

# PBL in practice

## Cultural responsiveness

Cultural responsiveness means developing awareness of the significance of students' backgrounds (including historical context), and intentionally integrating their customs and values into curriculum, instruction and the school environment. Put simply, we need to seek to understand both our own and our students' cultures to actively embed relevant experiences and perspectives in everything that we do in schools.

This PBL in practice paper explains what it means to be culturally responsive and provides examples of strategies for schools working to increase cultural responsiveness.

### References

- Klingner, J. K., et al., (2005). Addressing the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education through culturally responsive educational systems. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 13(38), 1–40.
- Leverson, M., et al., (2019). *PBIS Cultural responsiveness field guide: Resources for trainers and coaches*. Center on PBIS: University of Oregon. [www.pbis.org](http://www.pbis.org)

PBL is a framework for implementing practices that fit the values and needs of students, families and staff. Contextual fit is a core principle of PBL, therefore, PBL cannot be considered fully implemented unless it is culturally responsive.

In order to be culturally responsive, we must understand how our school systems have been established, how well they support students from varying cultures, and how they can be changed to ensure the support and validation of each student's culture. Our school systems and practices and the way we use data all need to be adapted to suit our context and respond to the experiences and needs of all students.

Cultural responsiveness requires us to:

- hold positive views about diversity
- understand the lived experiences of others
- be willing to learn about history, power structures and culture
- advocate for the rights of others.



## Key term

**Situational appropriateness** is the ability to demonstrate different behaviours according to the social context. For example, talking loudly over the top of others may be acceptable at a family gathering, but not in the classroom. Schools should explicitly teach the behaviours needed for success at school without judging what may have been taught or be acceptable in the family or community setting.

# Components of cultural responsiveness

## Identity

When we are culturally responsive we understand our own identity and are conscious of what all identities bring to the table. Our ethnicity, gender, language, ability and socio-economic status are some of the aspects which influence our sense of identity.

## Voice

When schools are culturally responsive they provide students, families and the community with opportunities to be heard and to contribute towards decision-making.

## Supportive environment

A positive school culture is integral to cultural responsiveness. Staff beliefs about behaviour reflect a shared understanding of the importance of teaching and acknowledging expected behaviours.

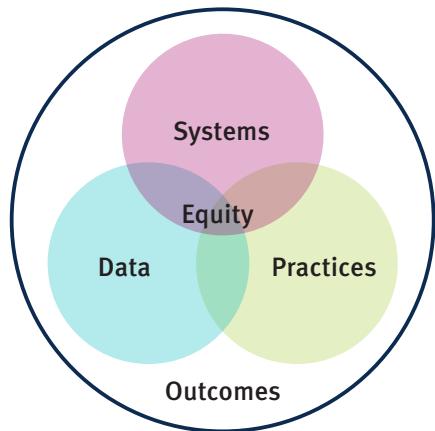
## Situational appropriateness

Situational appropriateness is the ability to demonstrate behaviours which result in positive outcomes in a given setting. When we are culturally responsive we recognise that behaviours which are appropriate in a student's home or community culture are as legitimate in that setting as the behaviour we see as appropriate in school.

## Data for equity

Schools develop a culturally responsive data system by disaggregating data to ensure equitable outcomes for all groups of students. For example, outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability, or students from a non-English speaking background can be compared to identify trends and make changes to staff practice or school systems where disproportionality is evident.

The PBL problem-solving model can be used to guide action planning for schools wanting to increase the focus on cultural responsiveness within their PBL framework.



Adapted from *Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Implementation Blueprint*, 2023. Used with permission.

For example, schools may identify that they want to ensure that school policy and procedures for student behaviour do not impact negatively on certain cultural groups (**outcome**).

They might then look at discipline data to determine if any groups are receiving a disproportionate number of referrals (**data**).

Data may indicate that **systems** for obtaining family engagement and student voice need to be improved. There may also be a need for professional development for staff on understanding implicit bias.

The school might decide to begin by explicitly teaching students the behaviours needed at school in order to demonstrate being respectful in the school setting (**practices**).

## Strategies for schools

- Have high expectations for all students.
- Use students' cultures and experiences to enhance learning.
- Provide all students with access to effective instruction and adequate resources for learning.
- Revise school expectations to reflect the cultural values of the community.
- Review the curriculum to ensure other cultures are represented.
- Ensure that students see themselves in books, events and displays.
- When expectations differ between home or community and school, explicitly teach the differences, the purpose of having the expectation at school and provide additional practice (situational appropriateness).
- Teach what is wanted at school without devaluing what may be acceptable at home or in the community.
- Establish multiple ways to reach the community and ensure frequent two-way communication with stakeholders.
- Actively engage families and community members in volunteer and event opportunities within the school.



One way to obtain family input is to survey families about the school-wide expectations. Possible questions to include:

1. Are our school's expectations for student behaviour meaningful or important to you?
2. Why, or why not?
3. What do you think they should be? What are the values or rules that you want your children to follow at home?
4. Are there any expectations or examples in the school matrix that go against your values at home?
5. If yes, what are they?
6. What other ideas do you have for us to teach students the expectations?

## Cultural norms

As a staff, discuss how different cultural norms may impact on student behaviour at school. For example:

- Regard for time
- Notions of courtesy
- Personal space/touching
- Non-verbal communication (facial expression, eye contact) and tone of voice
- Concepts of justice
- Emotionality
- Gender roles
- Concepts of beauty/modesty
- Rules of language
- Concepts of humour.

