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Kathleen King, Alfredo Artiles; and Elizabeth Kozleski (2009)

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Key Principles of Professional Learning to Prepare Culturally Responsive Teachers

Professional learning principles emerged from a variety of research traditions, particularly those focused on socio-cultural perspectives, which explore the relationship between individual psychological characteristics and a practice based model of human development and learning (Artiles, 1996; Rogoff, 1990, 2003). This theory of human development enables us to understand the ways in which children's and adults' participation in everyday (cultural) practices—whether they take place in classrooms, homes, or playgrounds—shape their development and learning.

This model also requires that we focus on the meaning and purpose of the activities in which people participate. Sometimes the meanings and purposes of activities are defined by a community's traditions, but event interpretations and goals are often negotiated in situ. Further, learners (e.g., students, teachers) use cognitive, social, and affective resources appropriated in their own communities to participate in formal and informal learning environments. However, learners' performance in everyday activities is not solely shaped by their own developmental characteristics.

Performance is also mediated by the nature of events (e.g., linguistic and cognitive demands, etc.) and the institutional conditions in which events take place (e.g., rules, assigned roles, expectations) (Gallego et al., 2001). Professional learning that is informed by these key assumptions can better prepare teachers to practice culturally responsive teaching. As we explain in this brief, this kind of professional learning provides teachers with opportunities for and guidance in the examination of how their own beliefs and knowledge about teaching are mediated by their educational experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds as well as institutional and situational demands of their work.

Knowledge about teaching must be more than a deep understanding of subject matter. Although content knowledge is an important element related to professional learning, culturally responsive practice infuses content with an understanding of the cultural nature of learning. Understanding the need to explore personal and professional identities as well as the necessity of responding to the strengths and needs that students from all cultural backgrounds bring to classrooms, The Equity Alliance at ASU has generated a set of principles to guide culturally responsive professional learning.

The principles were influenced by research from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE), the research of McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) with teacher learning communities around the nation, and the work of the National Staff Development Council.