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Why Is Culturally Proficient Leadership Important?

Giving priority to what matters is the path of risk and adventure, but I also believe that the institutions and culture that surround us are waiting for us to transform them into a fuller expression of our own desires. We have the potential to reclaim and experience our freedom and put our helplessness behind us. We have the capacity to experience an intimate connection with other people and with all we come in contact with, rather than feeling that we exist in relationships born of barter and instrumentality. We also have the capacity and maturity to live a life of service and engagement, rather than the primary pursuit of entitlement and interests that focus on ourselves.

—Peter Block (2001, p. 7)

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The Case: Maple View

Maple View is a growing suburban city that has expanded rapidly during the past 6 years. Two years ago, the city's population was 30,000 and included mainly middle-income and lower-salaried workers and their families. At that time, the new Pine Hills Estates development of "executive" homes was just beginning to grow and add upper-income residents. These professionals commuted from several large high-tech corporate headquarters and research and development centers in the area. It was just 2 years ago that the city's Planning and Economic Development Department estimated that the Pine Hills Estates residents represented approximately 5% of the population. At that time, middle-income residents comprised approximately 65% of the city's population and major economic base; approximately 23% of the population were low-salaried, service industry workers; and the remaining 7% were "working poor" or unemployed and dependent on government assistance for many of their basic services and family needs.

Now, 2 years later, Maple View's population has increased by more than 2,500 residents. The city's chamber of commerce has adopted the slogan, "Maple View on the Rise: Our City Is Growing to Meet Your Needs!" This growth has included additional residents in all sectors of the population. The key stimulus for this increase has been the upsurge of housing across economic segments. On the west side, the developer of the Pine Hills Estates has built an additional 150 large, expensive homes, many around a newly developed golf course. Much of this new construction has taken over land previously used for agriculture, including a popular cut-flower farm that employed 40 people throughout the year, with additional temporary workers during high-volume times. The west side has also been a growth area for new middle-class housing tracts that have drawn new residents to Maple View from more congested and densely populated urban centers. Three new, moderately priced developments have added 275 well-constructed but small homes that have sold very quickly because of their pricing. In addition, because of the master plan developed with the support of the volunteer service group, Leadership Maple View, the Planning and Economic Development Department submitted a housing development proposal to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Maple View successfully won a federal grant and built 186 subsidized apartments and 30 low-cost houses on the east side of the city.

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The city's rapid growth is exerting pressure on its social institutions, such as schools, public transit, and hospitals, while at the same time stimulating economic development of its business community. Several new retail shopping centers, banks, chain restaurants, movie theater complexes, and national chain superstores such as Home Depot, Target, and PETsMART have opened on the west side. In addition, a new upscale shopping "galleria" has replaced the old mall next to the state highway. A state-of-the-art movie multiplex is near completion next to the galleria, along with four new upscale restaurants. The city's planners are also developing construction specifications for a civic center complex that will include a new city hall, police department, and performing arts center. The specifications will go out to bid next month.

The east side, with the exception of the new low-cost housing units, is not experiencing much outside economic development. A major state highway divides Maple View into two separate communities, and few east side residents go beyond this boundary unless they are venturing to one of the large discount chain stores just across the highway. The "old" downtown, as people in the city's business community refer to it these days, is no longer the economic center of the city. Many of the original stores have gone out of business. However, new businesses, stores, and restaurants are opening in the old buildings, and they are contributing to a vibrant local economic community that offers the products and services reflecting the lifestyles and preferences of the east side residents. The city's Planning and Economic Development Department is neither investing in new development nor refurbishing the old neighborhood parks and public buildings on the east side, and the area is taking on a shabby look of disrepair in some sections. Quite a few east side homeowners in the Maple Street and Main Street sections are justifiably proud of their vintage houses and have invested a great deal of time and effort in restoring and maintaining them. In fact, many young professional couples are choosing to purchase these older homes and live in east side neighborhoods rather than in the newly built homes on the west side.

The large University Medical Center is located near the northwest city limits of Maple View. This 450-bed teaching hospital is an important source of employment for the city's residents—from doctors to janitors and from administrators to laundry workers. The hospital's chief administrative officer, Dr. Jack Bradley, has been involved in community development efforts in Maple View for the

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15 years that he has worked at the hospital. As a pediatrician, he has experienced the changes in Maple View's population firsthand. In the past 5 or 6 years, he has treated an increasingly diverse group of young patients and also has observed the results of economic, cultural, social, and educational disparities. Dr. Bradley lives with his family in an older section of Maple View on the east side. As the volunteer project director for Leadership Maple View, Dr. Bradley has made it his personal mission to develop leadership capacity across his diverse community. He spearheaded the leadership group that developed the proposal for federal funding of low-cost housing in the city. He is currently working with Dr. James Harris, Director of Academic Programs at the Tri-Cities Community College (TCCC), on a new leadership effort to involve east-side residents in an innovative bilingual-bicultural medical assistant training at the hospital. The new program will be called "Culturally Proficient Medical Assistance Training."

Tri-Cities Community College is on the southeastern edge of the city, approximately 5 miles from the old downtown center. The 2-year college serves 1,900 students from Maple View and two nearby cities. Dr. Harris and other administrators at the college are concerned about the disappointing statistics they have just received as part of a report on their students' transfer to 4-year colleges and universities. Only approximately one third of their entering students complete the university transfer credits and go on to complete a 4-year degree program. The administrators at TCCC worry that many graduates from area high schools are entering the college poorly prepared to succeed in the rigorous academic program required for transfer to a 4-year degree program. Dr. Harris fears that these students not only enter TCCC poorly prepared but also have no idea how to access sufficient support and assistance to become fully prepared. He believes that these students grow to fault themselves and accept blame for not having the "cultural capital" to successfully navigate the educational system. Dr. Harris has made an appointment with Dr. Barbara Campbell, the superintendent of the Maple View School District, to discuss this issue and find ways to support the students.

■ Maple View School District

The public school system in Maple View has a great reputation. The district consistently scores in the top 15% of districts throughout the state in the statewide standardized testing program. As a

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result, almost all the families in the city send their children to their local, neighborhood schools. The Maple View School District serves 11,200 students from preschool through Grade 12. The ethnic composition of the student enrollment reflects the racial diversity of the city's population:

37% European American

24% Latino American (first, second, and third generation from Central America, South America, and Mexico)

21% Asian American (third and fourth generation from China and second and third generation from Korea and the Philippines)

14% African American

2% Native American

2% Pacific Islanders (first and second generation from American Samoa)

Twelve percent of the student population is in special education programs, and 10% of the students are learning English as a second language. Across the district, students speak nine different primary languages.

Dr. Barbara Campbell, in her second year as superintendent, and the members of the district's school board, along with other district administrators, recently worked together at an administrative retreat to create a statement of their vision for the district. They published the following statement: "The Maple View School District commits its effort and resources to provide a high-quality education for all students that enables each one to achieve or exceed high academic and performance standards." Dr. Campbell, or "Barbara" as she prefers to be called by her colleagues, is not completely satisfied with the negotiated statement, but she knows that she can work with it. However, she is pleased with the collaborative process used to develop the vision statement.

The growth in student enrollment is a major concern for the superintendent and the school board. In the past year, they have dealt with thorny issues of reassigning students, locating portable classrooms on school sites, and investing in new construction. Throughout this challenging period, Dr. Campbell has kept her focus on issues of equitable distribution of resources, fair and just allocation of high-quality educational experiences, and the acceleration of achievement for undereducated and underperforming students.

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The school board members are elected at-large and serve the entire district rather than a particular geographical area or constituency. In elections during the past 10 years, very few east-side residents have sought office, and no one from the east-side neighborhoods has served on the board for at least 6 years. Eighteen months ago, the five current board members asked Dr. Campbell, then Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, to consider assuming the position of district superintendent. The previous superintendent retired after 10 years in the position. Barbara agreed, and the board's vote to approve her contract was unanimous, and they assured her that she had their full support.

Recent construction and development within the district's boundaries, especially on the west side, have resulted in significant revenue growth from developer fees and real estate assessments. Dr. Campbell views these funds as resources that she can use to equalize resources across the district. She is troubled by poor student performance results in the schools in east-side neighborhoods, and she knows that those schools have fewer fully qualified teachers than schools on the west side. She also knows that many of the teachers at the east-side's Maple View Elementary School and Maple View Middle School are working with emergency credentials and are not fully prepared to teach the subject matter for their assigned grade levels or departments. Barbara's vision is to transform these schools into high-performing learning communities like the schools on the west side.

■ Maple View: The People

The story of the city of Maple View, its school district, and its residents provides an illustration of why culturally proficient leadership is important. The fictional characters in the case face many of the challenges that will confront you as a leader who is searching for ways to integrate culturally proficient attitudes and behaviors into your leadership practices. Because schools do not exist in isolation of the communities they serve, the Maple View case story allows us to present a contextualized setting in which a variety of situations occur and in which the members of this community are willing and motivated to reveal themselves and their thinking because they have problems to solve. The process of learning and solving the problems faced by characters in this case story makes known the cultural transformation that takes hold in their schools and alters the outcomes of its members. This case presents only a small sampling of the kinds of issues that might surface in an educational setting such

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as the Maple View School District. Nonetheless, the case offers an opportunity to analyze the actions of the characters and learn why culturally proficient leadership is so important.

You will meet many of the citizens of Maple View in your reading of this book. The Resource lists the people in the sequence in which they appear in the book. People are identified by their roles in the school or community.

Leadership Action That Matters

In the chapters that follow, the Maple View case unfolds as a story of leadership that matters. The leaders—administrators, teachers, parents, and community members—of Maple View tackle challenges such as equitable opportunities and resources to learn, culturally sensitive instruction, expectations and assumptions about student performance, and willingness to learn new ways of being with students. As educators and parents work together to resolve these problems, they learn to view their individual and collective behavior through the lens of cultural proficiency. They learn to ask, “Will this decision to act result in a more culturally proficient organization?”

Each chapter offers an opportunity to learn more about the phases of development toward cultural proficiency and to consider why it is important and how you might integrate culturally proficient practices into your daily leadership practice. The elements of culturally proficient practice provide benchmarks against which you can calibrate your leadership behavior. To begin, use the scale presented in the following section to assess your openness to the work you will undertake in this book.

Invitation: Assess Your Receptivity

To read this book with purpose, we invite you to assess your receptivity to its content. The Cultural Proficiency Receptivity Scale will assist you in your own learning. Cultural proficiency is deep, personal work that one undertakes before attempting to influence the behavior of others. Chapters 2 through 5 present the tools of cultural proficiency designed to support you in self-examination of your own values and behaviors and to enable you to examine the policies and practices of your school and its subunits.

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It is our belief that personal leadership evolves from the inner work experienced by effective leaders. Leader effectiveness occurs when leaders are clear with themselves and others about what they value and believe (Banks, 1999; Covey, 1989; Heifetz, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992). In discussing the inner work of principals, Fullan (2003) states, “The principal with a moral imperative can help realize it only by developing leadership in others” (p. xv).

The Cultural Proficiency Receptivity Scale is a nonscientific instrument designed to guide you through a process of self-reflection. The concepts in this scale derive from the information you will be reading in Chapters 2 through 5. We urge you to read each of the statements and indicate your level of agreement on the 1-to-7 Likert scale. A response of 1 indicates strong disagreement, and a response of 7 indicates strong agreement. When you have finished reading the book, we encourage you to return to the scale and reassess your levels of agreement. The purpose of this scale is to introduce you to important concepts in a manner that personalizes the content of the book. The scale is not a test and is not intended for that use.

Cultural Proficiency Receptivity Scale

I believe that all children and youth learn successfully when informed and caring teachers assist them and make sufficient resources available to them.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I want to do whatever is necessary to ensure that the students for whom I am responsible are well-educated and successful learners.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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I am committed to creating both an educational environment and learning experiences for our students that honor and respect who they are.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I am willing to ask myself uncomfortable questions about racism, cultural preferences, and insufficient learning conditions and resources that are obstacles to learning for many students.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I am willing to ask questions about racism, cultural preferences, and insufficient learning conditions and resources that may be uncomfortable for others in my school or district.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I believe that all students benefit from educational practices that engage them in learning about their cultural heritage and understanding their cultural background.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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I believe that all students benefit from educational practices that provide them with hope, direction, and preparation for their future lives.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

It is important to know how the various cultural and ethnic communities represented in our schools view me as an educational leader and to understand how well my leadership serves their expectations.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Our district and schools are successful only when all subgroups are improving academically and socially.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Cultural discomfort and disagreements are normal occurrences in a diverse society such as ours and are parts of everyday interactions.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I believe that lack of cultural understanding and historic distrust can result in cultural discomfort and disagreements.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I believe we can learn about and implement diverse and improved instructional practices that will effectively serve all our students.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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As a leader, it is important for me to be able to communicate across cultures and to facilitate communication among diverse cultural groups.

Strongly Disagree		Agree			Strongly Agree	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Review your responses, compute your total score, and record it here _____. (The range of scores is from 15 to 105.)

What does your score mean? Are you highly receptive? Are you not receptive? Are you “middling”? We ask that you resist using your initial score as anything more than a baseline of information. This book will guide and support your personal journey to becoming more effective in cross-cultural situations. Accordingly, this instrument is one tool among several reflective tools in this book that you will use in the development of a personal leadership perspective for making a difference in your school community.

When you have completed the book, we invite you to return to your responses and to analyze them to support you in your journey to cultural proficiency. If you are reading about cultural proficiency for your own personal growth, reflect on your responses and be prepared to revisit them after completing the book. At that time, you will be able to assess what you have learned about yourself, about personal change, and about complex organizational change. If you are reading this book as part of a professional development activity with colleagues or as part of a university course, discuss your responses with others and explain why you responded as you did to the several items. Then, as with the focus on personal growth, you will want to revisit your responses after completing your work and reflect on your learning about personal and complex change.