PERCEPTIONS OF FORMAL AND NONFORMAL LEADERS ON CULTURAL PROFICIENCY IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

When it comes to equity and access through culturally proficient practices, what schools intend to do versus what they actually do can be incongruous by defaulting to traditional accountability metrics over change and innovation. Utilizing the Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices, the purpose of this study was to investigate formal and nonformal educational leaders' perceptions regarding the barriers and next steps of Cultural Proficiency implementation following a 10-day Cultural Proficiency training. Findings indicated variations based on individual identity, position in the school system, and external socio-political factors that influence how individuals perceive the implementation, advancement, and/or limitations of Cultural Proficiency work.

Keywords: Cultural Proficiency, educational leadership, transformative, school change, equity
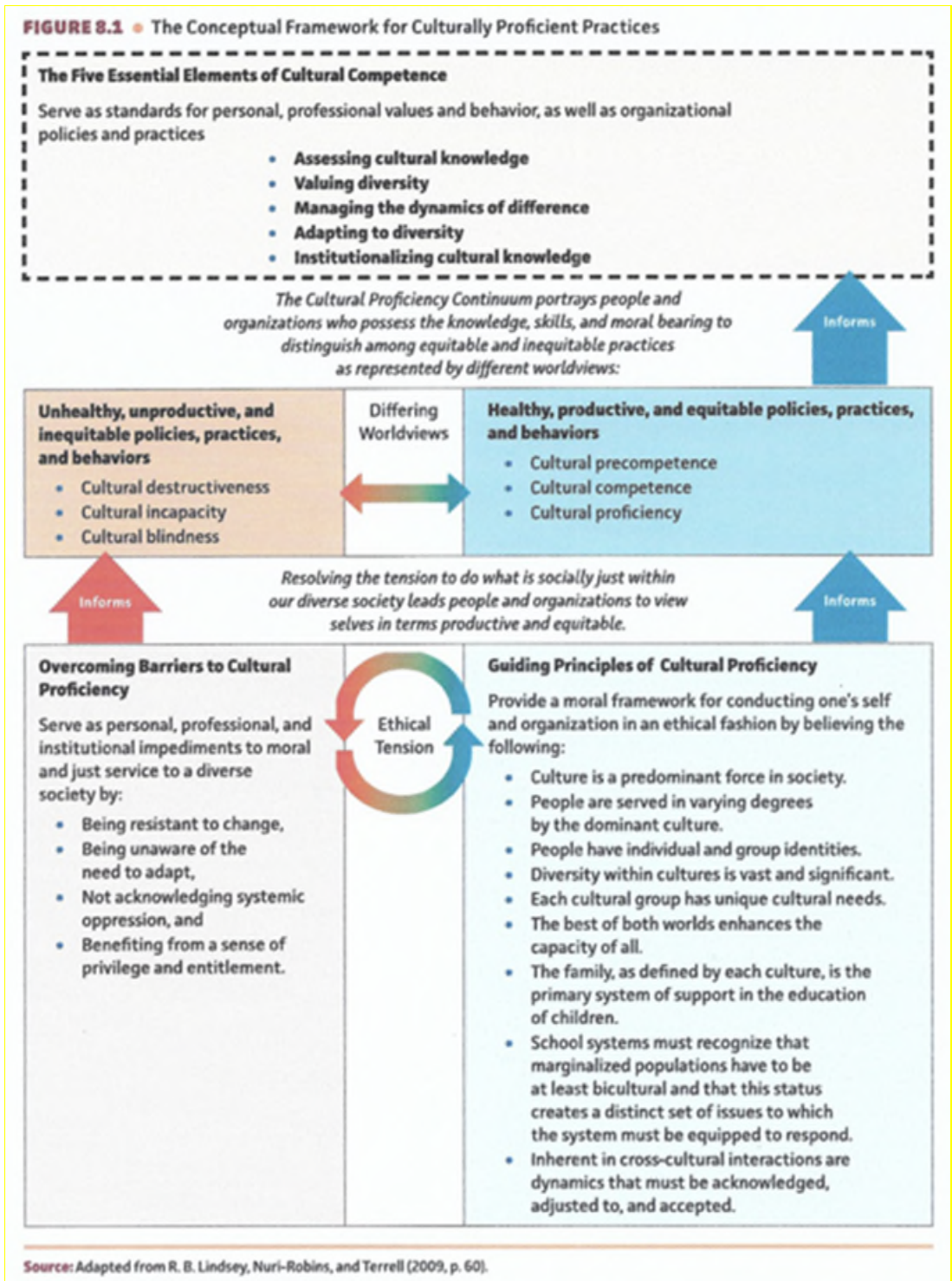
INTRODUCTION

Educational leaders come to understand the importance of equity and access through culturally proficient practices (Biegel, 2010; Bockenek & Brown, 2001; Kumashiro, 2000; Lindsey et al., 2018). However, when it comes to creating measurable outcomes and documenting this process for school reculturing, the democratic process for school change and innovation becomes lost and substituted for more traditional accountability metrics such as standardized tests and sanctions (Au, 2007; Dewey, 1937; Mintrop, 2012; Schein, 1988). Even with good intentions, what schools intend to do and what schools actually do are sometimes incongruous (Kumashiro, 2000; Oakes & Wells, 1997; Theoharis, 2007) when using terms like 'innovation' and 'equity' as foundations (Christensen et al., 2015; Ellis et al., 2019) in the name of improving student outcomes (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Boulay et al., 2018; Grubb, 2010; Mintrop, 2004; Reeves, 2000). Formal and nonformal leaders assist in this disruption, creating equity and access for all and, thus, must be included in the school change process (Lindsey et al., 2018; Welborn et al., 2022; Soles, 2020). Formal leaders are typically those who have official positions that grant them authority and power in schools and districts. In contrast, nonformal leaders have no official role assigning to them, yet they present attributes and leadership skills effective for school change.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilized the Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices (Cross, 1989; Welborn et al., 2022) to provide a focus on the transformative leadership intersection of formal and nonformal leaders via behaviors, language, policies, and practices of school, district, and community stakeholders (Figure 8.1). Formal and nonformal leaders assist in creating equity and access for all and, thus, must be included in the school change processes (Welborn et al., 2022). Transformative leadership in education facilitates positive school changes (Shields, 2010). Observing through a transformative leadership lens, a culturally proficient approach considers the barriers to transformation at the classroom level and reflects on the barriers' effect on bigger systems at play where leadership is essential. Taking this perspective provided the opportunity to glean how formal and nonformal leaders impacted the implementation process of the Cultural Proficiency Framework.

PURPOSE AND TRAINING GOAL

This study investigated formal and nonformal educational leaders' perceptions regarding the 10-day Cultural Proficiency Training, its influence on their educational practice, the degree to which change has occurred since the training, and potential next steps in continuing the work. The 10-day Cultural Proficiency Training aimed to familiarize participants with the Cultural Proficiency Framework and how to utilize it to address equity, access, and inclusion issues within their personal and professional environments. Participants used the Tools for Cultural Proficiency to build capacity and change conversations, practices, and policies to serve all students. Interviews were conducted with three individuals who went through inaugural trainings.

FIGURE 8.1 ● The Conceptual Framework for Culturally Proficient Practices

The Five Essential Elements of Cultural Competence

Serve as standards for personal, professional values and behavior, as well as organizational policies and practices

- Assessing cultural knowledge
- Valuing diversity
- Managing the dynamics of difference
- Adapting to diversity
- Institutionalizing cultural knowledge

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum portrays people and organizations who possess the knowledge, skills, and moral bearing to distinguish among equitable and inequitable practices as represented by different worldviews:

Unhealthy, unproductive, and inequitable policies, practices, and behaviors

- Cultural destructiveness
- Cultural incapacity
- Cultural blindness

Differing Worldviews

Informs

Healthy, productive, and equitable policies, practices, and behaviors

- Cultural precompetence
- Cultural competence
- Cultural proficiency

Resolving the tension to do what is socially just within our diverse society leads people and organizations to view selves in terms productive and equitable.

Informs

Informs

Overcoming Barriers to Cultural Proficiency

Serve as personal, professional, and institutional impediments to moral and just service to a diverse society by:

- Being resistant to change,
- Being unaware of the need to adapt,
- Not acknowledging systemic oppression, and
- Benefiting from a sense of privilege and entitlement.

Ethical Tension

Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency

Provide a moral framework for conducting one's self and organization in an ethical fashion by believing the following:

- Culture is a predominant force in society.
- People are served in varying degrees by the dominant culture.
- People have individual and group identities.
- Diversity within cultures is vast and significant.
- Each cultural group has unique cultural needs.
- The best of both worlds enhances the capacity of all.
- The family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children.
- School systems must recognize that marginalized populations have to be at least bicultural and that this status creates a distinct set of issues to which the system must be equipped to respond.
- Inherent in cross-cultural interactions are dynamics that must be acknowledged, adjusted to, and accepted.

Source: Adapted from R. B. Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, and Terrell (2009, p. 60).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This article provides findings and conclusions related to two research questions that were used to guide a larger case study:

1. What challenges do educational leaders face during the work of Cultural Proficiency?
2. In what ways do the school district's implementation plans and experiences influence changes associated with Culturally Proficient Practices to serve all students?

METHODOLOGY

As the aim of this study involved the need for understanding individual perspectives and experiences, a qualitative methodology was chosen since such methods are geared towards understanding how individuals make meaning of their contexts in relation to their surroundings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mertler & Charles, 2011). This required the researchers to obtain detailed, descriptive data from participants to inductively understand how participants of the 10-day Cultural Proficiency Training make meaning of that experience and its relation to their practice and perceptions (Mertler & Charles, 2011).

Given this methodology, a one-on-one, semi-structured interview approach was utilized to obtain the perspectives and experiences of participants. Participants were given the option to do a video conference or phone interview at a time they deemed convenient for their schedule. An interview protocol, based on this study's research questions, was utilized to assist with guiding the interview, but the semi-structured approach allowed the researchers the malleability to probe further into presented responses or explore topics non-sequentially (Ayres, 2008; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2017). Pseudonyms were chosen for locations and participants.

Data Collection and Sampling

The District of Leone provided a list of 10 individuals and their email addresses to the researchers of those who attended the 10-day Cultural Proficiency Training. These participants were selected to attend this Training as representatives of equity work in the District. The researchers emailed these individuals to schedule either a video conference or phone interview for up to 60 minutes that would be audio and/or video recorded. Out of the 10 individuals, four agreed to participate in the study, while three declined an interview. The remaining three individuals did not respond to either initial invitations or follow-up invitations sent via email 10 days later.

Of the four individuals who agreed to participate, one chose a phone interview, and the other three chose the video conferencing option. Of the four participants who agreed to schedule an interview, three were interviewed for the study, while one did not attend the scheduled interview, nor did they respond to follow-up emails about the interview and study. Thus, a total of three individuals were interviewed for this study. During the interviews, the researchers took preliminary notes on observations made to revisit during the data analysis process (Emerson et al., 2011; Saldaña, 2016). Recordings of each interview were transcribed to perform coding operations during data analysis.

Data Analysis

The researchers utilized an online speech-to-text program as a first-round of transcription on recorded interviews for efficiency. Researchers then reviewed and cleaned transcripts to ensure

accuracy compared to recordings and engaged in member-checking with respective participants to make sure their narratives were captured accurately and to allow participants to provide additional clarifications or insights (Glesne, 2006; Maxwell, 2013; Mero-Jaffe, 2011; Seidman, 2013). From there, iterative coding procedures were performed by hand, which began with open coding to uncover emic findings (Saldaña, 2016). A second round of process coding was utilized to identify actions taken by participants and their perceptions of actions occurring within their environments (Saldaña, 2016). A third round of focused coding was performed to assist with categorizing and relating codes either within or outside of the outlined research questions for this study (Saldaña, 2016; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). The researchers collaboratively analyzed findings to evaluate perspectives and interpretations after each round of coding.

Participants

There are three participants in this study. Ben, an Asian-American male (he/him/his) who grew up in the South, was part of the first cohort to go through the 10-day Cultural Proficiency training. He had a background in teaching within the field of humanities and obtained an assistant principal position shortly after completing the training at a different site. During the interview, he noted being disconnected from his original site's post-training results and plans and was still getting familiar with his new site and their relationship to Cultural Proficiency. He was the only person of color interviewee and the only male-identified participant in this study. Daisy was an assistant superintendent who identified as a White female (she/her/hers), leader/educator, teacher, and learner. Like Ben, she also participated in the first cohort of the 10-day Cultural Proficiency training and was integral in introducing the district to those trainings. Rachelle, a self-identified woman (she/her/hers) with a mixture of Western and Northern European ethnicity, was a mother in a bi-racial/bilingual family. She was a former student-athlete and coach who was active in extreme sports. Her role at the time of her interview was as a language teacher who was a non-native speaker of the language and who had traveled to and lived in many countries that spoke that language. She attended the 10-day Cultural Proficiency training as part of the second cohort going through the program. These three participants represent the following findings.

FINDINGS

When asked about challenges faced while doing Cultural Proficiency work, participants responded in two ways. The first included responses related to systemic, long-held, well-known barriers to student learning within education. The second included interpreting the question as referring to challenges within the district and school that inhibited the promotion of Cultural Proficiency. Barriers to participants themselves or other individuals were not discussed by participants for either interpretation.

Value-Systems

Various mentions of existing value-systems, or interpretations thereof, emerged from each participant in discussing challenges. Topics that were mentioned in relation to value-systems

included time, priority, and politics. Value-systems represent explicit values, language, and standards for effective personal interaction and professional practices (Welborn et al., 2022).

Time

Different perceptions of time were presented in interviews: scheduling, duration, and bandwidth. An example of these three aspects of time can be seen in Daisy's experience of when the trainings were scheduled,

> …as a [district executive leadership group] member, I struggled because my colleagues in [the district executive leadership group] did not necessarily prioritize those 10 days [of training] that I was away from the office. And so that's where I personally have had difficulties of stepping out to take a phone call, and I'm missing the robust conversations and the activities. And so, at the beginning, over the summer or such, there would be fewer distractions. But once the school year was underway, I would find more and more distractions where I might have to leave a half-day. And I was super apologetic, and of course, the trainers were very understanding. But yet that's not the intent. The intent is to truly be present for the 10 days. And I did find that to be very, very difficult to prioritize, because my whole system wasn't necessarily prioritizing [these trainings] yet.

This example demonstrated these overlapping perceptions of 'time.' Having the trainings during the summer (scheduling) made it possible for Daisy to be present (bandwidth) during those long training days (duration) due to fewer overall distractions. However, when trainings occurred during the school year (scheduling), distractions from her colleagues prevented Daisy from being able to be fully present and participate (bandwidth) in these extensive training sessions (duration).

Rachelle also brought up various issues with 'time.' Though she felt it was an honor to be chosen for the second training cohort, there was concern and hesitation over being out of the classroom for so many days (scheduling and duration). It was not until she underwent the training that she realized an appreciation for the duration of time:

> …when I put in all my req[uest] forms to take the days off from school, I thought, "Oh my gosh, we have to go there for three whole days? I don't want to be out of my classroom for three whole days, that's a lot of time." But then once you're there and you're involved and you have time to reflect and you have time to think, you're, like, "Oh wow, I couldn't have done it in an afternoon. I couldn't have done it on a Saturday morning." I needed those three days to go through the process in order to really get on board.

Rachelle's experience demonstrated a contradiction between her and Daisy's experiences. While Rachelle, as a classroom teacher, expressed concern with spending time away from regular duties during the school year (scheduling and duration) prior to the training, she came to appreciate the need for it to truly be present for the trainings (bandwidth) after the fact. As an administrator, Daisy had the obstacle of regular duties conflicting with the training during the academic year and preventing her from being present during the training (scheduling and bandwidth). Questions that

arose from this contradiction included: 1) Does being absent for those days during the academic year negatively impact students as Rachelle feared?; 2) Was there a positive change to the classroom environment as a result of attending the training?; and 3) Did Daisy's inability to be present during trainings due to work-conflicts negatively impact her ability to experience and gain key components from the training? Though there was no direct way to test for answers to these questions, it demonstrated differing value-systems for those attending trainings (teachers versus administrators) and how their regular duties either allowed for or acted as barriers to Cultural Proficiency trainings.

Another challenge that Rachelle brought up was the work being done post-training. Her district held monthly meetings after school and during the week to strategize how to promote Cultural Proficiency trainings and practices in the district. However, she relayed how those two-hour meetings were taxing on members, especially after spending all day teaching virtually (scheduling and bandwidth) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, during those meetings, Rachelle was unsure whether such work was truly valued by the district and personnel since 1) the time dedicated to it was relegated to after-hours or only as 15-minute activities at the beginning of a packed staff meeting (scheduling, duration, bandwidth), and 2) it was considered an optional activity and some staff were more dedicated than others in attending and promoting this work (scheduling):

> …using our kind of advisory committee that we are working on right now, [we should] have maybe a half-day or something where you're not waiting until the end of the workday to get it done…and make sure that everybody's there, make sure that everybody's present, make sure that we're able to kind of move forward […] So changing the focus [to], "Yeah we're going to go ahead and pay you hourly to be involved and to show up," and things like that. But if the district really, really, really wants buy-in from the committee and from having us go out to our sites and kind of spread the word, then maybe it does need to kind of shift in terms of how they do their meetings and how much emphasis they put on the meeting.

This sentiment was not brought up by Ben or Daisy, who were more administrative in their duties, which again contrasts perceptions between those in the classroom and those in administration. These points regarding a value in time also lend themselves to the topic of values in priority.

Priority

As addressed by Rachelle and Daisy, questions regarding the district and personnel's focus, or perceived lack thereof, on Cultural Proficiency due to time constraints signaled the value and priority placed on Cultural Proficiency work. As mentioned by Daisy, her colleagues' disregard for her time while participating in the training made it clear to her that they did not prioritize her ability to be present in those trainings. Though this brought up questions as to whether this might have been due to other personnel issues (i.e., lack of training, lack of communication, the nature of issues needing her attention, delegation of duties), it was clear that Daisy's experiences in the

Cultural Proficiency training were hindered by such disruptions which impacted her perceptions of her colleagues and their priorities related to Cultural Proficiency training.

All three participants, to varying degrees, noted differences in priority for Cultural Proficiency work when it came to district personnel. Rachelle and Daisy brought up a lack of access to trainings by classified versus certified staff, as certified staff or administrators were sent to trainings over classified staff. This subsequently limited the classified staff from promoting or supporting the work done by the district toward Cultural Proficiency. Such barriers to access may present an assumed hierarchy of who district administrators perceived to be eligible and have priority for such trainings. However, as an administrator, Daisy noted in her interview that she would like more classified personnel to participate in trainings. A question that arose regarding this matter was whether classified personnel may have similar concerns to ones brought up by Rachelle on attending such trainings (e.g., finances, duties being put off while away, etc.). Districts should consider and proactively address this to ease concerns for both classified and certified staff for future trainings.

Another issue brought up by all three participants was that Cultural Proficiency is not typically seen as a priority for others in the district, or it is seen as an auxiliary topic to other professional development topics rather than a central value on which to build the district's mission and policies. Ben perceived others as hesitating towards Cultural Proficiency work, while Rachelle noted others were not as dedicated to the work due to absences at the Cultural Proficiency workgroups. Again, Rachelle also noted perceiving the district as not being as dedicated due to having meetings and workgroups after-hours and designating them as optional.

Rachelle and Daisy also brought up perceptions and observations regarding different types of personnel in the district, notably veteran personnel who have been in schools for a while. Rachelle summed it up as such:

> …[promoting Cultural Proficiency is] a daunting task because you've got those old-school folks that have been around for a long time, and it's very difficult to convince them that this is amazing work and it does actually function […] That's the one thing that I hear from them is, "Oh what's this new group? What's this new organization? What's this new system that we have to learn?," because so many, back in the [19]80's and [19]90's in education, every single acronym in the world was thrown at you. Every single new concept was thrown at you, and you're like, "Okay, I have to learn this now," or, "I have to learn this, I have to involve this in my curriculum, in my teaching." […] They treat [Cultural Proficiency] the same way because they don't know how important it is.

This example shows both a lack of communication or set expectations regarding the goal and purpose of these trainings to district personnel and a tension that exists between those excited, willing, and wanting to charge ahead with this work versus those who still need easing into the work or understanding that this is a priority topic and focus for the district. An interesting approach brought up by Ben was:

If it's important enough, you make it a priority, and you find the time. And, given our current climate, I think you find the time. You find the resources to do it. But, I mean, it's not easy. It will take time, and there are people who are not going to be prepared for it or want to do it to face up to those things. But, slowly but surely, you got the critical few turning into a critical mass and then hopefully right the boat with where those people who are refusing to admit it are the exception rather than the rule. And then you keep working at it on trying to convince them, too. So you just don't stop. […] I'm a big believer in, 'Fake it until you make it'. So, if they're going through the motions, at least they're going through that motion and they're practicing that skill. And eventually, maybe little things connect. But if there's a certain behavior that you want them to do while they may not believe in the theory behind the behavior, well, you're still getting the behavior that you want to see whether it be treating kids equitably, discipline-wise, they might have problems with it, but if they're following, say, a restorative process, they don't have to believe in restorative practices, but the effect is what we want is the ending result.

Ben brought up an interesting point: the idea of Cultural Proficiency performance without having it be internalized as an actual priority for individuals. Questions that arose from this perception and approach were whether this enactment was enough to reach the desired goal of Cultural Proficiency. One could argue that a 'fake it until you make it' approach may not be enough to achieve the desired Cultural Proficiency goal if students perceive disingenuous approaches by personnel who might be unable to sufficiently model or moderate Cultural Proficiency discussions outside of a prescribed approach. Such an approach may cause harm to student experiences. However, given Ben's position as an administrator, setting a standard expectation, requirement, or regulation for personnel may be in his purview to accomplish when it comes to Cultural Proficiency work. This brings up perceptions of individual agency and their ability to enact systemic change in their roles regarding Cultural Proficiency.

Politics

On the topic of agency, there also exists an element of politics within the district and from the external surrounding community. These discussions by participants were reminiscent of Kezar's (2018) analogy of higher education institutions being within a cage where institutions appear to function within their own ecosystem separate from society, but there actually exists a high permeance and influence between the two 'through the bars' when it comes to culture. As a district administrator, Daisy noted that her work and the district's work were impacted by community influences and societal politics.

I would say in our community of Romia, the political element is very polarized…[W]e have absolutely the best intentions for all of our students, but yet we don't want to roll [Cultural Proficiency] out in such a way that there's a backlash and then that inhibits us from moving forward as quickly as we wish to […] The State recently put together the Ethnic Studies framework, and are encouraging school districts to create

Ethnic Studies curriculum courses, and even require it for high school graduation…Before we've even considered it, or had a chance to talk about it, people are calling us, calling Board members, "You're not doing this, are you? This is racist curriculum. This is anti-American. This is calling all White people racist." It's that level of fear or anxiety around the topic, and not a readiness to have a conversation and explore what would that look like, and what does it mean. It's the politics piece that's clouding the implementation and the good intentions […R]ight now it's more of this quiet, behind-the-scenes talking to Board members [like], "Hey, you're not doing this, are you?," to leaders who then are hesitant to have a conversation, because of the sentiment that they're hearing from the community. I had a phone call myself from a community member, not a parent, not a staff member, not really related to our organization, just a community member who was asking me all about the Ethnic Studies, and what is our stance, and where are we at. That kind of a thing. So, it's this proactive resistance that then inhibits the conversation, or at least delays it.

This indirect emotional and political intrusion and influence from the public – not even members of the school community – was what Daisy termed as "proactive resistance" that hindered the pedagogical practice of educators. In addition to these external pressures, Ben and Rachelle also alluded to similar political barriers within their own sites that hindered Cultural Proficiency work. Both noted some personnel at their respective sites considered this just one more item on a checklist to perform as educators. However, they each brought up different perspectives and additional barriers to Cultural Proficiency work, which could be attributed to their roles within their specific sites. As noted previously, Ben recognized that Cultural Proficiency work is not simple and can take time to achieve. However, due to his role, he responded to such barriers by suggesting continuing to implement and push towards that direction and practice regardless of internalization by educators. Rachelle, on the other hand, expressed frustration with those who were not ready to fully value and embrace Cultural Proficiency while she and her colleagues were excited and ready to dive in. This in-group/out-group rhetoric reflected similar political polarization that Daisy mentioned occurred between the district and its community.

Consistency

Another category cited as a challenge to promoting Cultural Proficiency was consistency. These were brought up in terms of practice, personnel, and current events. Consistency is encapsulated as implementing change requiring focus, clarity, and monitoring; situating contexts for the best change leaders in education (Reeves, 2009).

Practice

When it comes to the Cultural Proficiency trainings, Daisy noted that the practice of Cultural Proficiency was related to the consistency of members within the training cohorts. With the first cohort, Daisy mentioned the practices introduced within the training, and the cohort's ability to have a common language and experience created a strong bond and deep connection between the members. Even after the training, Daisy noted members were still connected with

each other and had infused Cultural Proficiency in their work even when moving on to different positions within the district. This indicates a cohort-model and designated training schedule for this Cultural Proficiency training may have provided a consistent, reliable, and safe environment in which to introduce the practice of Cultural Proficiency, which allowed members to test out language and develop rapport amongst each other on the subject. Having practiced within this environment and consistent community, cohort members were then able to translate knowledge into their respective roles after training was complete. The importance of consistency in real-world practice can be seen by contrasting these experiences with those of the second cohort. Daisy brought up inconsistencies in membership of the second cohort due to career movements which caused a fracture in the rapport-building of the group. This inconsistency, in her view, impacted the cohort's ability to feel safe in practicing Cultural Proficiency with each other and impacted their ability to develop a strong connection with each other as a cohort. Given Daisy's observation and the frustrations Rachelle brought up regarding her colleagues' lack of commitment to Cultural Proficiency, the internalization of such practices due to lack of consistency in membership at trainings may have been negatively impacted.

While Daisy noted there being consistent Cultural Proficiency policies and practices as a district, Ben and Rachelle brought up concerns regarding practices at their individual sites. Ben brought up disciplinary practices that existed at his site that were inconsistent with the values of Cultural Proficiency. Taking a broader view on the subject, he referred to long-standing racial disparities when it came to disciplinary practices in education that systemically disenfranchise students of color. In this sense, Ben highlighted such practices as a perpetuation of such racialized practices that inhibit the success of students of color and supports what he considered the "school to prison pipeline."

Rachelle, on the other hand, discussed inconsistencies when it came to educators' pedagogical practices and their ability to include Cultural Proficiency within a set curriculum,

> In some of the curriculum that we have already kind of set up in our textbooks and supplementals that we use, [Cultural Proficiency pedagogy is] already there. It's just a matter of what you do with it. You can keep it extremely dry and not do anything interesting with it and just teach the material and assess the kids, which unfortunately, there are some people that do that in our district. Not necessarily at my school but at other sites. After being in the district for 14 years, I've worked with the other [language] teachers and there's a couple of them that I can tell don't really try to reach out and connect the material with the student's perspective. And then there's some people that do it really well. So I feel like maybe it was already kind of there, it's just, like, what are you going to do with it and how are you going to present it.

Given this insight, it seems to be happenstance whether a student gets a teacher who is able and willing to creatively implement Cultural Proficiency within a given curriculum. This inconsistency in practice can have major ramifications on student experiences and whether they are getting a culturally proficient education.

Personnel

Outside of the personnel concerns related to inconsistent membership and attendance impacting training cohorts, both Daisy and Rachelle mentioned how it is the certificated staff being consistently chosen for trainings and the lack of classified staff. This raises questions regarding equity, namely the existence of a hierarchal culture in education and a lack of potentially differing perspectives on culture and what it means to be culturally proficient in training settings. However, it is important to note that both participants recognized this limitation in their interviews. Rachelle mentioned this issue should be addressed, and Daisy noted all members of the district should be promoting culturally proficient practices, not just certified staff. Dais also hoped to assist in rectifying this for future cohorts before the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the issue of current events.

Current Events

Rachelle cited the COVID-19 pandemic as a barrier to culturally proficient practices due to educators needing to pivot curriculum to remote learning at the start of the pandemic and hybrid learning mid-pandemic. This inconsistency in educational modes with limited preparation and training impacted educators' abilities to translate in-person experiences. Such challenges may have stunted educators' ability to promote Culturally proficient practices in the virtual classroom.

A few examples of additional current event aspects within and surrounding the district, school, and personnel were presented previously. These included 1) interference from community members, whether associated with the district or not, that impacted educational policies and practices; 2) current disciplinary practices that perpetuated inequities; and 3) concerns regarding whether Cultural Proficiency performance rather than internalization by educators were enough to achieve Cultural Proficiency.

In addition to current events, participants brought up potential examples of language, behaviors, policies, and practices that may support or hinder Cultural Proficiency. These include participants' positional focus and training implementation.

Positional Focus

In discussing Cultural Proficiency, each participant brought up different perceptions about what this entailed, given the topics they chose to discuss. As a male-identified Asian-American, Ben's personal experiences and positionality informed his Cultural Proficiency lens to be on race, ethnicity, and gender. His anecdotes detailed personal experiences that were rich in detail and included his role, perceptions, and developed conceptualizations during and after such experiences. As an administrator, Daisy had a much broader concept of Cultural Proficiency, mentioning aspects such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, housing security, and ability. However, conversations regarding these aspects were more broadly discussed, primarily in terms of metrics, standards, and outcomes required by the state and using that information to determine areas needing support for students. Rachelle, as a language teacher, focused on deep anecdotes related to ethnicity and culture as well as the facilitation of political conversations between her

students. These varied perceptions of Cultural Proficiency point to the idea that individual experiences and positionalities within the school system shape the focus of what Cultural Proficiency means and how individuals address it. Though this insight may seem reasonable, what becomes evident is these individuals went through the Cultural Proficiency training and yet seemed to utilize Cultural Proficiency schemas that were more related to their own experiences and positionality. This raises questions regarding whether these may lead to practices or policies that are limited in reach and cover populations that align with educators' purview rather than providing equity for all students.

In addition, equity and Cultural Proficiency were defined by the two administrators, Ben and Daisy, as being able to provide access and determine where additional assistance and support for students needed to be allocated. However, both approached this concept with the idea that supporting students meant providing access to meet existing educational standards or raising performance up to a set metric. This approach reveals that a deficit-based mentality still exists when it comes to incorporating Cultural Proficiency into practice. Such approaches maintain existing measurements and curriculum with the need to bring students up to that level rather than questioning the measurements and curriculum, which by design, may exclude or marginalize various ways of learning and cultural existences. This limitation in being able to perceive culturally proficient practices, or lack thereof, within existing schemas of schooling could be seen in how training influenced practice.

Training Implementation

All three participants highlighted the icebreakers and activities they participated in during the trainings as useful tools in helping to comprehend and conceptualize Cultural Proficiency in their personal experiences. These exercises were also cited as useful in translating culturally proficient practices into their educational practice, aiding in the internalization of their importance. However, when asked how culturally proficient practices were implemented in their work, participants all noted they utilized those same activities and exercises verbatim within their respective spheres. This presents a functional-fixedness issue for participants in introducing Cultural Proficiency concepts and conversations with others outside of such activities. This inability to branch out in conceptualizing Culturally proficient practices in education limited participants' ability to promote healthy Cultural Proficiency behaviors and practices.

DISCUSSION
Formal and Nonformal Educational Leaders' Perceptions of the Influence on Practice

Timing was a theme presented by participants when it came to the training and its influence on their practice. As a district executive leadership member, Daisy was eager and able to be present for the extensive training during the summer yet struggled during the school year due to colleagues' distracting and preventing her from being able to participate fully and be present. Rachelle, was honored to be chosen as part of the second cohort, but she was initially concerned about being out of the classroom and away from her students for so many days. These concerns

regarding timing and the training demonstrates potentially differing value-systems for training attendees (i.e., teachers versus administrators) and how their regular duties and their colleagues either allow for or possibly act as barriers to Cultural Proficiency training.

Participants' personal and professional identities seemed to play a role in their Cultural Proficiency lenses and practices. As a male-identifying Asian-American assistant principal, Ben's Cultural Proficiency lens focused on race, ethnicity, and gender relating to his lived experiences. Daisy, as a district administrator, had a broader concept of Cultural Proficiency, mentioning ethnicity, socioeconomic status, housing security, and ability. Rachelle, as a language teacher, focused on detailed anecdotes related to ethnicity, culture, and politics in teaching her students. These varied perceptions of Cultural Proficiency indicate individual experiences and positionalities within the school system may shape the focus and, subsequently, method of addressing Cultural Proficiency.

Two different tensions were brought up by participants around the training. The first involved veteran personnel who viewed Cultural Proficiency work and the training as just one more item to be added to their curriculum rather than a core value held by the district. This highlights both a lack of communication around the goals, expectations, and purpose of this training to district personnel. The second involved an element of politics and those within and outside the district who were either excited, willing, and wanting to charge ahead with Cultural Proficiency work while others still needed to be convinced of its benefits to the district. As a district administrator, Daisy noted that her work and the work of the district are impacted by community influences and societal politics. Ben and Rachelle also alluded to similar proactive resistance that hindered Cultural Proficiency work within their own sites. Addressing this, Ben discussed the need to continue prioritizing Cultural Proficiency work along with an interesting approach.

Perceptions regarding influences on practice differed depending on participants' positions within the district. These ranged from 'Cultural Proficiency performance,' frustrations related to the lack of valuing and prioritizing Cultural Proficiency, and the role political polarization had on the district's community and its influence on educational policies and practices.

Formal and Nonformal Educational Leaders' Perceptions to the Degree Which Change Has Occurred Since the Training

The practice of Cultural Proficiency post-training appeared to be associated with the consistency of cohort members who attended the training. Daisy described her cohort's ability to develop a strong bond and deep connections during the training through shared language and experiences via the introduction of Culturally proficient practices. Rachelle and Ben also discussed on-site concerns regarding Cultural Proficiency practice. Rachelle discussed inconsistencies in teachers' pedagogical practices and their ability to include Cultural Proficiency within a set curriculum. Rachelle's insight introduced a level of chance as to whether a student gets a teacher who is able and willing to implement Cultural Proficiency pedagogy and practices within a given curriculum or not.

In addition, Ben and Daisy's role as administrators framed their lens on equity as

determining where resources could be utilized to mold students into predetermined, existing educational metrics rather than challenging whether such metrics promote or hinder Culturally proficient practices. Such limitations in conceptualizing culturally proficient practices were also seen in participants' dependence on training activities and icebreakers as rote when implementing Cultural Proficiency into practice.

Implications for Future Research

The relevance of this project to the field of educational leadership is evidenced by educational practitioners and researchers using the Cultural Proficiency Framework in classrooms, schools, districts, and universities to better understand the underlying belief systems that can influence educator practice, school environments, and what students experience to create positive school change. Furthermore, our public schools need leaders who are culturally proficient so they can address the cultural differences found within an unchanged educational system and, in some respects, a digressing society that sees our majority-minority student demographic as inferior, severely lacking, or responsible for its own situation (Saeb et al., 2022; Soles & Maduli-Williams, 2019). To lead this paradigm shift at the institutional, organizational, and personal level will require formal and informal leaders with skills, perspectives, and, most importantly, a self-awareness to address issues that emerge when cultural differences are marginalized in schools and other organizations (Anan, 2023; Welborn, 2023). This self-awareness is only the beginning of individual, organizational, and institutional change. It also requires the right type of leadership capable of creating praxis or synthesizing theory and reflective practice to inspire action that challenges power relationships and leads to transformative change (Roegman et al., 2021; Welborn et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this descriptive study provide further evidence of the challenges nonformal and formal leaders face when addressing complex human interactions for organizational change in their implementation of the Cultural Proficiency Framework (Lindsey et al., 2018; Theoharis, 2007). These findings illustrate how nonformal and formal leaders categorize their understanding of implementing the Cultural Proficiency Framework. Moreover, nonformal leaders may be positioned to be counter formal leaders even when collaborating alongside one another to create the change they wish to see (Gray et al., 2019; Welborn, 2023; Welborn, 2019). Thus, it is imperative that findings, such as those presented here, are made available to the public to shed light on how nonformal and formal leaders can collaborate to create sustaining, culturally proficient educational practices.

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