

# Introduction

**C**ompetence encompasses one's ability to demonstrate proficiency in a particular area and with specific tasks. In this book, the area is culture and the tasks are teaching, learning, and schooling. Just like all other school subjects, teachers need to be fully prepared with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to achieve efficacy with cultural competence in all contexts. This means a teacher needs to understand and accept one's responsibilities for each student's engagement, expressions, and outcomes across the curriculum, instruction, assessments, and management, as all of these intertwine with culture. Accepting responsibility means striving for efficacy related to teaching and each student's learning.

Culture is a part of everything that is taught and caught. Teachers must be equipped to honor and respect each student's culture; to teach about culture as content and the processes of culturally interacting with one another; to build upon each student's acquisition, application, and appreciation of culture; and to infuse the content, processes, and context of culture across the entire curriculum. In order to accomplish these outcomes, teacher candidates need to be aware of their own understanding, interactions, and attitudes.

This book was written to broaden your knowledge about cultural diversity so you can reach all of your students as you teach them about themselves and one another as young learners. Your background and experiences encase your story; as a classroom teacher, it is essential to increase your awareness of every student's story. This book guides you with the depth to empower each of your students with the information, access, and opportunities each one of them needs and wants to be successful in your classroom and throughout their lives.

The intention is to provide you with information, insights, and inspiration so you are both comfortable with the conversation and confident in your teaching. However, given the history of, conversations about, and conflicts associated with culture in the United States and around the world, delving into cultural competence becomes a lifelong journey more

## 2 • Navigating Cultural Competence in Grades K–5

than a completed item on a packing list or a predetermined destination. Thus, the title of the book is *Navigating Cultural Competence*, providing you with tools and techniques as you travel through your teaching career in all areas related to culture.

Be reassured that navigating cultural competence is a learned expertise that must be negotiated with every new encounter and experience. This book was written specifically to guide you as you embark on your career using the Gallavan cultural competence compass. Each of the eight points on the compass identifies one of the essential directions you must consider and coordinate for safe travels.

Just as a compass helps you find your way through the elements of land, water, space, and time, the process of navigating cultural competence involves four critical elements that include:

**Concepts.** Significant information and initiatives about cultural competence based on theory, research, and practice.

**Awareness.** Honest inquiries and insights about oneself, one another, and society that occur frequently and easily.

**Reflection.** Clear evidence and impressions generated by watching, listening, and reading to assess and record process thoroughly.

**Education.** Meaningful inspirations and influences to ensure that cultural competence is natural, authentic, and holistic.

Looking at the first letters of these four components, you see that they spell the word *CARE*. Navigating cultural competence requires care for yourself, one another, and all of society—near and far, known and unknown. As a teacher, you need to care about your students, your teaching, and their learning in the context of schooling and the world. This book will equip you with many reasons to focus on *CARE*.

Each chapter in this text features the introduction of new concepts, prompts for expanding awareness, opportunities for reflection, and connections to one's education. To strengthen your care for navigating cultural competence to achieve efficacy, each chapter opens with frequently asked questions with answers, and then closes with extending activities for yourself and learning experience ideas for your young learners. From these resources, you can align your curriculum, instruction, and assessments while building a community of learners and managing your classroom so every day is a rewarding preparation for tomorrow.

Chapters 1 and 2 define cultural competence, debunk ten preconceptions to which teachers tend to ascribe, and introduce the Gallavan cultural competence compass. The best and proper tool to take on any

journey is a compass. The eight points of the compass are used as the main points for Chapters 3 through 8. In each chapter, you will find a description of the compass point, key points, and specific strategies; these conclude with frequently asked questions and two groups of activities. One group of activities allows you to expand your own professional understanding and teaching expertise, and one group of activities can enrich your students' understanding and learning experiences.

Chapters 1 and 2 also establish a sense of place to explore cultural competence. This book is based on a set of purposes and goals that you must relate to your own personal, professional, and pedagogical growth and development. Navigating cultural competence necessitates balancing internal perceptions with external stimuli. As a teacher, you provide these opportunities for your students in everything that is taught and caught.

Chapter 3 delves into noticing culture and cultural characteristics. This chapter helps you start your trip by increasing your awareness of the world around you. This is gained through all five of your senses, as well as expanding your thinking, while enhancing your feelings with your emotions. Then, you move into Chapter 4, which explores negotiating and evaluating the curriculum and content. Here, you will extend your understanding of cultural competence to your classroom subject areas as an independent subject area, and an infused highlight to everything you are teaching. Regardless of what you teach and how you are teaching, you will infuse cultural competence across your curriculum, instruction, and assessments.

Chapter 5 captures one of the most important ideas in this text. Here, you will gain insight for establishing a sense of place. Your teaching will be totally ineffective if your students do not attend school or fail to engage in their learning. You want your students to be excited about attending school and motivated about learning and sharing their new discoveries. This chapter reveals the techniques connected with cultural competence so every student achieves success and satisfaction that is sustained throughout your school year.

Chapter 6 offers strategies for seeking and engaging in collaborative endeavors with your colleagues, and for constructing new approaches with your colleagues, with your students, and on your own. Navigating cultural competence means getting involved in the process and working with other teachers to make changes and improve your efficacy both in and out of the classroom. You will be impressed with the amount of time you gain when you meet with your colleagues to share the work, the results, and the rewards. This is a chapter full of new approaches to make your life much easier and more rewarding.

Chapter 7 shares techniques to spark conversations and climate with colleagues and students, and most important, your students' families.

#### 4 • Navigating Cultural Competence in Grades K–5

Soon you will discover that you and your students will be more successful when the students' families are involved. Involvement means many different outcomes for different students and families; this chapter explores the possibilities. Once you model to your students and show them the fascination and enjoyment to learn *about* other people and *with* other people, teaching and learning take on a new life of their own. This chapter reveals the encouragement you need and want to make your classroom resonate.

Chapter 7 also prepares you to strengthen and weave together the complexities and controversies that abound in schools and classrooms, particularly those concerns associated with cultural competence. The United States has a history of changes in population demographics, group acceptance, and individual rights. You have likely taken an array of history, political science, sociology courses, and so forth, where you delved into many of the country's issues. Now you will integrate the learning into your classroom. You want the processes to be positive and productive.

Chapter 8 opens doors to help you waken compassion and commitment—both for yourself and with your young learners. Incorporating cultural competence into your classroom is admirable; now you can connect the classroom with communities, near and far. The guidelines provided in the chapter assist you in maintaining your momentum after your initial interest has disappeared. It is vital for you to infuse cultural competence across the curriculum and connect it with your students both in and out of the classroom. Tapping into their compassion to care for other people and society, and fortifying their commitment, will be one of your greatest challenges.

Chapter 8 also provides important guidelines to nurture and welcome challenges and changes. Teaching is dynamic and every day brings new surprises. This chapter prepares you to use challenges and changes to your advantage. Keep in mind that navigating cultural competence is both a journey and a destination; therefore, life will bring you endless challenges and changes that you not only welcome, but you may even instigate. The guidance in this chapter is intended for after you have learned the information in the previous chapters by design. Now the text returns to focusing on you, just as the text began.

At the end of the book, there are three resources. Resource A presents the Gallavan cultural competence compass referenced throughout the text. The cultural compass has been dissected in Chapters 3 through 8 so you can focus on the particular direction points. Resource B provides a review checklist, while Resource C supplies a list of websites related to cultural competence; cultural competence involves a field of study that has existed since time began. Cultural competence is an intricate part of your success in your classroom, professional development, and graduate studies. These readings and references will help you.

My wish is that you will read this text with an open and accepting mind. I hope that you will consider the ideas and try implementing them into your personal life, professional growth, and pedagogical endeavors. Each of us was born with cultural competence. We all wanted and needed dignity, respect, and care. As we grew, we reproduced and returned exactly what we saw and heard. For many of us, cultural competence was not honored or practiced so we have been limited in our lives and our work, perhaps cowering away from doing the right thing. As teachers, we need to ensure that all students are valued and everything that is taught reflects the cultures of all peoples. This book provides the cultural compass to guide you as you navigate your travels.