 and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 5.96$) with a standard deviation of 1.03.

Item 6: I believe that all students benefit from educational practices that engage them in learning about their cultural heritage and understanding their cultural background. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. A significant difference was found ($t(47) = -2.010, p < .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 5.739$) with a standard deviation of 1.25 and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 6.346$) with a standard deviation of .84.

Item 7: I believe that all students benefit from educational practices that provide them with hope, direction, and preparation for their future lives. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016

candidates. No significant difference was found ($t(47) = -1.470, p > .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 6.391$) with a standard deviation of .988 and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 6.73$) with a standard deviation of .60.

Item 8: It is important to know how well our district serves the various cultural and ethnic communities represented in our schools, and it is also important to understand how well served they feel by the educational practices in our schools. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. No significant difference was found ($t(47) = -1.334, p > .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 6.730$) with a standard deviation of 1.02 and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 5.956$) with a standard deviation of .79.

Item 9: It is important to know how the various cultural and ethnic/cultural communities represented in our schools view me as an educational leader and to understand how well my leadership serves their expectations. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. No significant difference was found ($t(47) = -0.765, p > .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 6.173$) with a standard deviation of 1.07 and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 6.38$) with a standard deviation of 0.85.

Item 10: Our district and schools are successful only when all demographics and cultural groups are improving academically and socially. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. No significant difference was found ($t(47) = -0.614, p > .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 5.78$) with a standard deviation of 1.38 and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 6.00$) with a standard deviation of 1.09.

Item 11: Cultural discomfort and disagreements are normal occurrences in a diverse society such as ours and are parts of everyday interactions. A significant difference was found ($t(47) = 2.069, p > .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 5.82$) with a standard deviation of 1.55 and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 4.84$) with a standard deviation of 1.73.

Item 12: I believe that lack of cultural understanding and historic distrust can result in cultural discomfort and disagreements. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. No significant difference was found ($t(47) = 1.403, p > .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 6.21$) with a standard deviation of 0.99 and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 5.67$) with a standard deviation of 1.21.

Item 13: I believe we can learn about and implement diverse and improved instructional practices that will effectively serve all our students. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. No significant difference was found ($t(47) = -1.302, p > .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 6.08$) with a standard deviation of 0.99 and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 5.67$) with a standard deviation of 0.57.

Item 14: I believe we can use disaggregated data to understand more precisely the achievement status of all students in our schools and that we can use that information to identify and implement effective instructional practices for each of them. No significant difference was found ($t(47) = -0.559, p > .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 6.00$) with a standard deviation of 1.08 and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 6.15$) with a standard deviation of 0.833.

Item 15: As a leader, it is important for me to be able to communicate across cultures and to facilitate communication among diverse cultural groups. An independent-sample was calculated comparing the mean score of 2015 candidates to the mean score of the 2016 candidates. No significant difference was found ($t(47) = 0.301, p > .05$). The mean score for the 2015 candidates was ($m = 6.78$) with a standard deviation of 0.52 and a mean score for the 2016 candidates ($m = 6.73$) with a standard deviation of 0.66.

Discussion

The *Cultural Proficiency Receptivity Scale* was used as a means for educational leadership candidates to self-reflect on what it takes to educate the whole child in terms of embracing a mindset and awareness of other aspects associated with cultural receptivity and proficiency. The data analysis provided the researchers additional support in emphasizing that administrators involved in schools should knowledgeably demonstrate receptivity and be proficient in the acknowledgement of cultural differences in terms of how each cultural group learns best. The data analysis indicated the inherent differences between the candidate groups in each cohort.

For Item Number Three, the 2016 candidates seemed more committed to creating an educational environment and learning experiences centered on honoring who students are than the 2015 candidates. For Item Number Four, the 2016 candidates seemed more willing to ask themselves the difficult questions surrounding issues of racism and insufficient learning conditions and resources over the 2015 candidates. Item Number Five indicated that the 2016 candidates seemed more willing to ask others in the school or district the difficult questions surrounding issues of racism and insufficient learning conditions and resources over the 2015 candidates. The data in Item Number Six indicated that both the 2015 and 2016 (difference in variance by .41) candidates believed that all students would benefit from educational practices that engage them in learning about their own cultural heritage and background. Finally, Item Number 11 denoted that the 2015 candidates felt that daily cultural discomfort and disagreements are normal occurrences in a diverse society over the 2016 candidates.

Conclusions

School leaders need to understand individuals from different cultures and engage others effectively, which will lead to a true definition of what cross-cultural relations should be (Clayton & Goodwin, 2015; El Ganzoury, 2012; Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012). It was suggested that educational leadership must adopt a mindset and belief system that will aid in increasing cultural competence and proficiency in order to be effective (Wlodkowski, & Ginsberg, 1995).

For these reasons, the data uncovered the following themes:

- School leaders must understand that culture shapes us personally and professionally and reflecting on perspectives is essential (Hansuvadha & Slater, 2012).
- Consideration of current events and social issues may influence results of future studies using the CCRS (Cowan, 2007; Raskin et al., 2015).

- Future educational leadership preparation and professional development programs should incorporate reflective practices as a support for making sound decisions about diverse student groups (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2011).

Implications for Future Research

As educators and future administrators, it is critical that we are aware of our own lens in which we view students and families (Anderson, 2012; Cowan, 2007; Vogel, 2011). It is paramount that seeing our students and families from a more diverse perspective will aid in the development of equitable policies and practice in the schools, which will promote success of all of our students (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2011; Lumby, 2012).

The incorporation of reflective practices using scientific instruments may be a better approach in determining educational leadership dispositions (Bustamante et al., 2009; El Ganzoury, 2012; Hernandez & Kose, 2012). Continuous professional development for educational leadership is needed to ascertain if there is a relationship between student success based on educational policies and practices (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2011; Mette, Nieuwenhuizen, & Hvidston, 2016). More research in this area is needed in terms of how social issues may or may not impact the cultural competence and proficiency of school leadership (Clayton & Goodwin, 2015; Cowan, 2007).

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