

Thank you

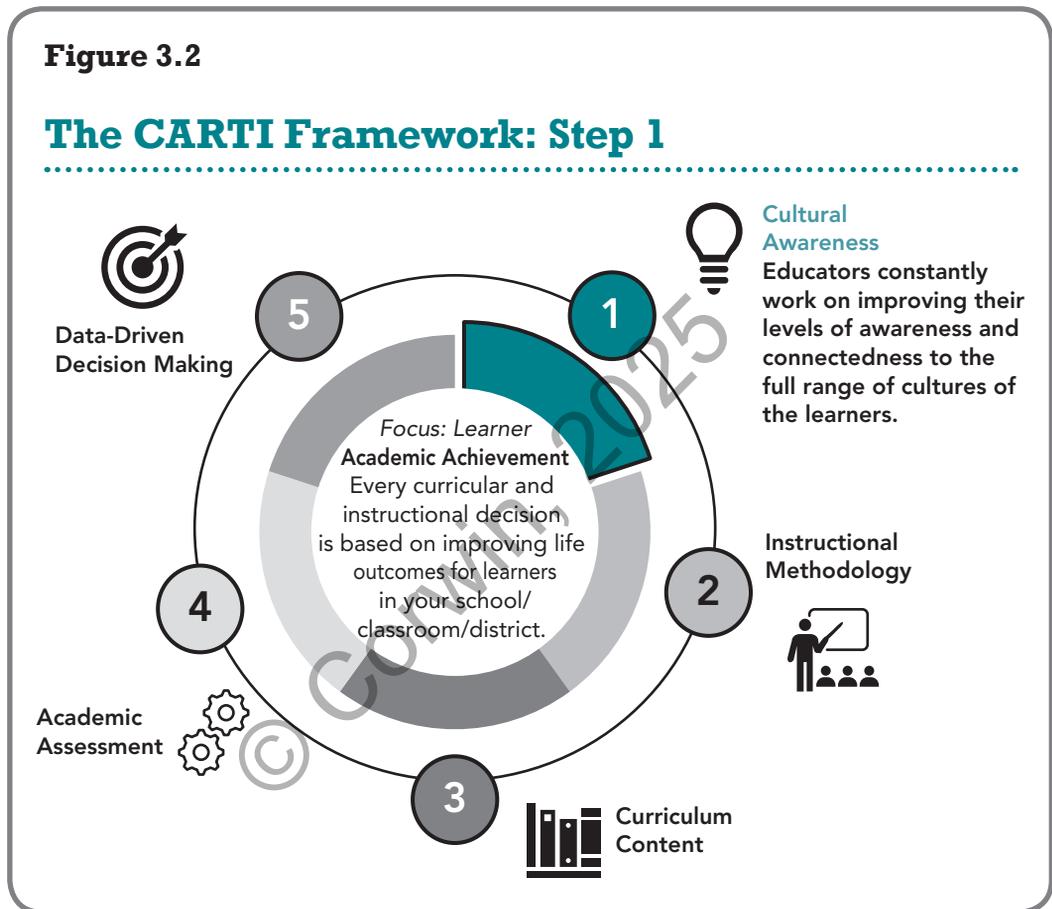
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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *The Culturally Competent Educator*.

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Step 1: Cultural Awareness

Before we begin to explore the concept of inclusivity and how we build and maintain a culturally connected classroom, let's consider the work of step 1 of the framework (see Figure 3.2) and how it connects to equity.



Equity requires understanding. It requires us to affirm, validate, and respect every child who walks into our schools. This is facilitated through our development of cultural awareness. We must commit to constantly improving our levels of awareness and connectedness to the full range of cultures of our learners.

cultural awareness—awareness of the information, norms, values, behaviors, and morals of groups of people who share an identity; awareness of the socially transmitted norms, values, behaviors, and morals of a group of people

Becoming culturally aware is a first step toward developing cultural competence or cultural proficiency (these two terms are often used interchangeably). This skill development is a process that makes explicit the values and practices that enable individuals (educators and learners) and organizations (schools and districts) to interact effectively across the various cultures they are comprised of.

When I work with educators, I describe it as a pathway from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence based on the conscious competence learning model (Jones et al., 2006; Poore, 2014). An action-oriented journey that can be embarked upon as a matter of personal choice, or as a goal for school improvement. The pathway consists of three zones across four stages (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Pathway to Cultural Competence

THE FEAR ZONE		THE LEARNING ZONE	THE GROWTH ZONE
Unconsciously Incompetent	Consciously Incompetent	Consciously Competent	Unconsciously Competent
Ignorant of the value of cultural diversity, enjoying of privilege, engaging in destructive behaviors (demonization, oppression)	Aware of your cultural ignorance and incompetence, but may be open to professional learning and personal development	Aware of cultural differences and learning to respectfully navigate multiple diverse cultural settings; recognize what you don't know	Respect, value, and affirm cultural differences; welcomed in culturally diverse spaces; can communicate your knowledge and instruct others
Doing harm, allowing harm, and denying resources	May be ignoring or doing harm, allowing harm, and denying resources	Calling out those who do harm, allow harm, or deny resources	Actively working to systemically eliminate doing harm, allowing harm, or denying resources
Destructive Behaviors	Passive Behaviors	Proactive Behaviors	Transformative Behaviors

The first stage in the first zone, the fear zone, is unconscious incompetence. Educators in this stage are ignorant of the value of cultural diversity. They likely enjoy racial or economic privilege which benefits them while harming others. To maintain that privilege, they engage in destructive behaviors such as demonization of other cultures and identities and oppression of others who are culturally diverse. They may use their power to do harm, allow harm, or deny resources to learners through their instructional practices or classroom management and disciplinary actions.

The second stage in the fear zone is conscious incompetence. Educators who are consciously incompetent are cognizant of diversity. They are aware of their ignorance of its value and their lack of understanding of how to use culturally responsive practices and relate to culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Because of this, they tend to engage in passive behaviors often tolerating destructive behaviors of other educators. They may forfeit their power. And in so doing, they ignore or allow harm perpetrated by themselves or others.

They inflict this harm through toxic instructional practices as well as damaging classroom management and disciplinary actions. They may ignore that learners who are culturally and linguistically diverse are denied resources to support their academic success, and they may deny those resources themselves.

Those in the fear zone may only participate in professional learning for cultural awareness when it is mandated. They may not be engaged during that learning. They may not implement what is taught. However, engagement and implementation are required to move from one stage to the next.

When an educator shifts to conscious competency, they move into the learning zone. Educators who are consciously competent are aware of cultural diversity. They have learned to navigate multiple diverse cultural settings and contexts. They have metacognitive knowledge, but do not yet have metacognitive regulation. They know what they don't know, but they cannot instruct others on how to do what they do.

Educators who are consciously competent engage in proactive behaviors. They call out their peers, certainly their subordinates, and perhaps even their leaders, who do harm, allow harm, or deny resources to learners. Unafraid, they voluntarily engage in professional and personal learning for growth and development.

The final zone is the growth zone and means that someone has become unconsciously competent. These educators intrinsically and openly respect, value, and affirm cultural differences—and do so without having to consciously consider their words or actions. These educators are welcomed in culturally diverse spaces. They are comfortable in those spaces while not offending those who occupy them. They have both metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive

regulation. They can communicate their knowledge and instruct and lead others still in the fear and learning zone. Their behaviors are transformative. These *equity warriors*, like those I described in the Introduction, actively work to systemically eliminate practices and policies that do harm, allow harm, or deny resources to learners.

If you'd like to take your own formative assessment, you may use the Educators' Cultural Awareness, Knowledge and Skills Survey (ECAKSS), available at www.surveymonkey.com/r/ECAKKS. As you continue with your work, you may wish to return to the survey annually to assess your growth.

Cultural awareness not only recognizes, but also embraces, values, and respects the differences and similarities within and between groups of people from different cultural backgrounds.

Cultural awareness involves:

- **Self-awareness:** Understanding one's own culture, including biases and assumptions about other people or cultures.
- **Understanding and respect:** Learning about other cultures, traditions, beliefs, and ways of life. This often includes understanding and respecting cultural nuances, rituals, symbols, and social norms.
- **Empathy and open-mindedness:** Being open to experiencing and learning from cultures that are different from one's own, and empathizing with the experiences of people from those cultures.
- **Adaptability:** The ability to communicate and interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds, which may involve adapting one's behavior to respect other cultures.

Cultural awareness is an important skill for educators to master. It helps foster effective communication, reduces conflicts, and promotes inclusiveness and mutual respect in our schools and classrooms. Increasing cultural awareness can help educators, schools, and districts understand and respect differences, which can lead to more effective and equitable academic and disciplinary interactions and outcomes.

In Chapter 2, you reflected on your identity. Here, let's continue to explore the broad scope of identity. Then we can move on to examine the question, "Who are our learners?"

Look again at your responses to the identity exercise in Chapter 2. Identity is not only about who we are from a physiological or biological perspective, but also about who we are from a social, cultural, and psychological perspective. How did you identify physiologically? Biologically? Socially? Culturally? Psychologically? What other aspects of identity inform who you are? Have they always been there or has your identity changed or evolved over the years?

Just like you, as our learners grow from preschool through high school, various aspects of who they are and how they identify will change. Some of the greatest changes and challenges to identity come during adolescence due to their heightened desire to fit in with their peers. The inputs to their identity (Figure 3.3) and the influences of family, peer groups, socialization, politics, and their lived experiences all come into play.

Figure 3.3

Identity Inputs



Before moving on, take a few moments to reflect on who your learners are. Use Table 3.2 as a model for your work. I've started a few columns for you. Add more columns to address the identities

Table 3.2

Identifying My Learners

RACE	GENDER/ IDENTITY	AGE OR AGE GROUP	RELIGION	LANGUAGE	ETHNICITY	NATIONALITY	SOCIAL CLASS	PEER GROUP	ABILITY
White Black/ African American Latine/ Hispanic Chinese Filipino					American South American Central American European				Gifted 504 IEP

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of your learners. Consider the various aspects of identity and list all the descriptors you can think of for each of those aspects. For example, for languages, what are the languages (world and socio-cultural) that your learners speak? (Refer to Appendix B for a short list of sociocultural languages common to the United States.)

Where do you need to become more aware and connected to the full range of cultures of your learners? How can you use community resources to do so? If school has not started, do the best you can based on what you know. When the instructional year begins, open this activity up to your learners. Ask them who they are. Ask them how they identify. They may have characteristics that neither I nor you thought of! Ask how you might get to know them, their cultures, their communities better. Then do so.



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