

# Are we truly responding to CRT in South Africa? Exploring Cultural Agility and competence in diverse classrooms

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# Who we are?





# Interpreting the Tree Drawings

John Buck

Tree Element	Reflective Questions	Possible Meaning in Group Context
Roots	Did you draw visible roots?	<b>Roots</b> = connection to family, culture, or sense of identity. No roots may suggest lack of grounding or introspection.
Trunk	How big, tall, or strong is the trunk?	Represents the <b>self or ego strength</b> . A solid trunk = confidence or resilience. Thin or broken trunk = vulnerability or fragility.
Branches	Are there many branches? Do they reach outward or are they short?	Reflects <b>social reach, ambition, or openness</b> . Reaching branches may show growth; no branches may indicate introversion or withdrawal.
Leaves / Fruit	Did you draw any leaves or fruit?	<b>Productivity and emotional expression</b> . Lots of leaves can suggest optimism. Missing leaves might reflect emotional emptiness or withdrawal.
Size of Tree	Is it large on the page or small and hidden?	Large trees may show <b>self-confidence</b> or desire for recognition. Small trees may suggest <b>insecurity or shyness</b> .
Position on Page	Is the tree centered, low, high, or to one side?	Centered = balance. High = idealism or dreaming. Low = groundedness or sadness. Off-center may show discomfort or imbalance.
Line Pressure	Are the lines dark, bold, or soft and light?	Dark, firm strokes = <b>intensity or tension</b> . Soft lines = <b>gentleness or insecurity</b> .
Detail Level	Is the drawing very detailed or very basic?	Lots of detail = <b>anxiety or perfectionism</b> . Very basic = <b>emotional restraint or lack of focus</b> .

This is **not a psychological diagnosis** tool. It is an invitation to self-reflect and share symbolically. Avoid overinterpreting or drawing conclusions about others' drawings.





**RiceBreaker**



**How does your family cook rice?**

# We hold different perspectives on the same topic based on our own experiences

This is the same with concepts such as



**CULTURE**



**DIVERSITY**



**INCLUSION**

# To think about cultural diversity, we need to start with definitions of *culture*

Prof Johan Heyns (moderator of the Dutch Reformed church and SA academic) stated that culture can be seen as the following:



## **CULTURE AS A HOME**

a safe place for people to be, where they can experience what is familiar to them



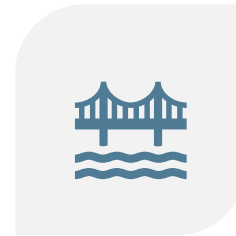
## **CULTURE AS AN ANCHOR**

can provide a stability to individuals who are looking for a place to belong



## **CULTURE AS CEMENT**

put people together to make them stronger as a group



## **CULTURE AS A BRIDGE**

it can provide a way to move closer to each other from different sides - speak to diversity



## **CULTURE AS MEDICINE**

can be a cure for the wrongs and give hope



# Definition of Diversity

- **Diversity** refers to the presence of **differences** among people
  - this can include differences in **race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, socio-economic status, physical abilities, sexual orientation, learning styles, *and more.***
- It is **not only about representation**, but about recognising, valuing, and engaging those differences meaningfully.

# We can view diversity as

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A space with various plants that thrive differently. You water a cactus differently from a fern. The garden is most beautiful when all kinds of plants flourish in their own way.



# Before we move on to more theory ... please share

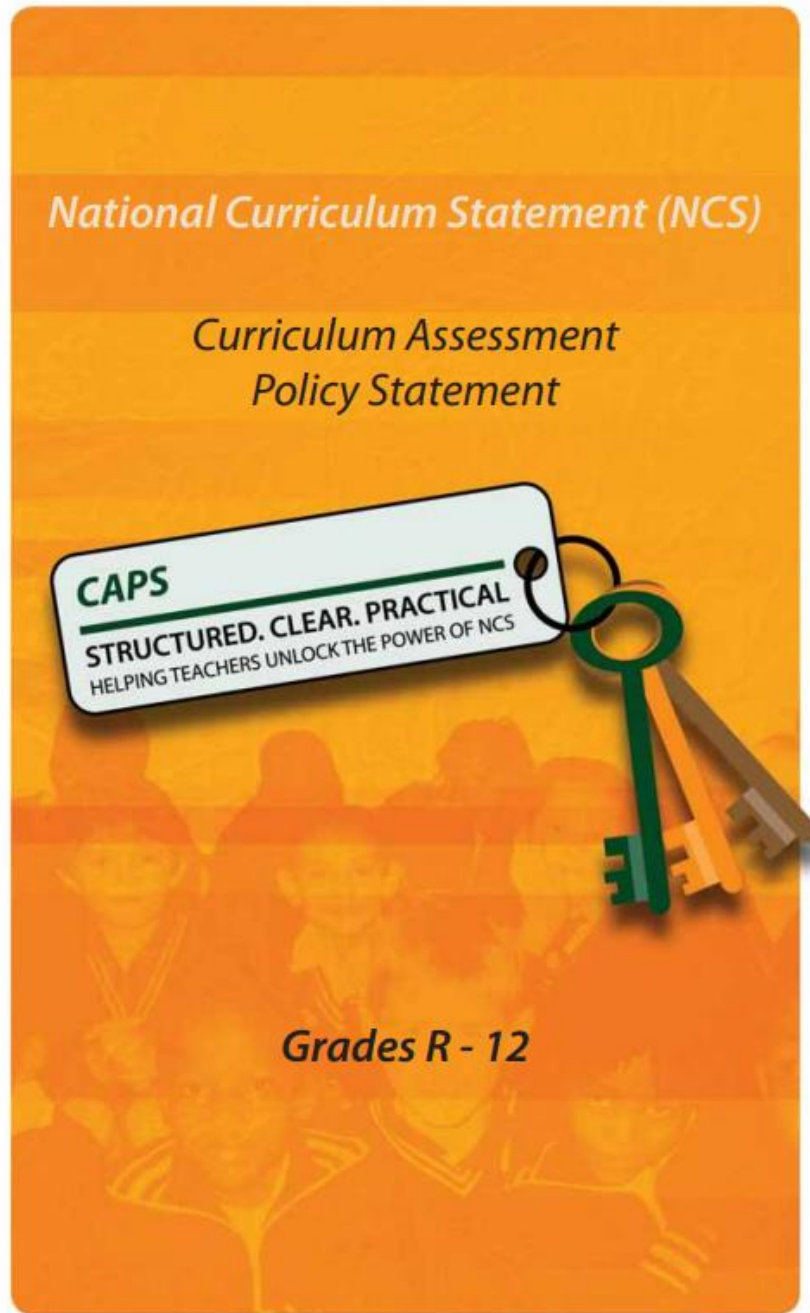
On the back of your Tree drawing please write down:

In your opinion, what are the **three most important cultural competencies** that student teachers should develop to work effectively in diverse classrooms?

1. xx
  2. xx
  3. xx
- 



**GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO LEARNER  
DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM | English**



**What do we have in  
South Africa as  
policy to guide our  
students on  
responding to  
learner diversity in  
the classroom?**

In South Africa, like many countries, we often respond to learner diversity through curriculum differentiation - adapting content, instruction, and assessment.

## Overview of the guideline document

### 4 differentiation pillars:

Curriculum content

Learning environment

Teaching methods

Assessment

# Reflecting on the current 4 pillars .... We might ask ...

What about when the diversity is not academic, but deeply cultural?

When a teacher has to navigate multiple value systems, language backgrounds, or cultural misunderstandings, what guidance are they given?

Does this really equip teachers to manage diverse cultural identities, values, languages, and tensions in their classrooms?

**The guideline document does not offer a framework or tools for teachers to build cultural competence.**





# We argue the inclusion of a 5<sup>th</sup> pillar:

## Differentiation through Cultural Responsiveness and competence

We believe cultural competence and agility must be seen as a fifth dimension of differentiation.

### Why It's Needed:

- The existing four pillars focus on *what* we teach and *how* we teach - but not *who* we are teaching and *how learners' cultural identities are recognised, validated, and drawn into the learning.*
- In multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, multi-faith classrooms, **culture is not a backdrop -it is the context.**

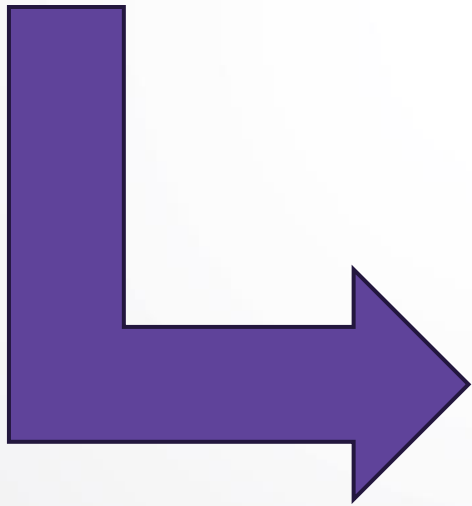
# What this pillar should include:

To be useful and practical for teachers, this 5th pillar should:

- Equip them with **cultural competencies** (e.g. cultural self-awareness, knowledge of learners' backgrounds, and intercultural communication).
  - Guide them in **building inclusive content** that affirms all identities (e.g. local knowledge systems, languages, cultural practices).
  - Emphasise **relational pedagogy**: seeing learners as cultural beings.
  - Offer strategies for **culturally responsive classroom management** and discipline.
  - Encourage **critical reflection** on bias, privilege, and systemic exclusion.
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## 5<sup>th</sup> pillar rooted in??

This pillar should be rooted in *culturally responsive teaching* and the development of ***cultural competence***. This will ensure that differentiation is not only pedagogical, but also ethical, relational, and transformative.



Intentional development  
of **cultural agility**



# Understanding Cultural Agility

- Defined as the ability to navigate and respond effectively in cross-cultural settings (Caligiuri, 2012)
- Not innate — developed through exposure, training, and mindset
- Differs from cultural intelligence (CQ):
  - CQ = knowledge
  - Cultural Agility = adaptable application

From **knowing** to **doing**:

Cultural Intelligence vs. Cultural Agility



# CQ (Cultural intelligence) vs. Cultural agility

Cultural Intelligence (CQ)	Cultural Agility
<b>Definition:</b> Ability to understand and reason about cultural differences	<b>Definition:</b> Ability to <i>adapt and act effectively</i> in culturally diverse situations
<b>Focus:</b> Knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity	<b>Focus:</b> Application, action, and flexibility
<b>Visual Metaphor:</b> A person reading a cultural guidebook	<b>Visual Metaphor:</b> A person dancing with different partners, adapting style with each

# From Knowing to Doing: Cultural Intelligence vs. Cultural Agility

## Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Ability to understand and reason  
about cultural differences



### Focus

Knowledge, awareness,  
and sensitivity

### Key Components

Cognitive (knowledge)  
Motivational (drive)  
Metacognitive (aware-  
ness)  
Behavioral (some action)

Cultural understanding

## Cultural Agility

Ability to adapt and act effectively  
in culturally diverse situations



### Focus

Application, action  
and flexibility

### Key Characteristics

- Behavioral flexibility
- Real-time decision-making
- Comfort with ambiguity
- Learning-by-doing

# Why Cultural Agility in HEIs?

## **1. Because diversity is not optional.**


South African (and global) classrooms are inherently diverse - in language, race, culture, beliefs, histories, and socio-economic realities. Cultural agility equips future teachers to work with, not just around, that diversity.

## **2. Because inclusive education requires more than content knowledge.**

A teacher may know their subject well, but without cultural agility, they may fail to connect with learners, unintentionally exclude identities, or misinterpret behaviour, leading to inequitable outcomes.


## **3. Because cultural misunderstanding leads to classroom conflict and disengagement.**

Educators without cultural agility may misread learners' behaviour, enforce discipline practices that are culturally biased, or rely on stereotypes—all of which alienate learners and harm learning.





# The Cultural Agility Competency Framework

- Caligiuri (2012) proposes a cultural agility framework comprising 12 key cross-cultural competencies.
  - Three of these are core behavioural competencies that directly influence successful actions in diverse settings, while the remaining nine support psychological comfort, interpersonal interactions, and decision-making in cross-cultural contexts.
  - These competencies also foster leadership development and broaden students' perspectives, enhancing their ability to collaborate effectively in culturally diverse environments.
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### **Competencies affecting behavioural responses**

- i) Cultural adaption
- ii) Cultural minimisation
- iii) Cultural integration

### **Competencies affecting individuals' psychological ease in cross-cultural situations**

- iv) Tolerance of ambiguity
- v) Appropriate self-efficacy
- vi) Cultural curiosity and desire to learn

## **The Cultural Agility Competency Framework**

### **Competencies affecting individuals' cross-cultural interactions**

- vii) Valuing diversity
- viii) Ability to form relationships
- ix) Perspective taking

### **Competencies affecting decisions in a cross-cultural context**

- x) Knowledge and integration of cultural issues
- xi) Receptive to adopting diverse ideas
- xii) Divergent thinking and creativity

# How will our culturally agile education students look like?




## **1. Self-aware and reflective**

- They understand their own cultural background, biases, and privileges.
- They reflect regularly on how their identity impacts their teaching.

## **2. Critically conscious**

- They recognise systemic inequalities and are committed to decolonising content and pedagogy.
- They question Eurocentric norms and include diverse voices in learning material.

## **3. Empathetic and relational**

- They build trusting relationships with learners and families across cultural lines.
  - They value different ways of knowing and being, without stereotyping.
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#### **4. Adaptable and context-sensitive**

- They adapt teaching strategies to align with local cultural practices and community needs.
- They're flexible in how they teach, assess, and support learners.

#### **5. Skilled in cross-cultural communication**

- They use inclusive language, listen actively, and foster open dialogue.
- They navigate multilingual classrooms with confidence and respect.


#### **6. Builders of inclusive environments**

- They design classroom spaces where all learners feel seen, valued, and safe.
- They use classroom norms and materials that reflect cultural diversity.

#### **7. Confident but humble**

- They are not afraid to lead change or challenge injustice, but remain open to learning from others.
- They welcome feedback and understand that cultural agility is a journey, not a destination.

#### **8. Lifelong learners**


- They seek opportunities to grow their intercultural competence.
  - They stay updated on inclusive education policies, research, and practices.
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# Why Cultural Agility in HEIs?

**4. Because CRT (Culturally Responsive Teaching) isn't intuitive - it's learned.** Most student teachers are not automatically equipped with the skills, attitudes, and self-awareness needed to engage in CRT. Cultural agility provides a structured framework to develop these capacities.

**5. Because HEIs have a moral and professional obligation.** HEIs are not neutral spaces. They shape the values, lenses, and capacities of future professionals. If HEIs do not intentionally develop culturally agile educators, they risk reproducing systemic bias.

**6. Because it promotes social justice and equity in education.** Cultural agility prepares teachers to challenge marginalisation in curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional cultures. It supports transformation by centering learners' identities and histories.




# Why Cultural Agility in HEIs?

## **7. Because it aligns with global teacher education trends.**

Competencies such as intercultural communication, cultural humility, and adaptive thinking are core in teacher education frameworks internationally. Cultural agility makes our graduates globally relevant.

## **8. Because it supports teacher resilience and professionalism.**

Culturally agile teachers are better able to adapt to complex classroom contexts, manage emotional labour, and work collaboratively in diverse school teams -essential for long-term success.




# Let's think together ...






# Challenges in building Cultural Agility

- Lack of exposure to diverse environments
  - Overestimation of one's own competence
  - Myth: Technology solves all cultural challenges – UTN ;)
  - Belief: Cultural competence = Cultural agility (not true)
  - True agility requires active, reflective engagement
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# Benefits in the Classroom (in schools)

Culturally Agile Teachers = Inclusive Classrooms

- Fosters inclusive, welcoming learning environments
  - Improves communication and reduces misunderstandings
  - Enables conflict resolution and cultural sensitivity
  - Promotes critical thinking and learner engagement
  - Creates empathetic, culturally responsive teachers
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# Recommendations for HEIs as a way forward

## Revise guidelines for responding to learner diversity (SA)

- **Recommendation:** Update national or institutional diversity guidelines (e.g. SA's Guidelines) to include a fifth pillar.

## Include Cultural Agility in core institutional policy documents

- **Recommendation:** Embed cultural agility as a graduate attribute or transversal skill in official university policies (e.g. Teaching & Learning policies, curriculum frameworks).


## Develop staff competencies

- **Recommendation:** Implement structured, ongoing professional development for academic and support staff focused on cultural agility, unconscious bias, and inclusive pedagogies.

## Use experiential learning (Kolb) and social learning theory (Bandura; Fiske) intentionally

- **Recommendation:** Design activities such as role plays, simulations, peer collaboration, intercultural case studies, and reflective journaling into student / learner tasks.

# Final Thoughts

- Cultural agility and the competencies it provides is not a luxury - **it's essential.**
  - A culturally agile teacher **doesn't just survive** in a diverse school setting—they **thrive by adapting, connecting, reflecting, and innovating.** These competencies, if intentionally developed can prepare future teachers to foster inclusion, navigate diversity, and support equity in South African schools and beyond.
  - We must **shape HEI curricula** to mirror the multicultural world our students will work in.
  - Let's equip future educators for **inclusive leadership**
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# Thank you for listening

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