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**Assessing Schoolwide Cultural Competence: Implications for
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What is This?

Assessing Schoolwide Cultural Competence: Implications for School Leadership Preparation

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Abstract

Purpose: The initial purpose of this mixed methods study was to assess the instrument fidelity and construct-related validity of a 33-item instrument called the Schoolwide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist (SCCOC) by eliciting school leaders' views. The SCCOC was designed as one tool for use in conducting school culture audits, which determine how well a school responds to the needs of diverse groups. The results revealed unexpected qualitative findings from school leaders' narrative responses to open-ended items. The implications of these findings for school leaders and school leader preparation are discussed. **Research Design:** On a Web-based questionnaire, practicing school leaders in two large western states responded to open- and closed-ended items on the relevance of SCCOC items to cultural competence in actual school settings. Participants' narrative responses were analyzed using an iterative process of coding and constant comparison to identify emerging themes. Themes were validated using intercoder reliability. **Findings:** Research team members reached consensus on four primary themes that emerged from analysis of narrative data: policy as a paradox, programs as instrumental to culturally competent practice, school culture and climate as integral to schoolwide cultural competence,

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and numerous barriers to cultural competence. Under the theme of barriers, five subthemes were revealed. **Conclusions:** The findings inform future research and the need to focus school leader preparation on examining personal biases, privilege, and beliefs about others who are different, as well as guiding leaders to develop culturally responsive skills and knowledge and the ability to assess schoolwide cultural competence.

Keywords

culture audits, cultural competence and proficiency, school leadership, school leader preparation, school culture assessments, social justice, equity

> Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us, but it is essential to leaders if they are to lead.
>
> —Edgar Schein (1992, p. 15)

For more than a decade, scholars in the field of educational leadership have emphasized that effective school leadership is contingent on a thorough understanding of school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 1991; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990, 2000; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Peterson & Deal, 2002; Sashkin & Walberg, 1993; Sergiovanni, 2001). Additionally, educational leadership scholars for social justice have stressed the essential role school leaders play in ensuring the academic success of all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, age, language, religion, or socioeconomic status (Brown, 2004; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Brooks, Jean-Marie, Normore, & Hodgins , 2007; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2007). Moreover, mounting research suggests that culturally responsive educational leadership positively influences academic achievement and students' engagement with the school environment (Banks & McGee-Banks, 2004; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Johnson, 2003, 2006; Juettner, 2003; Klingner et al., 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Riehl, 2000; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2006a, 2006b). Furthermore, the 21st century realities of global interdependence and diverse institutions require that schools effectively and appropriately respond to diverse groups in the school and school community and prepare all young people for positive interactions with people who are culturally different (Banks, 2008). Despite these imperatives, school leaders often struggle with how to identify and promote inclusive practices in schools, particularly when underlying norms and assumptions that reinforce inequitable practices often

are deeply embedded in a school's culture and reinforced by societal expectations and power differences. In some cases, school leaders are completely unaware of cultural influences in school settings or, because of their own biases, even consciously choose to maintain a status quo of inequitable practices.

Several educational leadership theorists believe that a thorough examination of school culture and organizational structures enhances school leaders' awareness and reveals inequitable organizational values and practices that impede student performance (Banks, 1989, 2002; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Scott, 2001; Skrla et al., 2006b). However, to examine effectively these organizational structures and to determine the inclusiveness of a school's policies, programs, and practices, school leaders might need more organizational assessment tools and preparation to guide them in this type of inquiry. *Culture audits* offer one mixed methods approach to examining how well a school culture reflects the experiences and needs of diverse groups in a school. Essentially, a culture audit is a team approach to collecting data from multiple sources to assess how well organizational policies, programs, practices, rituals, artifacts, and traditions reflect the needs, perspectives, and experiences of diverse groups in a school and school community (Bustamante, 2006). By conducting culture audits, leadership teams can attempt to obtain *emic* (insider) and *etic* (outsider) perspectives (Harris, 1976) that reflect the sentiments and behaviors of various subgroups in a school setting.

In schools, observations can serve as a valuable means of collecting "outsider" data by recording actual behaviors and organizational practices. Schein (1992, p. 9) suggested that systematic observations provide a valuable means of deciphering *organizational culture*, or the shared meaning, history, formal philosophy, group norms, rituals, espoused values, implicit rules, artifacts, and underlying assumptions of those who work in an organization. Observations should ideally involve the use of both field notes and checklists (Patton, 2002). In assessing organizational culture, observations might help researchers get beyond *espoused theories* (articulated beliefs about how an organization operates) to uncover the *theories in use*, which are reflected in what actually goes on in a school (Argyris & Schon, 1974, 1978). As one data collection tool for use in overall school culture audits, the School-Wide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist (SCCOC; Bustamante & Nelson, 2007) was designed to guide school leader observations.

In this article, we describe the qualitative findings of a mixed research study that was conducted to test the instrument fidelity and construct-related validity of the SCCOC. Instrument fidelity was examined by eliciting the

views of 151 practicing school leaders in two large western states, many of whom were also graduate students of educational leadership or school counseling. Specifically, school leader participants were asked to describe how valuable each SCCOC item was in assessing schoolwide cultural competence in actual school settings and how they might categorize each item within a potential school-related domain (e.g., curriculum). The qualitative findings of this study validated the fidelity of the SCCOC and informed further instrument revisions. In addition, however, we unexpectedly discovered that school leaders' narrative responses also revealed deep-set biases around issues of equity and social justice in schools, as well as a general lack of understanding of the essential indicators of schoolwide cultural competence commonly described in the academic literature on leading multicultural or diverse schools. Therefore, the findings of the SCCOC instrument fidelity study revealed numerous implications for school leadership preparation and professional development. These implications are discussed as they relate to the four major themes and five subthemes that emerged from an iterative analysis of school leader participants' narrative responses to open-ended survey items.

Review of Relevant Literature

The Meaning of Culture, School Culture, and Cultural Competence

A conceptualization of the notion of *culture* is fundamental to understanding *school culture, cultural competence, and proficiency*, and the use of culture audits as organizational assessments. Yet culture is a complex concept to define. As early as 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn had identified more than 160 definitions in the academic literature. Although the notion of culture traditionally has been rooted in anthropology (Hall, 1976; Kluckhohn & Strodbeck, 1961) and sociology (Van Maanen, 1979), the concept has been examined more recently in the fields of intercultural communication (Casmir, 1999; Hammer, 1989; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001; Wiseman & Koester, 1993), cross-cultural psychology (Triandis, 1994) and organizational theory (Hofstede, 1980; 2001; Schein, 1992; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

   Culture seminally has been defined as a learned meaning system of shared beliefs, values, norms, symbols, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that members of a group use to make sense of their world and foster a sense of identity and community (Bates & Plog, 1990; Geertz, 1979; Gudykunst, 1998; Hall, 1976; Samovar & Porter, 1995; Triandis, 1994). Culture is typically

transmitted across generations (Brislin, 1993; Ting-Toomey, 1999) and is more unconsciously experienced than taught (Lustig & Koester, 2002; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Cultures are not homogeneous, and subgroups or subcultures exist within larger cultures (Gudykunst, 1998). A single person might belong to multiple cultures (Brislin, 1993), and people might identify with more than one culture, depending on situations and points in time (Casmir, 1999; Kim, 1995).

Organizational culture specifically focuses on the cultures and subcultures of organizations and is best defined as the shared experiences, rituals, espoused values, artifacts, and underlying assumptions of groups of people who work together (Schein, 1992). Bolman and Deal (1991) described organizational culture as "beliefs, values, practices and artifacts define for . . . members who they are and how they do things" (p. 250). The notion of *school culture* evolved from the construct of organizational culture and was applied to the school setting. Educational leadership scholars have proposed that school culture is often reflective of the larger culture in which it exists (Cuban, 1984; Goodlad, 1984).

Building on the concept of organizational culture, the notion of organizational-level cultural competence and proficiency has developed from decades of empirical work in the fields of intercultural communication and cross-cultural psychology. Scholars in these fields examined the construct of *intercultural competence* as the ability of individuals or groups to understand and communicate appropriately and effectively with people from a variety of cultures (Lustig & Koester, 2002) or as "the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge respect and build upon ethnic, socio-cultural, and linguistic diversity" (Lynch & Hanson, 1998, p. 50). Original empirical work on the construct of intercultural competence began after World War I and World War II, when subsequent booms in international development work, the emergence of multinational corporations, and an observable increase in student exchange between countries were catalysts for research that addressed the coping needs of individuals living overseas (Hammer, 1989; Oberg, 1960; Wiseman & Koester, 1993). Additionally, in the United States, legislatively mandated desegregation of schools and other public institutions in the 1960s and 1970s prompted an increase in research on human relations, multicultural education, and intercultural communication (Yershova, DeJaeghere, & Mestenhauser, 2000).

The idea of organizational cultural competence and proficiency, as applied in our research, first evolved in the fields of health care and human services in response to the needs of an increasingly diverse clientele. Organizational cultural competence refers to an organization's ability to perform effectively

in cross-cultural situations through a congruent set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; Pederson, 2000; Sue, 1999). In our culture audit studies, *schoolwide cultural competence* refers to how well a school's policies, programs, practices, artifacts, and rituals reflect the needs and experiences of diverse groups in the school and outer school community (Bustamante, 2006; National Center for Cultural Competence, 2005).

The Need for School Leaders to Systematically Assess School Culture

On the basis of underlying organizational assumptions, institutions frequently and unknowingly engage in unintentional discrimination and oppression (Sue & Constantine, 2005). Schools are no exception. Cambron-McCabe (2006) argued that if schools are to evolve, the traditional organizational structure of schools must be transformed to reflect a new set of assumptions that epitomizes social justice. To do this, many educational leadership scholars contend that it is crucial for school leaders to review policies, practices, and organizational structures to remove potential barriers that disadvantage people on the basis of race or ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and other characteristics (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Lugg, 2003; Noguera & Blankstein, 2007; Skrla et al, 2006a). Scholars also have stressed that once barriers are identified, leaders must then ensure that new policies and practices are created that reflect the experiences of traditionally marginalized groups (Banks, 2002; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000).

Frattura and Capper (2007) suggested "data can raise the consciousness of educators about the strengths and the inequities happening in their own schools and about the myths that continue to be perpetuated about particular traditionally marginalized groups and individuals" (p. 49). They further discussed how, in an era of stringent accountability, school leaders tend to focus solely on student achievement data in making programmatic decisions. As a result, leaders often overlook aspects of school culture that influence why some students are more academically successful and socially engaged in school than others. Even though school leaders are required to make data-driven decisions for accountability purposes, examinations of school structures have rarely been found to be part of the inquiry process (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Skrla et al., 2006a). To examine effectively how culturally responsive a school is to diverse groups, school leaders need frameworks and tools to assist them in identifying these underlying organizational values and beliefs that contribute to inequitable policies and practices.

Defining Schoolwide Cultural Competence

The model of organizational cultural competence and proficiency provides a valuable framework for examining how well a school or district's policies, programs, practices, traditions, underlying values, artifacts, and other essential indicators of culture reflect the perspectives of diverse groups in the school and school community (Bustamante, 2006; Lindsey, Roberts, & CampbellJones, 2005; Lindsey et al., 2003; National Center for Cultural Competence, 2005). Cross et al. (1989) originally proposed a developmental continuum of cultural competence and proficiency for mental health professionals and organizations that described attitudes and behaviors ranging from *culturally destructive* to *culturally proficient*.

On the negative end of the continuum, cultural destructiveness relates to the active elimination of differences, cultural incapacity is the belief that one culture is superior to another, and cultural blindness is the denial of difference. On the positive end of the continuum, cultural precompetence indicates an awareness of limitations in responding to different cultural groups, cultural competence involves understanding and action in responding to other groups, and cultural proficiency involves interacting effectively and appropriately in a variety of cultures as well as knowing how to learn about culture. Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (1999) applied Cross et al.'s (1989) model to schools and school leadership. Much of Lindsey et al.'s (2003) work also built on Banks's (1989) description of a multicultural school.

Although these theorists and practitioners have provided some valuable approaches to analyzing organizational responses to diversity, few researchers have empirically examined the construct of schoolwide cultural competence and proficiency to determine ways to assess it and determine the impact of schoolwide cultural competence on inclusion, equity, and student achievement. In one study, Salvaggio (2003) surveyed 80 school leaders from 18 high-achieving culturally diverse schools and found that all five elements of Lindsey et al.'s (1999) model of cultural proficiency existed at high levels. In another study examining how school leaders influenced positive intercultural relationships in schools, Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, and Walker (2002) documented attitudes and behaviors that closely mirrored the culturally proficient practices described by Lindsey et al. (2003). Henze et al. found a relationship between positive interracial and interethnic interactions in schools and specific leadership behaviors and organizational practices. Additionally, patterns in observing and identifying inclusive organizational values and behaviors have been supported by organizational theory researchers who examined diversity, cross-cultural leadership, and organizational effectiveness

in corporate settings (e.g., House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004; Kochan et al., 2003).

Although few researchers have empirically examined cultural competence in school leadership, some studies on organizational cultural competence have been conducted in the mental health fields. Darnell and Kuperminc (2006) conducted a multilevel analysis of organizational cultural competence in mental health settings and found a strong relationship between individual member perceptions of cultural competence and agencies that promoted a value for diversity through their policies and practices. In counseling psychology, Sue and Constantine (2005) discussed elements of a truly *multicultural organization*. Although organizational studies in fields outside of educational leadership might inform what happens in the school setting, there is a need to examine further how organizational cultural competence is manifested in schools. Because we are not advocating a one-size-fits-all approach, we believe that data collection approaches, like culture audits, allow for consideration of the idiosyncrasies of each unique school context and culture, as well as the subcultures that constitute particular school settings.

Leadership Approaches to Assessing Equity and Cultural Competence in Schools

In the educational leadership literature, Skrla et al. (2006a, 2006b) discussed the use of *equity audits* as a valuable tool for assessing inclusive practices in schools. Equity audits involve the examination of equitable practices on the basis of certain identified indicators. Skrla et al. (2006a, 2006b) developed a set of 12 indicators on the basis of prior equity audit exemplars used in assessing government institutions and applied in state accountability systems. Skrla et al. (2006b, p. 259) grouped indicators into three dimensions: *teacher quality equity*, *programmatic equity*, and *achievement equity*. In equity audits, teacher quality equity involves analyzing data related to the experience, education, professional development, content-area expertise, and credentials of teachers who teach certain groups. The programmatic equity dimension is focused on the quality of the programs in which students are placed or excluded. Achievement equity analysis essentially involves the analysis and aggregation of existing discipline, achievement, and program placement data to identify inequities by race and ethnicity and socioeconomic class.

Equity audit data provide important clues to inclusive and exclusive policies and practices in schools. Just as in culture audits, school-based teams then use these equity audit data to devise equity action plans. How then do equity audits differ from culture audits? Although equity audits provide a

valuable strategy for identifying inequities in the school setting, we consider culture audits to be more comprehensive. Culture audits are designed to uncover the potentially more subtle aspects of a school culture by focusing on the inclusiveness of espoused values, rituals, norms, traditions, basic assumptions, and behaviors as manifested by school policies, programs, practices, artifacts, rituals, and group behaviors, and other indicators of school culture. By aggregating preexisting numerical data, equity audits provide valuable information to be used in an overall culture audit.

The SCCOC

In our work with school leaders, we found that they often struggle in making organizational level observations when conducting culture audits. We also found that although many school leaders theoretically understood the concept of schoolwide cultural competence and proficiency, school leader participants reported that they did not know how to go about assessing cultural competence in actual school settings (Bustamante, 2005). To guide school leaders in making observations as one of several data collection strategies to be used in conducting school culture audits, we developed a mixed methods protocol designed to guide observations of cultural competence in the total school environment. It is important to emphasize that SCCOC was designed to be complemented by surveys, interviews, field observations, and preexisting equity audit data as part of a complete, mixed methods school culture audit. The instrument consists of 33 specific items for observers to indicate the degree or extent to which indicated programs or practices are present in the schools on a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *almost never*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *almost always*, 5 = *always*). The checklist also has spaces for observers to indicate evidence or artifacts to support their observations for each item and to take extensive field notes. Originally, SCCOC items were developed from domains and indicators that emerged from a previous Delphi study of cultural proficiency conducted with international school leaders (Bustamante, 2005). Observation checklist items also were grounded in organizational cultural competence indicators gleaned from an interdisciplinary review of the literature on intercultural and cross-cultural communication (Hofstede, 1980; Lustig & Koester, 2002; Lynch & Hanson, 1998; Wiseman & Koester, 1993), multicultural education (Banks, 2002), cultural proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2003; Salvaggio, 2003), leadership for social justice (Marshall & Oliva, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally sensitive research (Tillman, 2002), inclusive schools (Henze et al., 2002; Riehl, 2000),

Table 1. Sample Items From the School-Wide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist

Sample Domain	Sample Item
School vision/mission	There is a school Mission or Vision Statement that includes a stated commitment to diversity and/or global citizenry.
Curriculum	Literature selections in the curriculum reflect a variety of cultural perspectives (classrooms and library).
Student interaction and leadership	Racial/ethnic representation in advanced placement classes, honors classes, and gifted programs is balanced.
Teachers	Teachers representing diverse groups are actively recruited by the principal and the district.
Teaching and learning	Instruction is differentiated to address students with special needs, while challenging all students.
Parents and outer community	Community outreach programs involve regularly eliciting perspectives of community constituencies and stakeholder groups, including parents.
Conflict management	The tendency for intercultural conflict is recognized and addressed through peer mediation programs and other proactive approaches to conflict resolution.
Assessments	Authentic student assessments are used to complement standardized tests in assessing achievement.

Source: The School-Wide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist (Bustamante & Nelson, 2007).

equity audits (Skrla et al., 2006a, 2006b), diversity and cross-cultural leadership in corporate settings (House et al., 2004; Kochan et al., 2003), and cultural competence in human service organizations (Cross et al., 1989; Darnell & Kuperminc, 2006; National Center for Cultural Competence, 2005; Sue, 2001). The original SCCOC was designed with extensive input from practicing superintendents, principals, counselors, and teachers and pretested and revised several times. As part of the pretesting process, practicing school leaders in grades PK-12 used the SCCOC to assess cultural competence in their schools and then provided feedback on the face validity and usefulness of the instrument by completing open-ended questionnaires and participating in focus groups. Table 1 displays sample items from the SCCOC.

Method

Following SCCOC pilot tests and instrument revisions on the basis of school leader input, we decided to examine the *instrument fidelity* and (score) construct-related validity of the SCCOC through further testing. In mixed methods research, instrument fidelity (a) refers to how adequate observational protocols are, (b) helps explain *within-* and *between*-participant variation, (c) assists researchers in validating scores on outcome measures, and (d) guides researchers in developing instrument items (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Sutton, 2006). To assess the fidelity of the SCCOC, we developed a mixed research Internet questionnaire, consisting of open- and closed-ended questions, to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Specifically, school leader participants were first asked to rank the importance of each SCCOC item to schoolwide cultural competence on a 4-point, Likert-type scale and then asked to describe how relevant each item was to cultural competence in actual school settings and how they might characterize each item in terms of a school-related domain (e.g., curriculum). Domains were not prescribed or restricted by the questionnaire format. Participants were free to comment openly and describe their own domains or categories by writing their responses in text boxes. This allowed for a more extensive sharing of school leaders' perspectives than we originally expected, because participants were not limited to a specific number of words in their responses. Participants were encouraged to construct their own responses. Internet questionnaires were completely anonymous and confidential.

The quantitative data from the SCCOC instrument fidelity questionnaire were analyzed using an exploratory factor analysis that revealed two major factors and explained 72.1% of the total variance: Policy (22 items) and Practice (11 items). Score reliability yielded coefficients of .97 and .89, respectively (see Nelson, Bustamante, Wilson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). The qualitative data acquired from school leaders' narrative responses to the open-ended items on the instrument fidelity questionnaire were analyzed using the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Findings from the qualitative component of the instrument fidelity study are described in this article.

Participants

We used a purposive sample in this study and used a network sampling strategy to recruit participants who were practicing school leaders (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Participants were 151 school leaders in two western states, many of whom were recent graduates or current students of doctoral and

master's degree programs in educational leadership and counseling. Participants consisted of superintendents (11%), principals (20%), directors (5%), coordinators (11%), department heads (3%), professional school counselors (20%), and those who checked a category titled "other" (30%) and described themselves as teacher leaders studying to be principals or school counselors. The participants were from urban (30.7%), rural (23.3%), and suburban (46.0%) school districts, and they represented pre-K schools (2.8%), elementary schools (50.4%), middle or junior high schools (22.0%), and high schools (24.8%).

Data Analysis Procedures

To ensure the credibility of the data analysis process, several steps were followed in analyzing the narrative responses from the SCCOC instrument fidelity questionnaire. First, responses to each question were downloaded, creating a packet of narrative responses for each researcher to review. Next, to enhance intercoder agreement, individual members of the research team read and reread responses to each item and then unitized them (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, key words and phrases for each response were highlighted, which then served as the basis for extracting a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping significant statements (i.e., *horizontalization* of data; Moustakas, 1994), with each statement being given equal weight. Units were eliminated that contained the same or similar statements or key words such that each unit corresponded to a unique response. Meanings then were formulated by explicating the meaning of each significant statement. Next, each ensuing significant statement was compared with previous codes such that similar clusters were labeled with the same code. After all the responses had been coded, the codes were grouped by similarity, and a theme was identified and outlined on the basis of each grouping. That is, the aggregate formulated meanings were organized into emergent themes and subthemes, with each theme and subtheme consisting of units that were deemed similar in content.

Once each research team member generated themes and subthemes for each SCCOC fidelity questionnaire items, team members met to compare individual researcher results and reached intercoder agreement at 95%. All items and their identified subthemes were put into a matrix and color coded according to either specific domains stated by participants (e.g., teachers, policies, students, curriculum, programs) or themes that emerged during our analysis as we hierarchically organized subthemes. The data then were interpreted further through iteration and additional reviews of the literature on

cultural competence and social justice. Consequently, themes and subthemes were created *iteratively* (Constas, 1992). As such, each significant statement was linked to a formulated meaning and to a theme. This method of thematic analysis (i.e., constant comparison analysis) was used to identify a number of themes and subthemes pertaining to the participants' insights. The locus of typology development was both *investigative* and *participative*, stemming from the intellectual constructions of the researchers and participants (Constas, 1992). The naming of categories was investigative and the verification approach also was accomplished iteratively (Constas, 1992).

Results

Four primary themes and five subthemes (under barriers to schoolwide cultural competence) emerged in the iterative data analysis process. Themes reflected the following: (a) policy paradoxically emerged both as an impetus to focusing on organizational cultural competence and as a documented means for justifying inequitable practices in schools, (b) programs were viewed as instrumental in carrying out culturally competent practices, (c) school culture and climate were seen as synonymous and integrated elements of schoolwide cultural competence, and (d) numerous perceived barriers to developing schoolwide cultural competence were evident in the participant responses. Under the primary theme of perceived barriers to developing schoolwide cultural competence, five salient subthemes emerged. These subthemes were a lack of clarity in defining roles and responsibilities for ensuring the development of schoolwide cultural competence; resource constraints (i.e., time, money, and materials); limited mention of research-based instructional strategies and culturally responsive teaching as essential aspects of schoolwide cultural competence; a general lack of school leader participant awareness of the influence of cultural competence (i.e., socially just practices, equity, inclusion, cultural responsiveness, etc.) in school settings; and strong personal biases related to the ideas of cultural competence, social justice, and educational equity.

Theme 1: The "Paradox" of Policy

Policy emerged as a major theme in school leaders' responses to many of the open-ended questionnaire items. More than 70% of school leader participants stressed that policy making was an important driver in improving schoolwide cultural competence. Some participants discussed the role of federal policy such as the No Child Left Behind Act in requiring school leaders to pay attention to the achievement of all children. Other school leaders discussed the role

of state policy in setting learning and teaching standards, whereas other participants emphasized the importance of district and school policy in promoting schoolwide cultural competence through visions and missions; hiring, mentoring, and promotion practices; professional development plans; and district and school improvement plans. Policy was emphasized as an essential first step in setting a premise for culturally competent programs and practices by a majority of the participants. The following participant quotations exemplify how policy was linked to the concept of cultural competence:

> I would put cultural competence within a policy domain.

> Policy is the enforcing authority that limits abuse of power and creates opportunities for equity and equality.

> Mission statements, recruiting, curriculum, campus improvement plans and goals are driven by policy.

> Policy should end segregation of students based on language (bilingual) because when students are grouped like this, they only socialize among themselves because they have little contact with other [culture] groups.

As with civil rights legislation and policies aimed at preventing discrimination or promoting affirmative action, these statements revealed a belief that policies are necessary to protect against unjust practices and promote inclusion. Researchers on organizational cultural competence have suggested that organizations with clearly articulated missions that support diversity and inclusion and policies that protect against discrimination also tend to have programs and practices that employees and clients perceive to be culturally competent (Darnell & Kuperminc, 2006).

Nevertheless, close analysis of data from this study revealed what we termed a *paradox of policy*. That is, school leaders' statements indicated how policies can be interpreted differently by different people, as well as how policies can be written in ways that ensure or reinforce exclusive practices in schools. This policy paradox was revealed most in school leaders' responses to SCCOC items related to student selection and placement in special programs (i.e., honors, advanced placement, special education, bilingual education, gifted and talented). Two differing points of view emerged in our analysis. Approximately 80% of the school leaders expressed a belief that schools had no control over student placement in special programs, whereas fewer than 20% suggested that schools should more closely

promote balanced representation in advanced placement programs through high expectations, teacher recommendations and encouragement, and parent education. The following quotations exemplify the belief that special program placement is beyond the control of schools and depends solely on policy-dictated assessment requirements or on individual students' abilities to meet placement procedures. These participants did not appear to question why certain groups might be over- or underrepresented in special programs. In some cases, their own biases regarding advanced placement, academic ability, and race became apparent:

> Students are placed in these classes based on their abilities, and only students who perform to the ability of these standards for these classes should be there.

> There is little room for this (balanced representation in advanced placement) . . . testing for our GT [gifted and talented program] is very rigid and is the same for all students.

> I strongly disagree with some form of promotion based on race and ethnicity solely for the purpose of filling an agenda.

> This is not based on race but performance. Generally, Asians perform higher and African-American children struggle in math so balance (in programs) is based on performance and does not always show up equal.

Typically, student selection and placement in special programs is dictated by policies and procedures. Clearly, the school leaders quoted above did not question policies and existing program selection policies. This finding is particularly surprising at a time when participation in advanced courses has been related to college readiness. Moreover, researchers have suggested that educators' beliefs about program placement policies might also impact the over representation of African American males in special education programs in U.S. public schools (Noguera, 2003; Patton, 1998). Clearly, educational leaders' beliefs about how policies and procedures for special program placement are developed, interpreted, and enforced impact equity in student placement in charter and magnet schools, honors, advanced placement, international baccalaureate, special education, discipline alternatives, English language instruction, and academic remediation programs.

On the other hand, fewer than 20% of the school leaders recognized that school practices, as well as personal biases and expectations, might

influence special program placement. The following statements reflect more culturally competent perspectives on advanced program placement:

> All parents deserve to be informed about how their children can get into advanced classes . . . plus teachers should not overlook any students as potential candidates for these programs.

> Maybe a greater variety of programs and supports should be offered because much is due to the lack of opportunity for poorer children. Parent education is also big because many less-educated parents will even decline offers for their children to participate in advanced programs out of ignorance or fear.

> The assessment systems also need to be looked at for potential language and culture bias. One test should not be the only measure. Tests do not adequately measure student strengths and multiple intelligences.

> We need to better identify talented students from all races and ethnic groups. To help this, we need to monitor teacher recommendation bias.

Thus, these data provided examples of how policies dictating program selection criteria can be created or interpreted as either inclusionary or exclusionary of traditionally marginalized or excluded groups depending on policy language, interpretation, and access to social and cultural capital. Attitudes similar to those expressed by these study participants have been conveyed relative to policies dictating hiring, retention, and promotion practices in various organizations, including school districts.

Theme 2: Programs as Instrumental to Practice

Second to policy, the terms *programs* and *program-related* were used most frequently by more than 50% of the school leaders in characterizing SCCOC items. School leaders who described SCCOC items as program related also expressed a belief that program creation ensured some type of implementation and action that would lead to more culturally competent practices (or behaviors) on the part of school personnel and students. In some cases, participants' responses also suggested that these school leaders believed that schoolwide cultural competence could be accomplished through the implementation of a series of programs designed to enhance student achievement and promote intercultural integration. For example, to

encourage intercultural integration in a *mix it up at lunch* program with secondary students, twice a month, students are grouped by birthdates, favorite colors, or other common characteristics and asked to sit with this group in the cafeteria.

Theme 3: The "Sameness" of School Climate and Culture

Participants characterized some of the SCCOC items as related to school climate and culture without specifying how, for example, "This depends on school culture and climate" and "I would make this part of school climate and culture." These statements suggest that some of the school leaders in the study did view cultural competence as a comprehensive organizational approach to diversity and equity rather than a specific program or policy. Interestingly, however, in all narrative responses when school climate and culture were described, school leaders used the terms simultaneously and synonymously, without any apparent distinction between the two concepts. However, some theorists clearly differentiate between school climate and school culture in the academic literature (Wagner & O'Phelan, 1998). School climate typically refers to a more temporary, ephemeral situation in a school, perhaps brought on by a school safety incident or a school event. It may include feelings about the school building or support staff, school safety, orderliness, and current teacher morale (Freiberg, 1998). School culture, on the other hand, is characterized by many of the same elements present in seminal anthropological definitions of culture that involve more embedded characteristics, including shared values, beliefs, traditions, and language, that are passed on over time (Karpicke & Murphy, 1996; Schein, 1992). Although some school leader participant responses clearly eluded to the importance of school culture and climate in assessing schoolwide cultural competence, it appears that school leaders might benefit from a better understanding of how cultural competence might be reflected in school culture as well as how culture and climate differ.

Theme 4: Barriers to Schoolwide Cultural Competence

Role and responsibility confusion. Overall, the data revealed limited consensus among the school leaders in this study as to who should be responsible for ensuring the development of schoolwide cultural competence. Participant discussions of roles and responsibilities in promoting cultural competence normally highlighted one individual, such as the classroom teacher, the counselor, or the principal. In response to student-related items such as student

"voice," student leadership, and intercultural integration, most school leaders stated that outcomes depended on a student's own initiative, abilities, and choices. There was little mention of adult interventions or schoolwide programs that might promote cultural competence in areas that most affected students. In general, school leaders rarely mentioned comprehensive or team-driven approaches to promoting schoolwide cultural competence. The value of collaborative leadership teams did not emerge as a major theme in our data analysis. For example, when asked about interracial and interethnic social integration among students, the responses varied:

> I think that problem should be handled on an individual situation basis.

> This is done completely through student interaction without staff involvement.

> This would come from the administration.

> Counselors and their associated programs are responsible.

> This needs to be the responsibility of both students and teachers.

Evidently, school leaders in this study were unclear about who should be involved and responsible for promoting schoolwide cultural competence. The development of cultural competence appeared to be viewed primarily as an individual effort, with little conscious initiation on the part of school leaders.

Resource constraints. Lack of time and money were consistently mentioned as barriers to focusing on schoolwide cultural competence. In responses to more than 10 of the SCCOC items, several school leaders simply stated that they did not have the time, energy, or resources to focus on improving school culture to meet the needs of diverse learners: "With all the accountability demands on us, we just don't have time for this." A few participants stated that they believed that programs enhancing schoolwide cultural competence would require large amounts of funding not available to most school districts: "We just cannot afford this right now." Others mentioned that they did not have the knowledge or the multicultural resources to address the needs of students from various cultures or provide professional development for teachers.

Lack of reference to research-based and culturally responsive instructional strategies. School leaders' responses to SCCOC items on differentiated

instructional strategies, particularly for English-language learners and students with special needs, suggested a lack of familiarity with researched-based instructional strategies and culturally responsive instruction. One SCCOC item specifically addresses the presence of a variety of cooperative grouping methods, visuals, hands-on activities, reading and writing workshops, oral language development, and other evidence-based effective teaching strategies. Participants' responses generally reflected a belief that differentiated instructional strategies depend on the teacher but can be driven by district policies. More than 70% of school leaders in the study stated that differentiated instruction belonged only in certain programs, such as special education. The following quotations reflect an apparent lack of emphasis on or familiarity with research-based strategies that differentiate instruction:

> There is little requirement for most of the listed needs.

> Teaching of the concepts is great, showing how to incorporate skills on their own is another. Struggling readers and writers must practice daily on the skill development to improve.

> This is done typically only in ESL [English as a second language] classes.

> Districts must offer various learning modalities to embrace all of the cultural diversities and offer multiple learning opportunities.

> It should be part of policy that teachers differentiate instruction to accommodate student needs.

Of the majority of participants whose responses reflected a lack of knowledge or agreement with research-based strategies for differentiated instruction, one participant stated that these (differentiated) strategies "watered down the educational system."

Although participants' responses generally indicated little familiarity with culturally relevant pedagogy, a few participants did express a clear understanding of the importance of cultural responsiveness in making connections to students' prior knowledge:

> Connecting with a students' background will help them feel more secure and accepted in a new environment.

Cultural experiences vary but when connected to prior knowledge allow greater comprehension and generalization of application. It should be included in all domains of a school setting.

Specific references to culture and learning were minimal, however, and could be considered atypical responses to SCCOC items that referred to research-based instructional strategies related to second-language teaching, differentiated instruction, special education, and culturally responsive instruction.

Lack of awareness of cultural competence indicators. Participants' narrative responses revealed a general lack of awareness of the notion of cultural competence and proficiency. In general, school leaders appeared unfamiliar with much of the terminology typically associated with culturally competent and proficient practices, including *culturally relevant pedagogy*, *informal leadership*, *authentic assessment*, *global perspectives*, and *youth voice*. Overall, participants appeared unfamiliar with the concept of *service learning* and the distinction between service learning and community service. The following quotations, however, do reflect an acknowledgement of the importance of certain culturally competent practices in schools (e.g., student voice) yet question how these elements fit the concept of schoolwide cultural competence and proficiency:

It is important to hear students; I am not sure how this related to cultural competence.

Differentiated instruction is important, but how is it connected to cultural competence?

In this study, school leaders indicated that they did not possess a holistic view of how specific indicators of cultural competence are integrated into the overall school culture.

Personal biases. Personal biases were evident in more than 50% of the school leaders' responses to questions asking them to describe how they might characterize each SCCOC item. These responses reflected attitudes indicative of various points along the developmental continuum of cultural proficiency originally proposed by Cross et al. (1989) and applied to schools by Lindsey et al. (2003) because cultural competence and proficiency is considered a developmental process. Both individual and organizational attitudes and behaviors toward diverse groups in a school might

be placed along the developmental continuum from cultural destructiveness to cultural proficiency. The following participant responses to SCCOC items suggested attitudes and beliefs that might fall on the cultural destructiveness extreme of the cultural proficiency continuum and were quite disturbing:

Just learn English. If they come to the US for a better life, then learn the language and the ways of the better life.

Stop watering down our cultural heritage.

NO affirmative action.

How can America achieve greatness when we spend all of our time and energy bringing up the mediocre?

Stop with the whole diversity bologna.

The following atypical responses to the SCCOC items likely would be placed at the positive end of the continuum because they suggested more culturally competent and proficient attitudes toward inclusive school practices.

Making new students feel comfortable and accepted should be a focus for teachers, students, and administrators, and should be included in school programs.

We need to better identify talented students from all races and ethnic groups for advanced academic programs.

Intercultural conflict should be addressed in all domains of the school setting.

We need to hear all student voices, not just the voices of the select elite.

Global perspectives should be integrated into all facets of school programming. Students must realize they are part of a larger global community.

Furthermore, in noting what was not said, no participants commented on aspects of diversity such as sexual orientation, exceptionalities and special

needs, gender, or religion, even when SCCOC items specifically referred to them. Nearly all participants focused on race, language, and ethnicity in their responses.

Discussion

In this study, school leaders' emphasis on policies and programs somewhat aligned with the academic literature defining organizational cultural competence (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2003, 2005; National Center for Cultural Competence, 2005; Sue, 2001), as well as generally supported the results of an exploratory factor analysis of quantitative data gathered from the SCCOC fidelity survey (Nelson et al., 2008). In the literature on organizational cultural competence, policies, programs, and practices are frequently described as the areas in which an organization's underlying cultural values and beliefs are most tangible (Cross et al., 1989; Sue, 2001). Practices, however, did not emerge as a salient theme in the narrative data analysis, although they have been considered one of the most essential aspects of cultural competence because they most focus on ways of being and behaving in organizations (Sue, 2001). Equitable, inclusive, and socially just practices, as manifested in the behaviors of individuals and groups, are critical aspects of a culturally competent and proficient school environment (Lindsey et al., 2005).

One barrier apparent in school leaders' responses reflected confusion about who was actually responsible for promoting schoolwide cultural competence in the school setting. Rather than viewing schoolwide cultural competence as a collaborative team effort, school leaders tended to name specific individuals as responsible, namely, principals, counselors, or classroom teachers. This might have indicated that participants were unclear about the meaning or complexity of cultural competence. Equally, role and responsibility confusion also might have suggested that school leaders did not view cultural competence development as an essential leadership function, nor did they believe it was important. Several participant quotations supported this idea.

The second barrier that emerged as a subtheme in the narrative findings related to resource constraints. School leaders questioned the practicality of spending time and effort examining the cultural competence of their schools through culture audit type processes. Overall, school leaders complained that lack of time and funding along with too many responsibilities, were barriers to assessing schoolwide cultural competence. Resource-related barriers tend to be commonly reported by educators, particularly when administrators and teachers are increasingly held accountable for student performance and take on more daily responsibilities. In reality, striving to improve cultural

competence and proficiency does not involve additional costs or program implementations but culturally responsive ways of being and doing that value and incorporate different worldviews to improve the education of all students and promote more equitable, inclusive school environments (Lindsey et al., 2003). Admittedly, conducting a culture audit might take some time and organizational effort. However, in the end, much time and money may be saved when proactive plans are developed that direct energy and resources into areas that promote the academic and social well-being of all students.

The third barrier that emerged suggested that the school leaders in this study were not adequately familiar with or knowledgeable about research-based and culturally responsive instructional practices. A lack of awareness was identified as a barrier in this study and has been cited as a common barrier by other scholars (Lindsey et al., 2003). Despite the immense knowledge base of effective and culturally relevant teaching practices, school leaders in this study either did not have the background in their graduate training or had not been exposed to professional development opportunities relevant to these practices. Perhaps school leaders need more mechanisms for keeping abreast of effective instructional strategies and would benefit from revisiting more frequently current instructional strategies, for both children and adults with diverse cultural backgrounds.

Finally, personal bias in school leader responses was readily apparent. Some participants clearly expressed negatively biased attitudes toward inclusive policies and practice. Others displayed an outright unwillingness to seek culturally responsive solutions to poor student achievement and intercultural conflict. According to the literature, school leaders and school organizations are likely to be at different developmental levels along the cultural competence and proficiency continuum proposed by Cross et al. (1989) and Lindsey et al. (2003). Participants' narrative responses to the SCCOC fidelity questionnaire reflect attitudes that could be classified along this continuum from culturally destructive to culturally proficient.

Limitations

This study might have been limited by the design of the fidelity survey instrument, the sample of participants, and our assumptions as researchers. Moreover, as researchers, we naturally held certain assumptions about the participants in our study and the nature of the topic of cultural competence as it related to school environments. We assumed that school leaders in general would value the notion of cultural competence and would understand the importance of developing organizational cultural competence in their schools as a means to improving the academic performance, engagement, and global diversity

competencies of all students. Despite these assumptions, we were admittedly surprised by some of the barriers to cultural competence expressed in the narrative responses of the school leaders in this study, particularly those barriers associated with a lack of apparent knowledge about appropriate instructional practices and negative personal biases toward issues of educational equity and diversity.

Implications of Results for School Leaders and School Leader Preparation

Many of the participants in this study were both practicing school leaders and graduate students of educational leadership and counseling. Therefore, the findings of this research inform SCCOC instrument fidelity but also have implications for the preparation and professional development of school leaders at the individual, organizational, and societal levels.

Developing individual cultural competence in school leaders. In the academic literature on individual cultural competence, researchers typically focus on the development of awareness, knowledge, and skills (Betancourt, Green, Carrillo, Ananeh-Firempong, 2003; Connerley & Pederson, 2005; Sue, 2001). *Awareness* relates to one's perceptions and recognition of his or her own biases and worldview, as well as recognition of the realities of privilege and inequities in the surrounding environment. Research has shown, however, that our values and attitudes about issues of equality are often inconsistent with our behaviors (Devine, 1989). In other words, people who score low on attitude tests measuring prejudice and discriminatory beliefs often behave in offensive or inappropriate ways in actual cross-cultural encounters (Devine, 1989). Nonetheless, raising school leaders' awareness of their biases and privilege is an important starting point in developing individual cultural competence. There are many validated inventories and reflection tools to assist professors and trainers in facilitating school leaders' awareness of their own cultural competence, such as the Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003) and the Multicultural Competence Checklist (Holcomb-McCoy, 2004). Singleton and Linton's (2006) text *Courageous Conversations About Race* and Lindsey et al.'s (2005) book *The Culturally Proficient School* have numerous reflections and activities that are appropriate for addressing sensitive issues with graduate students of educational leadership in a classroom setting or with practicing school leaders through coaching sessions, workshop series, or district-sponsored book talks. The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (http://www.glsen.org)

provides a wealth of articles and resources to assist with classroom reflections and discussions on issues related to sexual orientation and schools. Over several courses, school leader candidates should be encouraged to reflect on their attitudes and values to understand how their life experiences have formed their worldviews, as well as understand how these views affect their school leadership. To become culturally competent school leaders, candidates must have numerous opportunities over time to reflect on how their attitudes, values, and past experiences affect their leadership. This simply cannot be accomplished in one course or one workshop. Growth and development in awareness and attitudes should be monitored and continually reflected on throughout candidates' educational leadership preparation process.

Knowledge has to do with familiarity with concepts and theories about injustice as well as specific knowledge about other cultures or the ability to learn about them. For educational leaders, knowledge of instructional leadership strategies also is essential to promoting schoolwide cultural competence (Ruff & Shoho, 2005). As instructional leaders, school leaders must be knowledgeable of instructional strategies to be models for teachers and provide teachers with the resources and professional development support required to differentiate instruction to meet different student ability levels, support second-language learners, and carry out culturally responsive instruction. The results of this study suggest that school leaders might need additional training in research-based instructional strategies that support schoolwide cultural competence. Graduate students of educational leadership and school leaders could benefit from consistently revisiting instructional methods and strategies for both children and adults, particularly those strategies that have been found to be culturally responsive and inclusive.

Skills refer to a leader's ability to behave in ways that effectively and appropriately communicate with those who are different. Certain skills have also been associated with socially just school leadership that complement the notion of cultural competence such as: the ability to lead change effectively (Fullan, 1991), a purposive moral imperative (Dantley, 2003), distributive leadership (Brooks et al., 2007), and an ability to handle resistance (Theoharis, 2007), among others. In developing culturally competent school leaders, opportunities for school leader candidates to be immersed in cultures and environments that provide experiential learning opportunities should be incorporated into all coursework. Service learning and cultural immersion of students have been found to facilitate the development of awareness, knowledge, and skills related to interacting with diverse groups (Gurin et al., 2002).

Experiential learning and immersions opportunities might be arranged in local communities or through international exchange experiences and have been found to enhance culturally competent educational leadership skills (Danzig, Blankson, & Kiltz, 2006). In our teaching, we have found that having students conduct culture audits as a course assignment has raised their levels of awareness as well as provided practice in acquiring inquiry-oriented skills. As one graduate student put it, "I never thought to pay attention to the race and ethnicity of students enrolled in advanced placement classes." Another educational leadership student, who was also a principal, expressed in a focus group that he never realized how offensive remarks about gays could be to others:

> You often really do not know the sexual orientation of the people you work with, or the students, or the parent of kids in your school. Conducting a culture audit and discussing it in class made me think about this. I think my attitude has changed because I am more sensitive and now I am more careful not to say stupid things. Our educational leadership students than are asked to use data analyzed from their culture audits to develop cultural proficiency action plans designed to strategically address need areas in the school and districts audited. Many graduate students have implemented these plans successfully by continuing to use culture audits to monitor the perceptions and experiences of different groups in the school and school community.

Preparing to lead culturally competent schools. Educational leadership scholars emphasize that effective school leadership requires an understanding of school culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Peterson & Deal, 2002) and the ability to lead in ways that enhance equitable, culturally competent values and practices in schools (Brooks et al., 2007; Dantley, 2003; Frattura & Capper, 2007; 2007; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2007; Young & Liable, 2000). School leaders need to be carefully selected for preparation programs and then adequately prepared to take on leadership roles. Experiential learning experiences and critical analysis of personal biases, policy, equitable practice, and organizational culture need to be major pillars of educational leadership programs. Instructional leadership practices should be emphasized and reviewed so leaders understand how best to enhance the learning of all students and teachers.

In an increasingly globally diverse world, school leadership candidates could benefit from greater global perspective taking to understand their

pivotal role as educators and advocates. The findings of this study suggest that educational leaders may need to develop a more critical stance toward educational policies as indicated by the theme of policy as a paradox that emerged from school leaders' responses. Educational leadership preparation programs can encourage school leaders to develop the knowledge and skills to advocate for policies and legislation that support inclusive and culturally sensitive practices, rather than accept and enforce policies at face value without questioning and observing whether outcomes are equitable and socially just. Professors who promote leadership for critical policy and advocacy might have students select and research a key policy issue and then contact legislators or plan persuasive communication (written or oral) around a key issue to raise public or board members' awareness. Educational leaders should feel empowered and qualified to advocate for and influence policy that impacts education.

Finally, educational leadership students should be taught to collect school-level data to obtain a holistic view of a school's responsiveness to diverse groups. Inquiry-oriented practices that examine equity (Frattura & Capper, 2007; Skrla et al., 2006a, 2006b) and the feelings, experiences, and perceptions of various subgroups in schools and school communities are crucial to developing schoolwide cultural competence (Bustamante, 2005; Nelson et al., 2008). School leaders are increasingly required to make data-driven decisions. As Frattura and Capper (2007) pointed out, school leaders tend to overlook cultural considerations in favor of making decisions solely on the basis of test scores and accountability ratings. The effectiveness and appropriateness of communication, for example, might best be determined by eliciting the perspectives of the various school subgroups affected rather than outwardly judged or imposed, particularly by those in positions of power and privilege. In other words, by using inquiry skills to ask people what they are thinking, feeling, and learning; school leaders will access data that are rich and inclusive rather than strictly by the numbers, which is an incomplete examination of the complexity of student achievement. Culture and equity audits provide valuable data that might indicate why certain students succeed and others do not. Without a leadership team that values and models personal and organizational cultural competence, staff members and students might resort to myriad excuses for not promoting cultural competence. Graduate students of educational leadership can be required to complete culture and equity audits on their schools and districts as course requirements. Then, on the basis of the data collected, students can be asked to develop action plans for improving cultural competence in their schools or districts.

Despite increases in courses and content directly addressing social justice and educational leadership in diverse and global environments, many

graduate course descriptions continue to reveal limited emphasis on how to prepare educational leaders to assess school culture and promote culturally competent policies, programs, and practices. School leaders who are prepared to be cultural consultants in their schools will be instrumental in assessing and promoting schoolwide cultural competence. Those leaders who are not prepared may unknowingly encourage or continue destructive practices that negatively affect the future academic success of children and adolescents, particularly those who are traditionally marginalized within the societal context. More than any other type of organization, schools have the capacity to influence the long-term success of their young members. Therefore school leaders have a moral imperative to promote culturally competent practices that prepare all young people to function successfully in a diverse and global world (Banks, 2008; Dantley 2003).

Final Words

As a research team, we fully recognize that schoolwide cultural competence is a complex developmental process and that culture audit results will depend on the idiosyncrasies of particular school contexts. We also acknowledge that culture audits, equity audits, and instruments such as the SCCOC can only begin to uncover the inequities, discrimination, and imbalances of power and privilege apparent in schools and mirrored from societal realities. As scholars, we fully recognize the complexities of sociocultural, historical realities and do not presume to take a postpositivist approach in assessing something as complex as culture. However, by conducting culture audits, school leaders, who are positioned to enhance schoolwide cultural competence, might begin to uncover and confront underlying assumptions that obstruct the academic success of many students and impede the development of global competencies of all students. Even in school settings where children are perceived to be racially and culturally homogeneous, school leaders have a moral obligation to prepare these students to interact appropriately and effectively with people who are different from them. Educational leaders have a key role to play in guiding students to contribute to and succeed in a diverse and global world. Yet, in order to fulfill this important role, educational leaders must develop their own cultural competence and responsiveness in relating to others and leading learning organizations.

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