



Research. Results. Practice.

CULTIVATING CROSS-CULTURAL TOOLS

Tool #3: Cultural Reasoning

Building the knowledge, experiences, and skills that replace bias-based beliefs.

Why This Tool Matters

Every day, educators interpret student behaviors, family interactions, classroom participation, and learning differences. **Cultural reasoning** is the ability to make sense of experiences that are culturally different from our own without immediately judging them through our own cultural norms. Rather than asking, "*Why would they do that?*" cultural reasoning asks, "*What cultural experiences or contexts help explain what I'm observing?*"

When educators lack cultural reasoning, they are more likely to interpret differences as deficits or misbehavior. Cultural reasoning helps interrupt colorblindness, deficit thinking, and poverty disciplining by replacing assumptions with informed interpretation.

What It Looks Like in Schools

A family may communicate differently during conferences, celebrate different holidays, or respond to school expectations in ways unfamiliar to an educator. Cultural reasoning encourages educators to interpret these differences through curiosity rather than comparison.

For example, your chapter describes cultural reasoning as an important skill when understanding student behavior, interacting with multilingual families, and visiting students' homes. In each case, the educator seeks to understand the cultural context before making instructional or behavioral decisions.

Cultivating This Tool

- Ask yourself, "What cultural factors might explain what I'm seeing?"
- Learn about community traditions and customs.
- Seek multiple perspectives before interpreting behavior.

- Reflect on how your own cultural norms influence your interpretations.
- Use perspective taking before making conclusions.

Reflection Questions

- How might this situation be interpreted differently by someone from another cultural background?
- Am I interpreting difference as deficiency?
- What additional cultural knowledge would help me better understand this situation?

Fill Your Shopping Cart

This month...

- ☐ Learn about one cultural tradition represented in your school.
- ☐ Reflect on one situation where additional cultural context changed your understanding.
- ☐ Ask a colleague how they interpreted the same situation.

Related Tools

-  Perspective Taking
-  Cultural Learning
-  Diplomatic Mindset

References

Fergus, E. (2024) *Desegregating Ourselves*, Chapter 5.

Rasmussen, L. J., & Sieck, W. R. (2015). Developing cross-cultural competence.